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Short Stories

Twice A Month

August 25th



*Corporal
Downey is
called for*

THE WILLOW CREEK MURDER

by

**James B.
Hendryx**



Even your best friend won't tell you



JOHNSON couldn't understand it; he and Marie had had their little "tiffs," but they didn't explain why she had sent back his ring . . . nor did her brusque note shed any light on the broken engagement. Puzzled and disheartened, he sought his best friend. Perhaps he could offer some explanation. And so he could . . . yet he withheld the truth. The subject is so delicate that even a close friend won't discuss it.

IT'S INSIDIOUS. The insidious thing about halitosis (bad breath) is that you yourself rarely know when you have it, and even your best friend won't tell you. At this very moment you may be suffering from this all too common condition . . . needlessly offending others . . . and doing nothing about it. It is unfortunate that everyone offends this way at some time or other! Too much eating, too much smoking are contributing causes.

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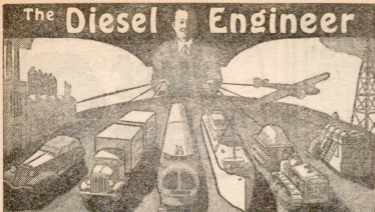
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28x4.00-24	2.40	28x4.00-24	2.56	30x3.50-22	3.65	30x3.50-22	3.65
28x4.00-26	2.55	28x4.00-26	2.71	30x3.50-24	3.75	30x3.50-24	3.75
28x4.00-28	2.70	28x4.00-28	2.86	30x3.50-26	3.95	30x3.50-26	3.95
28x4.00-30	2.85	28x4.00-30	3.01	30x3.50-28	4.15	30x3.50-28	4.15
28x4.00-32	3.00	28x4.00-32	3.16	30x3.50-30	4.35	30x3.50-30	4.35
28x4.00-34	3.15	28x4.00-34	3.31	30x3.50-32	4.55	30x3.50-32	4.55
28x4.00-36	3.30	28x4.00-36	3.46	30x3.50-34	4.75	30x3.50-34	4.75
28x4.00-38	3.45	28x4.00-38	3.61	30x3.50-36	4.95	30x3.50-36	4.95
28x4.00-40	3.60	28x4.00-40	3.76	30x3.50-38	5.15	30x3.50-38	5.15
28x4.00-42	3.75	28x4.00-42	3.91	30x3.50-40	5.35	30x3.50-40	5.35
28x4.00-44	3.90	28x4.00-44	4.06	30x3.50-42	5.55	30x3.50-42	5.55
28x4.00-46	4.05	28x4.00-46	4.21	30x3.50-44	5.75	30x3.50-44	5.75
28x4.00-48	4.20	28x4.00-48	4.36	30x3.50-46	5.95	30x3.50-46	5.95
28x4.00-50	4.35	28x4.00-50	4.51	30x3.50-48	6.15	30x3.50-48	6.15
28x4.00-52	4.50	28x4.00-52	4.66	30x3.50-50	6.35	30x3.50-50	6.35
28x4.00-54	4.65	28x4.00-54	4.81	30x3.50-52	6.55	30x3.50-52	6.55
28x4.00-56	4.80	28x4.00-56	4.96	30x3.50-54	6.75	30x3.50-54	6.75
28x4.00-58	4.95	28x4.00-58	5.11	30x3.50-56	6.95	30x3.50-56	6.95
28x4.00-60	5.10	28x4.00-60	5.26	30x3.50-58	7.15	30x3.50-58	7.15
28x4.00-62	5.25	28x4.00-62	5.41	30x3.50-60	7.35	30x3.50-60	7.35
28x4.00-64	5.40	28x4.00-64	5.56	30x3.50-62	7.55	30x3.50-62	7.55
28x4.00-66	5.55	28x4.00-66	5.71	30x3.50-64	7.75	30x3.50-64	7.75
28x4.00-68	5.70	28x4.00-68	5.86	30x3.50-66	7.95	30x3.50-66	7.95
28x4.00-70	5.85	28x4.00-70	6.01	30x3.50-68	8.15	30x3.50-68	8.15
28x4.00-72	6.00	28x4.00-72	6.16	30x3.50-70	8.35	30x3.50-70	8.35
28x4.00-74	6.15	28x4.00-74	6.31	30x3.50-72	8.55	30x3.50-72	8.55
28x4.00-76	6.30	28x4.00-76	6.46	30x3.50-74	8.75	30x3.50-74	8.75
28x4.00-78	6.45	28x4.00-78	6.61	30x3.50-76	8.95	30x3.50-76	8.95
28x4.00-80	6.60	28x4.00-80	6.76	30x3.50-78	9.15	30x3.50-78	9.15
28x4.00-82	6.75	28x4.00-82	6.91	30x3.50-80	9.35	30x3.50-80	9.35
28x4.00-84	6.90	28x4.00-84	7.06	30x3.50-82	9.55	30x3.50-82	9.55
28x4.00-86	7.05	28x4.00-86	7.21	30x3.50-84	9.75	30x3.50-84	9.75
28x4.00-88	7.20	28x4.00-88	7.36	30x3.50-86	9.95	30x3.50-86	9.95
28x4.00-90	7.35	28x4.00-90	7.51	30x3.50-88	10.15	30x3.50-88	10.15
28x4.00-92	7.50	28x4.00-92	7.66	30x3.50-90	10.35	30x3.50-90	10.35
28x4.00-94	7.65	28x4.00-94	7.81	30x3.50-92	10.55	30x3.50-92	10.55
28x4.00-96	7.80	28x4.00-96	7.96	30x3.50-94	10.75	30x3.50-94	10.75
28x4.00-98	7.95	28x4.00-98	8.11	30x3.50-96	10.95	30x3.50-96	10.95
28x4.00-100	8.10	28x4.00-100	8.26	30x3.50-98	11.15	30x3.50-98	11.15
28x4.00-102	8.25	28x4.00-102	8.41	30x3.50-100	11.35	30x3.50-100	11.35
28x4.00-104	8.40	28x4.00-104	8.56	30x3.50-102	11.55	30x3.50-102	11.55
28x4.00-106	8.55	28x4.00-106	8.71	30x3.50-104	11.75	30x3.50-104	11.75
28x4.00-108	8.70	28x4.00-108	8.86	30x3.50-106	11.95	30x3.50-106	11.95
28x4.00-110	8.85	28x4.00-110	9.01	30x3.50-108	12.15	30x3.50-108	12.15
28x4.00-112	9.00	28x4.00-112	9.16	30x3.50-110	12.35	30x3.50-110	12.35
28x4.00-114	9.15	28x4.00-114	9.31	30x3.50-112	12.55	30x3.50-112	12.55
28x4.00-116	9.30	28x4.00-116	9.46	30x3.50-114	12.75	30x3.50-114	12.75
28x4.00-118	9.45	28x4.00-118	9.61	30x3.50-116	12.95	30x3.50-116	12.95
28x4.00-120	9.60	28x4.00-120	9.76	30x3.50-118	13.15	30x3.50-118	13.15
28x4.00-122	9.75	28x4.00-122	9.91	30x3.50-120	13.35	30x3.50-120	13.35
28x4.00-124	9.90	28x4.00-124	10.06	30x3.50-122	13.55	30x3.50-122	13.55
28x4.00-126	10.05	28x4.00-126	10.21	30x3.50-124	13.75	30x3.50-124	13.75
28x4.00-128	10.20	28x4.00-128	10.36	30x3.50-126	13.95	30x3.50-126	13.95
28x4.00-130	10.35	28x4.00-130	10.51	30x3.50-128	14.15	30x3.50-128	14.15
28x4.00-132	10.50	28x4.00-132	10.66	30x3.50-130	14.35	30x3.50-130	14.35
28x4.00-134	10.65	28x4.00-134	10.81	30x3.50-132	14.55	30x3.50-132	14.55
28x4.00-136	10.80	28x4.00-136	10.96	30x3.50-134	14.75	30x3.50-134	14.75
28x4.00-138	10.95	28x4.00-138	11.11	30x3.50-136	14.95	30x3.50-136	14.95
28x4.00-140	11.10	28x4.00-140	11.26	30x3.50-138	15.15	30x3.50-138	15.15
28x4.00-142	11.25	28x4.00-142	11.41	30x3.50-140	15.35	30x3.50-140	15.35
28x4.00-144	11.40	28x4.00-144	11.56	30x3.50-142	15.55	30x3.50-142	15.55
28x4.00-146	11.55	28x4.00-146	11.71	30x3.50-144	15.75	30x3.50-144	15.75
28x4.00-148	11.70	28x4.00-148	11.86	30x3.50-146	15.95	30x3.50-146	15.95
28x4.00-150	11.85	28x4.00-150	12.01	30x3.50-148	16.15	30x3.50-148	16.15
28x4.00-152	12.00	28x4.00-152	12.16	30x3.50-150	16.35	30x3.50-150	16.35
28x4.00-154	12.15	28x4.00-154	12.31	30x3.50-152	16.55	30x3.50-152	16.55
28x4.00-156	12.30	28x4.00-156	12.46	30x3.50-154	16.75	30x3.50-154	16.75
28x4.00-158	12.45	28x4.00-158	12.61	30x3.50-156	16.95	30x3.50-156	16.95
28x4.00-160	12.60	28x4.00-160	12.76	30x3.50-158	17.15	30x3.50-158	17.15
28x4.00-162	12.75	28x4.00-162	12.91	30x3.50-160	17.35	30x3.50-160	17.35
28x4.00-164	12.90	28x4.00-164	13.06	30x3.50-162	17.55	30x3.50-162	17.55
28x4.00-166	13.05	28x4.00-166	13.21	30x3.50-164	17.75	30x3.50-164	17.75
28x4.00-168	13.20	28x4.00-168	13.36	30x3.50-166	17.95	30x3.50-166	17.95
28x4.00-170	13.35	28x4.00-170	13.51	30x3.50-168	18.15	30x3.50-168	18.15
28x4.00-172	13.50	28x4.00-172	13.66	30x3.50-170	18.35	30x3.50-170	18.35
28x4.00-174	13.65	28x4.00-174	13.81	30x3.50-172	18.55	30x3.50-172	18.55
28x4.00-176	13.80	28x4.00-176	13.96	30x3.50-174	18.75	30x3.50-174	18.75
28x4.00-178	13.95	28x4.00-178	14.11	30x3.50-176	18.95	30x3.50-176	18.95
28x4.00-180	14.10	28x4.00-180	14.26	30x3.50-178	19.15	30x3.50-178	19.15
28x4.00-182	14.25	28x4.00-182	14.41	30x3.50-180	19.35	30x3.50-180	19.35
28x4.00-184	14.40	28x4.00-184	14.56	30x3.50-182	19.55	30x3.50-182	19.55
28x4.00-186	14.55	28x4.00-186	14.71	30x3.50-184	19.75	30x3.50-184	19.75
28x4.00-188	14.70	28x4.00-188	14.86	30x3.50-186	19.95	30x3.50-186	19.95
28x4.00-190	14.85	28x4.00-190	15.01	30x3.50-188	20.15	30x3.50-188	20.15
28x4.00-192	15.00	28x4.00-192	15.16	30x3.50-190	20.35	30x3.50-190	20.35
28x4.00-194	15.15	28x4.00-194	15.31	30x3.50-192	20.55	30x3.50-192	20.55
28x4.00-196	15.30	28x4.00-196	15.46	30x3.50-194	20.75	30x3.50-194	20.75
28x4.00-198	15.45	28x4.00-198	15.61	30x3.50-196	20.95	30x3.50-196	20.95
28x4.00-200	15.60	28x4.00-200	15.76	30x3.50-198	21.15	30x3.50-198	21.15
28x4.00-202	15.75	28x4.00-202	15.91	30x3.50-200	21.35	30x3.50-200	21.35
28x4.00-204	15.90	28x4.00-204	16.06	30x3.50-202	21.55	30x3.50-202	21.55
28x4.00-206	16.05	28x4.00-206	16.21	30x3.50-204	21.75	30x3.50-204	21.75
28x4.00-208	16.20	28x4.00-208	16.36	30x3.50-206	21.95	30x3.50-206	21.95
28x4.00-210	16.35	28x4.00-210	16.51	30x3.50-208	22.15	30x3.50-208	22.15
28x4.00-212	16.50	28x4.00-212	16.66	30x3.50-210	22.35	30x3.50-210	22.35
28x4.00-214	16.65	28x4.00-214	16.81	30x3.50-212	22.55	30x3.50-212	22.55
28x4.00-216	16.80	28x4.00-216	16.96	30x3.50-214	22.75	30x3.50-214	22.75
28x4.00-218	16.95	28x4.00-218	17.11	30x3.50-216	22.95	30x3.50-216	22.95
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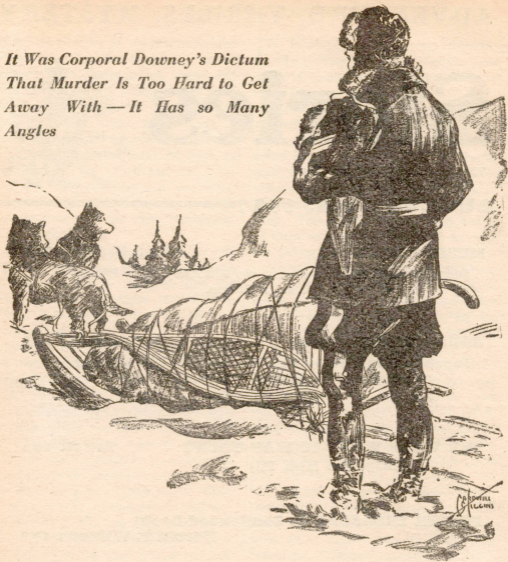
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*It Was Corporal Downey's Dictum
That Murder Is Too Hard to Get
Away With — It Has so Many
Angles*



THE WILLOW CREEK MURDER

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

*Author of "Corporal Downey Takes the Trail" and Many Other Stories of the
Yukon Patrol*

OLD TOM ALLEN leaned against the windlass and peered down into his shaft where John Ashton swept the bed rock clean with a whisk-broom made of spruce twigs, and shoveled sweepings into the partially filled bucket.

"That's all of it," he called up, "unless you want me to fill it up with side scrapings."

"No, I want to pan that bed rock stuff separate—want to see if it's any better'n the rest. Step in an' I'll haul you up."

His shovel in one hand, John Ashton

stepped into the bucket, grasping the rope with the other and a few moments later, stood beside Allen on the snow-covered dump and poured some of the gravel from the bucket into the pan that Allen held in his hands. Setting the bucket aside, he picked up a petrol tin from the fire that blazed nearby, and poured water into the pan. Flicking the ashes and bits of charcoal from the surface—remnants of the fire that had thawed the last of the gravel in the shaft—Allen rotated and rocked the pan, jerking off his mitten, now and then to claw out the coarse gravel. When the process was finally completed, both peered into the bottom of the pan at grains of dull yellow metal. The older man picked out one small nugget and hefted it.

"Four dollars, mebbe," he guessed. "Prob'ly about eight, ten dollars in the pan, all told. About like the last couple of foot of gravel. Not bad—but I thought mebbe we might run onto some real good nuggets on the rock. Anyways, it's a damn sight better'n we ever done on Quartz Crick."

Ashton nodded, and glanced at the dump. "Yes, a lot better than Quartz Creek. You ought to sluice out a good stake in the spring—might average a dollar a pan straight through. I make it fourteen feet to bed rock."

"That's right—but I doubt if it'll go a dollar a pan."

John Ashton peered into the petrol tin, still half full of water, and filled it with snow. "When that melts you'll have water enough to pan out the rest of the bucket," he said. "Mark out where you want to start your new shaft, and while you're panning, I'll shovel off the snow and get the fire going."

Allen shook off a mitten and glanced at his thick silver watch. "We'll eat first," he said. "The new shaft, an' the pannin' can wait till after. When Nellie gits dinner ready she likes to have it et."

Ashton packed more snow into the tin

while Allen added wood to the fire, and picking up the pan with the gold in the bottom, led the way to the log cabin that nestled snugly against the perpendicular rimrock that rose abruptly from a grove of tall spruce.

A few straggling snowflakes floated lazily earthward through the still air and John Ashton glanced up to the leaden sky.

"It's getting warmer," he said. "Looks like we might get a storm."

Allen nodded. "Yeah—an' mebbe a thaw, by the feel. I hate them damn March thaws. Had one back in ninety-six, on Forty Mile. Water run down into the shafts an' froze, an' we had a hell of a time choppin' it out. I like it to stay cold right up to May, an' then have the spring come all to onct."

NELLIE ALLEN greeted the two who entered the cabin, stamping the snow from their feet. "You're on time, for once," she smiled. "I was just about to call you. Hurry up now, and wash up, while I set the grub on. Did you reach bedrock?"

Her father nodded. "Yup—John swep' her clean as a floor."

The girl's deep blue eyes rested momentarily on John Ashton's face, as he removed cap and coat, then shifted questioningly to Allen.

"Have you panned it, yet? What did it show—down against the rock?"

For answer Allen extended the pan he held in his hand. "Eight, ten dollars, mebbe. There's two, three more pans left in the bucket." Taking the pan, the girl carried it to the window and peered at the yellow particles in the bottom. Disappointment showed in her fine eyes.

"I had hoped it would be better than this."

Her father laughed. "It's greedy ye are," he said, a trace of his Irish brogue showing as it was apt to when he talked to the girl. "Since when have you learned

to turn up yer pretty nose at half an ounce to the pan?"

"I'll bet Henry Swan's doing better than that, down against the rock," she replied. "He threw dust around like water, Christmas time, in Dawson."

Out of the corner of her eye the girl saw John Ashton's face darken slightly at mention of Henry Swan's name, and she smiled to herself as she lifted the sizzling moose steak from skillet to platter.

"An' why not?" asked Allen, awaiting his turn at the wash dish, "It's his crick. He found it—an' he's filed on Discovery. You don't s'pose he'd be tippin' folks off to a better claim than his own, do you?"

The girl laughed, her red lips parting to disclose white even teeth. "Oh, I don't know. When he tipped you off to this creek, it wasn't that he cared a hang whether you made a real strike here, or not. It was because he wanted me here—figured that if he could get me way off here, with no one else very near, I'd marry him. He knew this was a better proposition than we had on Quartz Creek, and that you'd stick with it. He was furious when the Ashtons followed us here and located above him. He wanted those two claims for himself. He accused me of tipping Billy Ashton off to where we were going. Just as if I could help it if Billy followed—"

"Just as if you could help it if either of us followed you," interrupted John Ashton, his face buried in the towel that hid the quick frown that greeted his words.

The girl turned back to the stove and fussed with the gravy, as her father took his turn at the wash dish and Ashton, before the cheap mirror, drove the comb through his coarse, curly black hair.

Seating themselves at the table, the men each forked a liberal slab of steak from platter to plate, as the girl filled their cups with scalding black tea. Slipping into her seat, she smiled at John. "Going to the dance tonight?" she asked.

John Ashton's dark face seemed to grow a shade darker as he replied, almost gruffly. "No. Why should I go to the dance? I'm tired of staggin' it."

"Oh, but there'll be lots of girls. Every girl on Indian River will be there—and from all the creeks. Henry Swan's going to stag it."

Ashton shrugged. "Swan'll be so drunk two hours after he gets there that all girls will look alike to him, anyhow. Besides, I've got to work."

"It's only six miles," the girl said, "and you can easily make it after your knock off. Besides, there isn't much to do this afternoon—just building the fire to start the new shaft."

"I'll be working my own claim. Tom won't be needing me here for the next couple of weeks—till he gets down to where he's got to use the windlass. I'm starting a new shaft of my own. Billy seems to be the only one on this creek that can get along without working. Stayed in Dawson a whole week, Christmas. And puttering around about this fool dance all day today——"

THE deep blue eyes flashed angrily. "Suppose Billy did stay a week, at Christmas—so did dad and I. Henry Swan stayed two weeks—and some of the men stayed even longer than that.



And if you were a girl, and were stuck way off on some creek, year in and year out, cooking and keeping a cabin clean, you wouldn't call 'em 'fool dances'! You'd look forward to 'em, and wish

there were more than just three or four a year. And as for Billy's pattering around down there, as you call it—there wouldn't be any dance, if it weren't for some of the men like Billy who can take their noses out of the gravel long enough to see that the girls have a little fun. Crampton's stock of goods is due tomorrow or next day, and if a lot of the men hadn't pitched in today and helped finish the floor and get it in shape, there wouldn't be any dance. You know as well as I do that Crampton will move his trading stock into that new store the minute it gets there—dance or no dance."

Again Ashton shrugged. "He'd be a fool if he didn't. I suppose he ought to leave his goods out in the snow, so people could dance on his new floor."

"Thank God some men can think of something besides money," retorted the girl angrily.

"Money's a good thing to have," observed Tom Allen, in a mildly placating voice. An easy-going, devil-may-care old sourdough, he had never made money himself, being contented with any claim that paid a little better than wages—grub and whiskey money, and a few dollars over for some pretty clothes for the daughter he adored, and who bossed him with motherly firmness.

"It isn't everything," replied the girl.

Allen changed the subject, speaking to Ashton. "Sure, John—if you want to sink a new shaft of yer own, it's a good time to start it. The two shafts'll go down together, an' then when it comes to the windlass crankin', we can swap work. That is," he added, "unless Billy'll be helpin' you."

"You can't tell about Billy," grunted Ashton. "We started together, and here I've got one shaft down to bed rock, and helped you out on the last eight or nine feet of yours, and I'm starting another—and Billy hasn't got down to windlass work on his yet. He's been too busy dancing," he added, an ill-disguised sneer

in his voice, as he pushed back his chair and rose from the table. Putting on cap, coat, and mittens, he turned at the door. "Want me to help with the fire?" he asked.

"No, I've plenty of wood cut. There's not much to do. I'll be knockin' off early, anyhow. I told Billy I'd take Nellie down to the show so he wouldn't have to be doublin' back for her."

Ashton turned to the girl, a smile on his thin lips. "I enjoyed the dinner," he said. "Have a good time at the dance. And don't let Billy get too drunk—or your dad may have to bring you home."

The girl tossed her head. "I never saw Billy so drunk he couldn't take care of himself—and me, too," she added.

Ashton laughed shortly, as the door slammed behind him.

"I hate John Ashton!" exclaimed the girl, as she faced her father across the table, her blue eyes flashing. "It just don't seem possible that he and Billy are brothers."

"John's steady," replied Allen. "He's a worker. He'll be rich some day, John will."

"Rich and mean as—as hell!" the girl retorted, with such vehemence the man smiled. "And," she added, "I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw a dog. It's a wonder you'd let him clean up the bottom of the shaft. If there were any nuggets, I'll bet he's got 'em in his pocket. Why didn't you let him stay on top and crank the windlass?"

"Sure, me old back has lost its appetite fer bendin' over. The bed rock is hard—I'm savin' me old knees fer my prayers. But he didn't git away with no nuggets. I leant on the windlass an' watched him. You've got to pick up nuggets bare handed, an' never a onct did he pull off a mitten."

"Just the same," the girl replied, "I'm going down in the shaft after dinner and see that he didn't shove any nuggets against the edges, so he can come down

and get 'em tonight while we're away."

The old man chuckled. "T'would take more than John Ashton to git the best of you, wouldn't it mavourneen? Ye get yer suspicious nature from ye're mother, God rest her soul. She was an O'Roorck—an' there's been many an O'Roorck hung since the Battle of the Boyne."

II

HENRY SWAN was a good prospector—a lone wolf—a man who would have no partner. A dour, surly man when sober, and a dangerous one when drunk.

A man who made no friends. When he sold out his claim on Quartz Creek to Swiftwater Bill, he had pushed up Indian River, and located his present claim on a tiny stream he named Willow Creek because it emptied into Indian River through a tangle of scrub willows. Upon striking pay dirt in the grass roots he had returned to Dawson to record the claim and buy supplies, and meeting old Tom Allen in the Tivoli Saloon, had tipped him off to the location.

"Sell out on Quartz, Tom, an' locate below me on Willow Crick," he had advised. "It's a little crick, an' a short one—there's room for only two claims either below or above my Discovery. You an' Miss Nellie locate in below me, an' after the sixty days is up, if no one has filed above, we'll each locate one of them claims, an' we'll have the hull crick to ourselves. I'm tellin' you she's good—mebbe she's big."

And, knowing Swan for a good prospector, Allen had hunted up Swiftwater Bill, sold his Quartz Creek claim, and returned to the creek to tell Nellie.

The girl had flown into a rage and stamped her foot. "My Lord, as if Quartz Creek wasn't bad enough without stampeding to some God-forsaken little trickle up Indian River!" she cried.

"But Henry says there's pay in the

grass roots," reminded Allen mildly, "an' Henry knows his stuff."

"He might know gold," retorted the girl, "but he don't know women. He don't care a damn whether you find pay in the grass roots or not! He thinks that if he gets me way up there on some creek where there are no other men, I'll marry him! He's a fool! I wouldn't marry him if he was the last man in the world. And I won't go to his damn creek, either—so there!"

"What'll ye be doin' then?" asked Allen. "I've sold out, here. It's Henry's crick, er some other. An' Henry knows gold. Ye don't have to marry him, daughter, jest because yer on the same crick."

"I'll say I don't have to marry him!" exclaimed the girl, bitterly.

"Ye might go further an' fare worse. Henry Swan'll always have money, an' ye could have him with a flick of yer finger. John Ashton, too; he'll be rich some day, that one, an' a bob of yer pretty head would git him. Instead of which ye go chasin' hither an' yon with young Billy, to dances an' what-not—an' he'll ne'er have aught to his name save the clothes on his back, an' the glint in his eye, an' the braw word on his lips. 'Tis yer old father, meself, hates to see ye take up with a ne'er-do-well, when ye could have gold in the bank fer the choosin'."

The lightning in the dark blue eyes changed suddenly to sunshine, and with a ripple of low, throaty laughter, the girl's long, strong fingers tousled old Tom's graying locks. "Git along wid you," she said, mimicking his Irish brogue. "My mother could have had gold in the bank for the choosing, too. But she married a ne'er-do-well, with a glint in his eye, and a braw word on his lips—and she never regretted it, and neither have I. You old fraud! No one knows better than you that a woman wants love—not gold! If she gets love, she's lucky. If she gets love and gold, too, she's luckier. But if she gets only gold—God help her. You're the

best daddy a girl ever had, and I'll go to this Willow Creek with you, or the North Pole, if you say so—but it won't do Henry Swan any good. Nor John Ashton either."

WHEN, a few days after Henry Swan's return to Willow Creek, the Allens arrived with their meagre belongings in a poling boat, the two Indians who had accompanied them helped pack their stuff up the smaller creek to a spot Swan had selected for their cabin, on the first claim below his own. Then, under Swan's direction, all hands had set to work felling spruce trees and building the cabin. Nellie had worked along with the men, her strong young muscles and capable hands doing their full share with ax, and saw, and hammer. She had answered Swan's labored compliments with light banter, aware that his beady black eyes followed her with a devouring glare—the eyes of a jungle beast, thought the girl, as her own eyes had turned with increasing frequency, and a soft glow of expectancy, toward the mouth of the little creek, beyond the stakes standing stark and new that marked the boundaries of her own claim.

Then one day, with the cabin walls window-high, a pack-laden figure had pushed through the scrub willows, and Billy Ashton jerked the cap from his head and whooped his arrival. Other figures followed—John Ashton, and some pack-laden Indians.

Old Tom Allen had stared in surprise. The girl had darted a swift glance at Henry Swan who stood, ax poised for notching a log, venomous hate blazing in his pig-like eyes as he glared at the newcomers. They, led by Billy, were approaching across her claim. She had waved her hammer in greeting and her voice had risen in a note of glad surprise that was almost genuine. Almost, but not quite, for even as she called the greeting, she was aware that Swan's eyes had

shifted from the Ashtons to her. She had turned toward him, and was shocked at the accusing hate in the narrowed eyes as a slow flush darkened his cheeks. Without a word, the man had brought the ax down with a vicious swing that sank it to the helve in the spruce log, had turned on his heel, disappearing into the timber in the direction of his own claim.

The Ashtons had staked their claims above Swan's, recorded them at Dawson, and returned to Willow Creek. It was with their help that the Allen cabin was finished.

Swan thereafter had kept to himself, never even speaking to the Ashtons. When he had needed help on his claim, he hired it in Sand Bar, the straggling camp that had grown up on Indian River, some six miles below the mouth of Willow Creek.

It was at this new camp of Sand Bar that the trader, Crampton, had built his combination trading post and saloon, and it was there that the dance was to be held that John Ashton had so bluntly refused to attend.

RETURNING from the Allen claim this March day to his own, next above Swan's Discovery, Ashton set to work shovelling the snow from the spot he had selected for his new shaft, and building the fire that was to start the tedious process of burning into the gravel to bed rock. From time to time he glanced down the creek where Swan, shoulder-deep in a new shaft of his own, was shovelling gravel onto his dump. It grew warmer and snow fell steadily. Swan cleaned his shaft, kindled the fire that would thaw a few more inches into the iron-hard gravel, and entered his cabin. An hour later he emerged, and with a smile of grim satisfaction, John Ashton watched him disappear into the fast-gathering dusk.

Stepping into the cabin which he shared with his brother, Billy, on the dividing

line of the two Ashton claims, he lighted the tin bracket lamp, drew the case of dynamite from beneath his bunk, and pried off the cover. Cutting a length from a coil of fuse, he capped a stick which, with four other sticks, he tied into a bundle with a piece of twine. Laying the bundle carefully on his bunk, he began to build another, but laid it aside.

"Guess I'll see what this one does, first," he muttered. "I only want to crack the rock—not blow the whole bottom out of the shaft."

Deliberately he prepared and ate his supper, curbing his impatience to be about his business until he could be sure the Allens and Swan were far enough from Willow Creek to be out of ear shot of the explosion.

This was the opportunity for which he had been waiting—the first time since Christmas that he had been alone on the creek.

John Ashton was a self-centered man—a man whose one idea in life was to acquire wealth. When news of the gold strike in the Klondike had reached the little Iowa town where he and Billy were operating the general store left to them by their father, they promptly sold out and headed North; the social and frivolous Billy because the enterprise offered adventure, and the hard-headed and saturnine John because it offered a shortcut to wealth.

They had been equal partners in the store under the terms of the will and had prospered moderately, John perforce doing most of the work—and doing it uncomplainingly. Not through unselfishness, but merely because his hard business sense told him that it was Billy's social contacts that brought trade to the store. Everybody liked Billy, while he himself had few friends. This fact he was shrewd enough to admit to himself and to turn to account—though he hated Billy for it with a repressed, but ever growing hatred.

IN THE gold fields it was different. The brothers had stuck together from force of habit, but they were not partners.

Each had taken his share of the proceeds of the store, and, believing that in the business of gouging gold from gravel social activity was a liability rather than an asset, John had no intention of shouldering the lion's share of the labor and dividing the profits equally with Billy. This he had stated bluntly and in so many words, and Billy had accepted the dictum with a grin.

"O.K.," he had said, "this mining business is more a question of luck than labor—you either strike it; or you don't. Kill yourself working if you want to, but I'm not going to—I'd rather have less and enjoy it."

The two had located adjoining claims on Quartz Creek—where John took out the more gold, but Billy had the more fun. Both had fallen for Nellie Allen. John because he saw that she was a hard and capable worker, Billy because she—because he couldn't help it. When John saw that she liked to go to dances, he had started going—never with Nellie, though he frequently asked her. But somehow, it seemed that Billy had always asked first—or so she said. His hatred for Billy had increased.

Thus matters had stood when one evening, Billy announced that he had sold out his Quartz Creek claim to Swiftwater Bill, who was buying right and left in that territory, and was hitting out for a new creek that Henry Swan had discovered. He said that the Allens were going, too, so John hunted up Swiftwater and sold him his own claim—his business shrewdness sensing that if Henry Swan was heading for a new creek, that creek must be good. Swan knew gold—and was reputed to be lucky, besides. So the Ashtons had staked the only two remaining claims on Willow Creek and won the undying hatred of Henry Swan.

III

SWAN had driven his shaft to bedrock by Christmas, and had knocked off for a two weeks' spree in Dawson. Billy and the Allens had gone, too, and had stayed in Dawson a week. But John had remained on Willow Creek, working on his claim. His test pannings had uniformly showed better than the Quartz Creek claim, and John was satisfied. However, he had often wondered how his own claim compared with Swan's. Swan's absence at Christmas gave him the opportunity to find out, so one day he had dug at random into Swan's snow-covered dump. As he stared at the patch of uncovered gravel, he had frowned in surprise—the gravel was dark, almost black—and his own gravel, on the next claim above was light colored. Procuring his pick and a sack, he had set to work, and half an hour later was back in his cabin, panning the black gravel. His surprise had increased when he found it absolutely barren of gold—not even a color did he get out of three pans of the stuff. His frown



deepened. Henry Swan knew gold—everybody, even the old sourdoughs admitted it. What was the answer? Returning to Swan's shaft, John had lowered the windlass rope and let himself down, his eyes studying the sides. But the sides showed no black gravel—not even a pocket. They were uniformly light colored, even as the sides of his own shaft. He scraped the snow away with his feet and stared down at the bedrock—flat, and level as a floor. Suddenly and viciously he cursed.

"Damn it, what's wrong here? How can Swan's dump be black when the shaft it came out of shows nothing but light colored gravel? And why would Swan fool

with gravel that don't show even a color?"

He stamped about, examining the sides more closely, when suddenly his foot sank into the snow and he pitched heavily forward, bruising his head, even through his thick fur cap, against the rough gravel. He had stepped into a hole—but a hole in bedrock! Dazed slightly by the blow, he withdrew his foot and stood staring stupidly down at the deep depression in the snow. It was incredible. It couldn't be. Why bedrock was—was bedrock. It was the end. There couldn't be a hole in the bedrock. Where would the hole go? Dropping to his knees, he had removed the snow from the hole, scooping it out with his mittened hands.

A few moments later a low cry escaped him, and he redoubled his efforts. When all the snow had been removed, he knelt there on the bottom of the shaft and stared down into the depression. Then he understood; the bedrock was no bedrock at all, merely a layer of hard rock, some eight inches thick. Above this layer the gravel was all light colored—below it, it was black. And Swan had scarcely scratched this black gravel—hardly half a yard of it had been removed. The hole was near one side of the shaft—a break in this eight-inch plate of rock.

John Ashton had knelt there astounded at the luck that had disclosed this break. If Swan had dug his shaft a foot farther to the north, the break would never have been discovered, and he would have believed he had hit bedrock. But—and again John's brows had knit in a frown—where was the luck if the black gravel beneath the rock was barren? Leaping to his feet, he had climbed the rope, hand over hand, and ten minutes later a fire was burning in the hole. As it burned, he had turned again to Swan's dump, scraping away more of the snow. That time he had found only yellow gravel. The spot he had first uncovered was the only spot of black gravel in the whole dump.

The fire in the small hole required frequent tending, and between times, Ashton had managed to take a test panning of Swan's light colored gravel, and found that it ran similar to his own. He had glanced nervously down the creek at frequent intervals. If Swan should return and catch him at work in his shaft there would be the devil to pay. Ashton's thin lips had pressed grimly, and he had gone to his cabin, and returned with his rifle. If it came to a showdown there alone on the creek, it would be just too damn bad for Swan—that'd be all. He could tell the police that Swan had attacked him on his own claim—he'd have plenty of time to arrange things to look that way—and the Allens could swear that Swan hated him for filing on the creek.

BUT Ashton had been unmolested, and toward evening he had scraped the ashes of his fire from the hole, and scooped a few pans of the black gravel into his sack. Carefully he had refilled the hole with snow, smoothed the snow in the bottom of the shaft, and over the dump, and returning to his cabin had panned the black gravel.

Before the washing of the first pan had been finished the man's eyes were glittering with greed. The black gravel was unbelievably rich—rotten with gold, as the sourdoughs would say. With trembling fingers he had weighed the dull yellow residue that was left in the pan—coarse grains, and two or three irregular nuggets. Two ounces and a half—nearly fifty dollars—fifty dollars to the pan! My God, it was like Bonanza! And only he and Swan knew—and Swan would never tell; not even the Allens, now—for since he suspected that Nellie had tipped off the Ashtons, he had hated the Allens even worse than he hated the Ashtons.

He washed out the three pans he had carried from Swan's shaft, returned the washed gravel to the sack, carried it outside and scattered it thinly over a wide

area. He would leave no tell-tale patch of barren black gravel on his own dump, as Swan had left on his. Then he had returned to the cabin and for a long time had sat staring at the little yellow pile, as wild schemes raced through his brain. He would buy out Billy and the Allens! As for Henry Swan, well—he would think about Swan later. With just the two of them on the creek, maybe—

But first he must be sure that the rich black gravel extended under the Allens' claims—and Billy's—and his own. Possibly some freak of nature had deposited it only under Swan's claim. He had poured some gold from a pouch and compared it with the gold from the black gravel. It was different ore; even he, a comparative novice, could see that—a coarser and a darker gold, gold from a different era, or from a different source. Suppose that black gravel had been the bed of an old, old creek—a creek so old that the present mountains were new in comparison—a creek that had once flowed at a right angle to this present one, transversely across this valley. Then it might well be that Swan had located the only rich claim on Willow Creek, and save for the spot where it crossed this narrow valley, the whole length of the old creek, with its fabulously rich gravel, would lie buried forever under the massive mountains. The thought had driven him frantic. He must find out. He would never rest until he had driven his own shaft down to that thin flat plate of rock. Then another thought had set him cursing like a mad man; when he reached the rock, how would he know whether it was that same eight-inch plate, or the bedrock that was the foundation of the world? He could not hope to find a natural break in the rock—as Swan so luckily had. He couldn't drill it. It took two men to drill, and he had no intention of sharing his secret with anyone—certainly not with Billy, who, he chose to believe, had robbed him of Nellie Allen. Dynamite! There

was the solution. He could break the thin plate rock with a shot laid on its surface. He had blown out the light and thrown himself onto his bunk, but sleep would not come. After an hour he had leaped from the bunk, made up a light pack and struck out through the night for Dawson.

JOHN ASHTON was strong, and work had toughened his muscles. He had covered the seventy miles to Dawson in a little over forty-eight hours and had arrived near midnight. Stores, restaurants, saloons, and dance halls had been a blaze of light that shone dully through heavily frosted windows—especially the saloons and the dance-halls—for the Christmas season was on, and men from far creeks had come in for their big mid-winter spree.

But the bright lights held no lure for John Ashton. He was not a drinking man—not because of any moral inhibition against liquor, but because its use interfered, in wasted time and money, with his business of getting rich. Slipping into the A. C. Store, he had purchased a case of giant, a roll of fuse, and a box of caps, and without even stopping for a meal, had struck out for Willow Creek, taking three days for the return journey. He had cached his purchases under his bunk, and fallen feverishly to work on his shaft—burning, digging, chopping wood for his fire. New snow had come and covered his tracks. A few days later Billy and the Allens had returned, and after another week, Henry Swan.

When his shaft got to where he couldn't throw out the gravel, he had persuaded Billy to help him, promising to return the labor when Billy should need it. They had reached the flat rock late in February, and Billy turned his attention to his own shaft which was barely four feet deep.

Burning with impatience, John Ashton had bided his time. He must know whether the floor of his shaft was the

thin plate that floored Swan's or real bed-rock. Yet, because placer mining does not call for the use of dynamite, he could not fire his shot without arousing the curiosity of Billy and the Allens, and appraising Swan of the fact that he had discovered his secret.

When Tom Allen's shaft had got too deep for him to handle alone, John gladly hired out to him—he must also know what lay at the bottom of Allen's shaft. On this two-man job, he had insisted on assuming the harder work in the shaft, leaving the older man to handle the windlass and drag up the wood. If a crack, or a hole should show on the floor of the Allen shaft, he wanted to be there to conceal it, if possible, before Allen should find it out.

And on this day in March the bottom had been reached—a flat unbroken floor, like the floor of his own shaft. Bedrock apparently—that impasse that spells finis to any shaft. And this night the dance at Sand Bar offered the opportunity for which he had been waiting—he could fire his shot, and no one would be the wiser.

Seated alone in his cabin, John Ashton glanced for the hundredth time at the clock. Then he rose and picked up the bundle of giant from his bunk. An hour and a half had passed since Swan had left his cabin—ample time for him to have reached Sand Bar. His hand trembled with excitement—in five minutes he would know! Pulling on his cap, he walked swiftly to his shaft, split the end of the fuse with his knife, and held a match to it. When it began to sputter, he lowered the bundle into the shaft by a string, retired to a distance and waited for what seemed to his overwrought nerves an eternity. It was with difficulty he restrained himself from going to the shaft and peering in to see if the fuse had gone out—surely something must have happened. A dull roar startled him even though he was expecting it, and a cloud of acrid smoke belched skyward.

Rushing to the shaft he peered down, vainly seeking to penetrate the heavy yellow smoke that made him cough as it stung his nostrils and bit into his lungs. Hastening to the cabin he lighted his lantern and returning to the shaft, lowered it—but the smoke was still too dense and he could see nothing.

FUMING with impatience, he paced up and down, pausing every few minutes to lower his lantern. It was nearly half an hour before he finally lowered himself by means of the bucket rope, and his feet had no more than touched the bottom, than he whooped with excitement. Coughing from the fumes that still lingered in the shaft, he dropped to his knees among the broken rock fragments, and clawed them aside with his bare hands. Holding the lantern close, he stared down at the black gravel. He was rich! It was the same as Swan's!

Climbing out hand over hand, he drew up his lantern, hastened into the cabin and made up another bundle of giant—using only three sticks this time, as he wished to damage the floor of Allen's shaft as little as possible. If he could just crack the rock enough to be sure that the black gravel lay beneath, he could replace the fragments, and the snow which was falling thickly now, would cover all evidence of his work.

An hour later, John Ashton lay back on his bunk and planned. The three-stick shot had done the work—broken the flat floor of Allen's shaft so that when he removed one of the fragments he could see the black gravel. He had replaced the fragment, and the snow was still falling.

IV

BILLY ASHTON came in as John was finishing his breakfast. He stamped the heavy wet snow from his feet, beat it from his cap and parka, and poured himself a cup of strong black tea.

"Tough going," he said. "There's a foot of heavy snow, and now it's turning to rain. Believe me—what with dancing all night, and slogging up through that snow, I'm ready to hit the hay."

The elder brother frowned disapproval. "Aren't you going to work, today?"

"Not on your tin-type! I've got to get some sleep. There's another dance to-night."

"Another dance?"

"Yes—the outfit that's bringing in Crampton's goods is camped fifteen miles down the river. The dogs are all in bucking this wet snow. One of the mushers came on through to tell Crampton. His stuff can't get here till tomorrow, and maybe not then—so we're going to pull off another party."

"I have one shaft down to bedrock, and I'm starting a new one," said John pointedly.

"Yeah!" Billy replied with a grin, "and you hit bedrock with Allen's shaft yesterday, too—old Tom and Nellie were telling me. I'll have to hurry, or you'll all get rich ahead of me."

"A man don't get rich dancing all night and sleeping all day."

"Maybe not—but he has a hell of a lot of fun."

"It wasn't so bad, back home, where your social contacts brought trade to the store, but up here it's different—you can't dance gold out of the gravel; you've got to dig it out."

The younger man regarded the elder with a look that more than hinted of pity. "You never do anything, or even think of anything, that isn't connected with money, do you, John? Why don't you cut loose, sometime, and do something just for fun?"

"You can't spend fun—it won't buy you anything."

"You never spend any money, either—unless it will buy you something to make more money with."

"If I were you, I'd forget this hop and

work in my shaft today, and get a good sleep tonight."

"Well, you're not me, by a damn sight, so go ahead and work your new shaft. Mine can wait. Gold don't rot—there's plenty of time to get out the gold. Meanwhile, there's a very limited time in which to dance—in Sand Bar. When Crampton's stock of goods arrives there won't be room in his store to turn around, and there's not another building this side of Dawson big enough to dance in. Better come along tonight." He added, with a grin, "You might be able to help protect me from Henry Swan—or help protect Swan from me."

"Henry Swan?"

"Yes—he got tanked up last night, and asked Nellie to dance. She refused, because he was weaving on his feet, and he called her something he shouldn't have. I was a little bit lit, myself—just feeling good—but when I heard that, believe me, I saw red! I grabbed up an ax that someone had stood in the corner behind the stove, and I'd have split his damn skull to the chin—but some of the boys held me, and others got Henry out of there. I was plenty mad before I cooled off—threatened to kill him on sight, and all that rot. Of course, I won't kill him, but the next time I see him I'm going to give him the damndest licking a man ever got—or he'll lick me."

After several moments of silence John said, "What became of Henry? Did he come home?"

"Damned if I know. He didn't show up again at the dance. I guess they took him to one of the cabins to sleep it off. He isn't home yet, Old Tom and Nellie and I broke trail to Willow Creek through the new snow, and there was no light in his cabin, nor no smoke coming out when I came by, just now. He'll probably stay drunk for a week—generally does when he goes on a bender."

"How about Old Tom—did he get drunk, too?"

"Oh sure—you know how Tom likes his liquor. But he could handle himself, all right. By the time we reached the cabin, he was about sober—but feeling like hell. When a man gets his age he



just can't take it. He brought a quart home with him, and he'll nick along at it for the next couple of days, recovering."

"Will he go to the dance, tonight?"

Billy chuckled. "Not Tom. He'll be more interested in trying to get something to stick in his stomach."

ALL that day John Ashton worked on his claim, tending the fire that slowly thawed the gravel—chopping and hauling wood. Toward the middle of the afternoon, he saw Henry Swan lurch across the clearing and enter his cabin. After an interval smoke rose from the stove pipe, but Swan did not reappear and his shaft lay idle.

At early dusk a light showed in his own cabin, smoke rose from the pipe, and he entered to find Billy preparing supper. He removed his coat, shook it, and spread it on the woodpile close to the stove to dry. The wet snow had turned to rain, a slow drizzle had been falling since morning, and the garment was sodden with moisture. He finished washing and sat on the edge of his bunk, sniffing hungrily the odor of frying moose meat.

"Henry Swan is home," he announced a few moments later. "He came several hours ago."

"Working?" asked Billy, without turning from the stove.

"No. He's pretty drunk, I guess—walked like it."

Billy made no comment, just stood there, turning the meat in the pan, adding a huge pinch of tea to the pot.

"I was thinking," said John, "that it would be a good chance for you to give him that licking. He is probably in no condition to—er—retaliate."

Billy slanted the other a glance. "Think so?" he asked dryly. "Well I don't. When I give Swan that licking it's going to be when he's all there. It would be damn small satisfaction beating up a man who was so drunk as to be practically helpless."

The other shrugged. "He was drunk last night," he reminded, "and you would have killed him."

"That's different. I was a bit drunk myself, and what he called Nellie drove me to sudden fury. I've had time to cool off. It isn't a killing matter, but it calls for a damn good licking—and when Henry's sober, so he can appreciate it, I'll give it to him."

"But—suppose he licks you—he's much larger."

Billy shrugged. "That's his privilege—if he can get away with it. He'll sure as hell have the chance."

THE meal was eaten in silence, and as soon as it was over, Billy Ashton left the cabin.

An hour later John opened the door and looked out. It was still warm, but the drizzle of the daylight hours had again turned to snow. He drew on his parka and took his cap from its peg. Reaching above Billy's bunk he took a rifle from the wall and making sure it was loaded, blew out the light, and then stepped out into the night, closing the door behind him.

He struck out down the creek, walking as rapidly as he could in the saturated

snow. A light burned in the Swan cabin, as he proceeded on to Allen's. Old Tom lay on his bunk, the water pail and a half emptied whiskey bottle within easy reach on the floor beside him. John Ashton smiled.

"What's the matter, Tom—the dance too much for you, last night?"

The older man swung his legs to the floor, retching as he leaned forward to draw on his boots. "'Twas the licker, not the dancin'. Me stummick ain't what it used to be." Dipping the tin cup into the water pail, he withdrew it half full. Picking up the bottle he added a liberal portion of whiskey, then downed it at a draught, holding his lips pressed tight as his body gagged and retched. When the paroxysm passed, he cleared his throat roughly. "That's better," he said, with a wink and a grin. "I must be gittin' old. Hell's bells! I've seen me the time I could dance three, four nights hand runnin', drunk as a fiddler—an' never miss a day's work."

"Maybe it's the quality of the liquor," suggested Ashton, glancing about the room.

"Oh, sure, this licker's rough an' harsh, but it's all there is in the country—we got to drink it." He rose stiffly, and lifted the water pail and the bottle to the table. "Help yerself," he invited, "an' draw up a chair."

"None for me," declined Ashton. "Don't use it. Never could see the point." Turning his back, he slipped Billy's rifle into the corner beside Allen's, noting with satisfaction that they were of the same make and calibre. He drew off his parka, and seated himself opposite Allen, who had slumped into a chair. "At your age," he added, "it would be better if you didn't use it, either."

"Ha—when a man gits too old fer a frolic, it's time he was dead! It ain't me years; it's me stummick. Me own father was weaned on whiskey, an' drank it all his life, an' he lived to be eighty-six. An'

his father, old Gran'pa Allen—ha—there was a man! Ninety-two he was when they hung him—an' no drink of water had passed his lips for fifty years. The Allens is a hardy race—a bit heedless, mebbe, but hardy."

"What's this Billy was telling me about some trouble he had with Henry Swan at the dance last night?" asked Ashton, changing the subject.

"Oh, 'twas a bit of a brawl they had over Nellie. Swan's mean when he's drinkin', an' when Nellie refused to dance with him he called her a name, an' Billy was fer splittin' his skull with an ax. But the boys grabbed him an' got him quieted down, an' they got Henry out of the way, an' it blow'd over. It's a damn poor dance without a fight or two to liven things up."

John Ashton's face assumed an expression of the utmost gravity. "It may have blown over for last night," he said, "but I fear for the future. Billy will kill Henry Swan as sure as hell."

"No, no, don't you go worryin' about Billy. The lad was a bit tipsy himself last night, an' the name Swan called Nellie made him see red. He'd have killed him at the time, mebbe—but not now. Them threats he made last night don't mean nothin'!"

"They mean more than you think," retorted Ashton gravely. "He wasn't tipsy today—he was stone cold sober—and he swore he'd kill Swan if it was the last thing he ever did. And here on the creek, God knows he'll have plenty of chance."

Allen poured liquor into the cup, diluted it with water, and swallowed it at a gulp. "I'll tell Nellie," he said. "She'll make him promise to leave Swan alone—er let him off with a good beatin'."

Ashton shook his head. "It won't do any good. I know Billy too well. I tried to remonstrate with him, but he wouldn't listen to me—and he won't listen to Nellie, either. He's willful and headstrong. I've tried my best to look after him since

the death of our parents, but I fear my efforts have failed."

Tom Allen shot the speaker a shrewd glance, but Ashton's face showed only grave concern. "Ye don't need to worry about Billy, John Ashton," he said. "He's young an' full of life, an' mebbe he drinks a bit too much, now an' agin—but so does the best of men. Billy will not be committin' a murder."

"He would have murdered Swan last night, and he'll probably be tipsy again tonight," replaced Ashton. "Neither you, nor Nellie, nor I can keep our eyes on Billy all the time—and as long as Swan remains on this creek, he's in danger. Billy will hide his time."

"I think ye're a fool," grunted Allen. "As fer gittin' Swan off this crick—it can't be done. He's got too good a thing here—an' he knows it."

"You might buy him out?" suggested Ashton.

ALLEN took another drink and then laughed aloud. "Me buy him out! Thanks fer the compliment. There's nothin' I'd like better than to own Henry Swan's claim—but what would I use fer money?"

"I've got the money."

"You—well then, why don't you buy him out?"

"He wouldn't sell to me. He hates both Billy and me like poison—for locating here on the creek. He won't even speak to either one of us."

"He hates us, too. He thinks we tipped you off to the location—an' I ain't sayin' but what mebbe Nellie did slip the word to Billy."

"Sure she did—and Swan knows that, or at least he suspects it. But he don't think you had anything to do with it. He don't hate you, and the fact that he asked Nellie to dance with him last night shows that his hatred for her is not very deep."

"Hate er no hate, Henry Swan will not be sellin' out on Willow Crick—to you

nor us, nor no one else. Why don't you buy Billy out—if yer so afraid he'll kill Swan."

"Billy will never leave the creek as long as Nellie is here—you know that. The only way would be for me to buy all three of you out—you, and Nellie, and Billy. By George, that's a solution I hadn't thought of! I'll—"

"Listen," interrupted Allen, "if yer figgerin' on buyin' us out, you kin fergit it. We've got good claims here—the best we've ever had—an' we're holdin' on to 'em."

"In that case," said Ashton, "we'll have to try Swan."

"But I'm tellin' you Swan won't sell!"

"You've told me, but Swan hasn't told me yet—or rather, he hasn't told you. We'll go up and see what he says."

"You mean, go up to Swan's cabin?"

"Certainly. It won't take but a few minutes. He's home, and—"

"An' drunk as a lord—we seen him go by here today. He'll be meaner than hell—what with his run-in with Billy an' all. Chances is, he'd run us off his claim."

"He's probably drunk all right," admitted Ashton, "but for that very reason, he might sell out, when he wouldn't if he were sober. You can never tell what a drunken man will do. He knows now that he'll never get Nellie—and it may be that he'll sell out, just to get away from here."

"He'd be a fool to sell—an' Henry Swan's no fool," replied Allen stubbornly.

"It won't hurt to find out," insisted Ashton. "Come on, Tom—surely you won't refuse to go up there with me and ask him to sell. It's the only chance I see to save Billy from being a—a murderer."

"I think ye're a fool—but I'll go, if it'll ease yer mind. But I'm warnin' you—it ain't goin' to do no good." Swallowing a stiff drink, Allen reached for his parka, and as he drew it on, Ashton

reached into the corner and picked up a rifle. A moment later, he followed the older man out the door.

V

IT WAS growing colder. The saturated snow into which their feet sank was stiffening, and the new snow that was falling came down on the north wind in fine flinty flakes that bit the skin.

"They kin walk home on the crust in the mornin'," said Allen. "Twill be better than last night—sinkin' to our knees in the mushy snow. I was damn near wore out when I got here. Why're ye carryin' a gun?"

"The moose are beginning to stir around a bit," answered Ashton. "I saw where three crossed my claim last night. Our meat's running low, and I thought I might get a shot at one."

The two proceeded in silence, and a few minutes later a dull square of light showed through the spruces. Holding to the creek, Ashton paused when opposite Swan's cabin. "Better call to him, Tom," he said. "If we go any closer he might think it was Billy and take a shot at us through the door."

Allen laughed. "Ye're a cautious man, John Ashton. "A man who takes few chances." Nevertheless, he took a step forward and called Swan's name loudly. After a moment of silence, the door swung open, and the figure of Swan stood out plainly in the rectangle of light. The next instant Allen cried out again, as a loud report sounded almost in his ear, and a streak of orange-red flame split the darkness. He stared in horror as Henry Swan pitched forward onto his face and lay very still in the snow before his door. Whirling about Allen saw John Ashton calmly levering a fresh cartridge into the rifle barrel.

"What the hell?" he cried. "My God, man—you've shot him! You've killed Henry Swan!"

"Exactly," replied Ashton. "And now, if we keep our heads, this thing will work out to our mutual benefit. I planned it all very carefully."

"Planned it! Work out to our benefit!" cried Allen, staring at the other in horror. "My God—it's murder!"

"I believe the police will call it that. I prefer to think of it merely as a means to a worthy end. As I said, if we keep our heads, we will both profit by Swan's demise."

"Profit by it! Why, ye murderin' hound, ye'll not be gettin' me mixed up in this!"

Ashton smiled thinly. "You're mixed up in it already, Tom — inextricably mixed up in it."

"I tell ye I'll have nothin' to do with it! Ye were a fool, Tom Ashton, to fetch me along as a witness to yer killin'. I'll tell the police—"

"Ah, yes," interrupted Ashton. "We'll both tell the police—tell them plenty and what we choose."

Allen started toward the fallen man, but with a hand on his shoulder, Ashton jerked him back. "Don't go there," he said, sharply. "Swan is dead. There is nothing you can do. Come on, we'll go back to your cabin now—and talk things over."

A glance at the inert form told Allen that Ashton had spoken the truth. "What do ye mean," he asked dully, "talk things over?"

"Why—we must get both our stories straight. And I'll show you where the profit comes in."

"I tell ye, I'll have nothin' to do with this. It's a dirty redhanded murder—an' I'll not have the likes of ye goin' back to my cabin."

"You've got more to do with it than you think," smiled Ashton, extending the rifle toward the other. You see, Tom—it was your rifle that killed him. And I—er—happen, much against my will, to be a witness to the crime. You see, Tom,

you drank most of that bottle of whiskey, and got to brooding about that name Swan called Nellie, and at last you—"

Allen's eyes raised in horror from the rifle to the face of the speaker. Words came haltingly from between stiff lips. "Why—you—you damn—"

"Never mind the curses, Tom. Calm yourself. You—"

"You'd swear a noose around my neck for a killin' I never committed!"

"No, no, Tom—no nooses. I told you I had planned this thing all out. Come, we'll go back to the cabin. And go on ahead—I'll follow. I should hate to be assaulted from behind."

ONLY for an instant Allen hesitated, then turning, led the way back to his cabin without a word. As they entered the room his eyes sought the corner.

"There's my rifle," he cried. "Ye lied to me out there in the dark."



For answer Ashton stepped across to the wall bracket and turned up the lamp which had been dimmed when they left the cabin. "Look again, Tom," he said. "That's Billy's rifle. This is yours that I have in my hand. They were standing there together."

"An' ye picked up mine by mistake?"

John Ashton's smile was bleak, and his words sounded clipped and brittle. "No. By design. I don't do things by mistake. Mistakes are costly. I need your cooperation—and I took that means of insuring it."

"But—good God, man—they'll hang me! That story about me gittin' licked up an' goin' up there on account of what he called Nellie will sound reasonable—an' when they find out that Swan

was killed with my rifle, an' you swearin' you seen me do it—I ain't got a chanct."

"Exactly," Ashton agreed. "But if you play along with me, Tom, they'll never even suspect you. Not only that, but we'll have the whole creek between us. Swan's claim is a Discovery, twice the size of an ordinary claim, and in three months we can buy it in cheap from the Public Administrator and divide it between us. That will give you and Nellie the lower three claims on the creek, and I'll have the upper three."

"The upper three? How about Billy?"

Again that thin lipped smile. "Billy," said John Ashton, "will not be here. He's starting tomorrow, and he's going fast and far. A good many people heard him threaten to kill Henry Swan last night at the dance—they saw him try it with an ax. Well, when Billy comes home, I'll tell him that Henry Swan has been shot—shot with his rifle—it's the same make and calibre as yours—and I'll point out to him that the only thing for him to do is to skip out."

"You mean, you'll tell him you shot Henry?"

"Certainly not—how silly. I'll tell him you did it—with his rifle. As you say, the story sounds plausible. I'll tell him that I carried his rifle down to your cabin and that you picked it up by mistake for your own. I'll tell him that you were quite drunk, and you asked me to go up to Swan's with you while you demanded an apology for the name he called Nellie—and that you called him to the door and when he refused to apologize, you shot him dead."

"But—why would he skip out because I'd shot Henry Swan?"

John Ashton's eyes narrowed and the thin lips set even more firmly. "Billy and I are brothers," he said, after a long moment of silence, "but I hate him, and he knows it. I've always had all the work—and he's had all the fun. People like Billy—and they hate me. To hell with

'em. We'll see what they say now—when they think Billy's a murderer. I'll remind him of the threats he made against Swan, and tell him Swan was killed with his rifle—and then I'll tell him, frankly that I want his claim—that I'll say on the witness stand that I know nothing whatever of the killing. I'll also point out that if the police do succeed in pinning the murder on you, it would leave Nellie in—"

"Ye'll leave Nellie out of this, ye damn blackguard!"

"Certainly—but Billy's got funny ideas. He might skip out on purpose to throw suspicion on himself, if he thought it would save Nellie's father from the rope."

"I'll have nothin' to do with it! My God, John Ashton, are ye man or devil—to be fram'in' a murder on innocent men? To see ye're own blood brother hung?"

"No one will be hanged. I will pay Billy enough for his claim to insure his get-away. He can go over into Alaska and be perfectly safe. We don't need to report the murder for several days. People all know that Henry Swan keeps pretty much to himself. I'll say that Billy told me he was going to Dawson—and that several days later I found the corpse lying there in front of the door."

"Nellie will take it mighty hard—with Billy gone—an' his name blackguarded with murder. They was figgerin' on git-tin' married."

"She'll get over it," interrupted Ashton. "They always do. It's as much for her good I'm doing this, as for yours and mine. I should hate to see Nellie married to him. Even if he would marry her—which is doubtful. There are several girls, back home, that Billy should have married—and didn't."

OLD TOM leaped to his feet and leaned over the table, his gray beard quivering with anger. "John Ashton, ye're a dirty, lyin' skunk, an' I'll have

naught to do with yer lousy murderin' schemes! I'll go to the police an' tell 'em jest what happened. How ye're tryin' to frame Billy—an' if not him—me!"

Ashton shrugged indifferently as without moving from his chair his cold eyes met the blazing eyes of the other without flinching. "Suit yourself," he replied. "In that case, you'll be the goat. It will sound rather fantastic, won't it—that story about my trying to frame my own brother? Remember, there are no witnesses. It's my word against yours—and no one can say there was ever any trouble between Henry Swan and me. You had a motive—so did Billy. But the important thing, the thing that will convict you of murder as sure as you're standing there: is the evidence. It was your gun that killed him—and the police will damn soon prove it. That is, unless Billy skips out; in which case, suspicion will be diverted to him. It's no use, Tom—I've planned it all out. All you've got to do is to say nothing and sit tight. Let me do the talking—and we'll divide Henry Swan's claim between us."

As the force of the argument sank home, the blood slowly drained from old Tom Allen's face, the fire of righteous anger died out of his eyes leaving them dull and expressionless, his taut muscles relaxed, and he sank dejectedly into his chair and with groping hands, poured himself a drink.

Presently John Ashton rose, picked up Billy's rifle and passed out into the night. "Better think it over," he said, as the door closed behind him.

VI

UPON reaching his own cabin, he fired a shot from Billy's rifle into the air, ejected the shell, and then, as an afterthought, ejected the remaining loaded shells from the gun, slipped them behind the clock on the shelf, and returned the empty gun to its pegs above Billy's bunk.

"In case he should suspect my hand in this, and go on the warpath," he muttered, "leaving his gun loaded might be a mistake. From now on, I can't afford to make any mistakes."

When Billy Ashton returned from the dance just on the edge of daylight, John was preparing breakfast. Throwing off his cap and his parka, he eyed the older man who had uttered no word of greeting.

"What you so glum about? Still grouching because I choose to sleep when you think I ought to be working? Well—I'm not trying to get rich in a minute. You tend to your claims; and I'll tend to mine."

"I'll be working both claims from now on," replied the other.

"What do you mean?"

"Henry Swan was shot and killed in his doorway, last night."

"Shot and killed! Who killed him?"

John shrugged. "Whoever did it, the police will believe it was you—after the threats you made the night before at the dance."

"Who did kill him—you?"

John Ashton met the blazing eyes of his brother with a thin smile. "Me? Why should I kill Henry Swan? I never had any trouble with him. As a matter of fact, Tom Allen killed him."

"Tom Allen! Why should Tom kill him? Was he crazy?"

"Drunk—not crazy."

"He's drunk, all right. I just helped Nellie pull his boots off and get him to bed. He was asleep at the table with his face buried in his arms, and he'd killed the quart he brought home to sober up on, and most of another that Nellie kept for emergencies. I remember he did babble something about a shooting—but we didn't pay any attention to it. But why did he kill him?"

"He was bound to demand an apology for that name Henry called Nellie at the dance. After you'd gone I got kind of lonesome, so I went down to Allen's to

chew the fat with the old man. He was pretty well oiled when I got there, and he kept nicking away at the bottle, and talking about Henry Swan, and getting madder and madder about it, till finally he decided to go up and demand an apology. I tried my best to dissuade him—but it was no use. Old Tom's stubborn as a mule when he's drinking. He was bound that I should accompany him, so just to humor him, I did—that, and because I thought that I might be able to prevent Swan from beating the old man up.

"Tom picked up a rifle as we left the cabin, saying that if Swan saw he was heeled he'd be more apt to apologize. When we got to Swan's place, Tom stopped on the creek ice and yelled to him to come out. Presently the door opened, and without saying a word to Swan, who stood out plainly in the lamplight, Tom raised the rifle, and before I realized what he was up to, he fired and Swan pitched forward into the snow. Then Tom threw a fresh shell into the gun, and waited. But he didn't have to shoot again—he'd done a perfect job the first time. Henry Swan was dead."

"My God—this will kill Nellie! She thinks the world and all of old Tom."

John Ashton nodded sombrely. "Yes," he agreed, "the poor girl would never draw another happy breath if Tom were hanged."

"Hanged! Surely they wouldn't hang him if he was drunk when he did it!"

"Drunkenness is no defense where the crime was premeditated and deliberate."

"But—how would the police know it was deliberate and premeditated? Swan was probably drunk, too—they'd think it was a drunken brawl."

"But, my dear Billy—you forget that I was a witness. I know that it was deliberate, and premeditated—also why did he carry the rifle? I know that he never gave Henry Swan a chance. And I know that he was not too drunk at that time to know what he was doing. Common honesty, and

a regard for the truth, will compel me to so testify. Surely, you could not expect me to perjure myself on the witness stand."

BILLY ASHTON'S eyes focused on the speaker's face in a searching gaze that hardened as the words ceased. For long moments they faced each other in silence. Then the elder brother turned abruptly away and pretended to busy himself at the stove. Still Billy did not speak, and after an interval, the other's eyes again met his, as though compelled by that soul-searching gaze. Then, the younger man spoke.

"John," and his voice cut hard as flint, "you're a damned hypocrite. You're a liar—and a murderer."

"What!"

"You heard me. You killed Henry Swan. Tom Allen may have fired the fatal shot—when he was drunk—but you instigated it."

John Ashton shrugged. "Even if true, that would be hard to prove," he answered. "Besides, there is no motive. Why should I kill Henry Swan?"

"So you could buy in his claim from the Public Administrator. That's the reason—a money reason—the only reason you've ever had for anything you've ever done. You killed Henry Swan—and you've made poor old Tom the goat."

John Ashton's eyes glinted angrily, as his thin lips twisted into a sneering grin. "Saying it is one thing—but proving it will be quite another."

"I don't expect to prove it, damn you! You were stone cold sober, and old Tom was drunk. You never took a drink in your life because you were afraid it would cost you money! The police would convict him—with your help—but they'll never have the chance. I suppose it would suit your scheme all right if it was me they suspected. Better—because if I skip out, you can have my claim, too."

John nodded. "Yes," he said brazenly,

"that would suit me to a T. In fact, I had hoped you would suggest just that move. And I may as well tell you that the finger of suspicion will readily point to you as the murderer—because Henry Swan was killed with your rifle."

"With my rifle!"

"Exactly. When I went down to Allen's last evening, I carried your rifle with me in hope, let us say, of seeing a moose. Your sights are much better adapted to night shooting than mine. When I arrived at Allen's I stood the rifle up beside Tom's in the corner—and when he reached for his rifle, it was yours he picked up, instead of his own. They are almost identical—and in his somewhat befuddled condition he never noticed the difference."

Reaching for his rifle, Billy raised the muzzle to his nose and sniffed. Then he nodded. "Thought of everything, didn't you, John?"

"In furtherance of your noble self-sacrifice I can be of great assistance. When the police come to investigate the crime, I can forget all that actually happened last night on the creek. And, I may even be able to remember that, soon after your departure, last evening, I heard a shot from the direction of Swan's cabin. That will place his demise a matter of two or three hours before it actually occurred, but in his frozen condition, the police will never know. And I can purchase your claim, and thereby finance your flight. Also, I can delay the accidental discovery of Swan's body for several days, and after the discovery, I can take my time in reaching Dawson with the news. With, say, six or seven days start, you can easily reach Alaska. I can explain to the police that your absence, previous to my discovery of the body, caused me no concern, as you told me you were going to Dawson for a spree. You have done just that, before—it would sound plausible."

"Yes," replied Billy, tight-lipped, "and you can tell Tom Allen to keep his mouth shut. I don't know what he'll remember

of last night's doings, but tell him to say nothing—no matter how much he remembers. And you can deliver the note I'm going to write to Nellie. I'm telling her that I killed Henry Swan as I passed his shack last evening on my way to the dance. Go harness the dogs, while I write the note and the claim transfer."

WHEN John re-entered the room, Billy handed him a folded note. "Give this to Nellie," he said shortly. "And here's the transfer. I named the price as one dollar and other valuable consideration. How much are you giving me for the claim?"

"Well, I thought that two thousand dollars would be about right."

"Two thousand dollars! Hell, that claim is hardly scratched yet! You'll pan more than that out of the dump—and my shaft's only four feet down!"

"I expect a profit on the transaction," replied the other coolly. "Two thousand is the price. In fact, it is all I have on hand. Obviously, I can't accompany you to Dawson and draw more. Here is the money—take it or leave it."

"Give it here," replied Billy. A moment later, he pocketed the money after counting it, and stood facing his elder brother. "Good-by, John," he said. "If I never see you again it will be soon enough. With your claim, and mine, and the Swan Discovery, you'll be rich. But for all your gold, John—I'm damned glad I don't have to wear your shoes. And I'm damned glad that mother and father died without knowing what a conscienceless devil you are. You'll get hold of the Allen claims—somehow, too. Then you'll own the whole creek. Well, you can have the claims, but listen to me—you keep your damned slimy hands off Nellie! I'm going away and you won't know where I am, but remember this—I won't be so far away that I won't know all about you, and what you are doing. You may sell out for a million and go back to the States—back home,

maybe—but don't try to marry Nellie Allen—or by God, the next time I'm on the run, it'll be for a murder I did commit. Now—peel your coat."

"What?" asked the other, a look of fear leaping into his eyes, as he met the hard gaze of his younger brother. "What do you mean?" he faltered, as his glance swept the room wildly.

"I mean that before I go, I'm leaving you something to remember me by. It won't be much, John—to what you've really got coming—but it will be something—a broken nose, maybe, or the loss of a few teeth."

"Don't you dare lay a hand on me!" shrieked the other, in terror. "I—I'll set the police onto you before you have time to reach Dawson! I'll—"

Billy laughed shortly, hastily. "Oh, no you won't. The last thing in the world you want, is that the police should pick me up. Because if they do, I'll talk—and talk plenty. You may have an iron-clad case figured out—one that would convict me, or maybe old Tom Allen—and then maybe you haven't. Somewhere along the line you may have slipped—may have done some little thing, or left some little thing undone, that would put the rope around your own precious neck. Remember, there would be three of us working against you



—and the police would be seeking the truth. As long as I'm on the loose, they'll believe it was I who killed Swan. If they pick me up, it'll be different. You don't dare force a show-down. You haven't got the guts!"

AS THE younger man finished John Ashton's fingers closed about the haft of a heavy hunting knife that lay on the table beside him, and taking a quick step backward, he hurled it with all his might, at the same instant that Billy threw himself sidewise. Missing his head by inches, the knife struck the wall broadside, and clattered to the floor, as Billy leaped at the thrower, overturning the table as his thigh struck its corner. Again and again the younger man struck, hard vicious blows that landed on the other's face and jaws despite his frantic effort to ward them off. His face crimson with blood from his flattened nose, John's groping fingers sought frantically to lift the latch of the door, but Billy was crowding him too close, forcing his body against it, as piston like blows landed with lightning rapidity. His escape by way of the door cut off, John lunged forward straight at his assailant, his arms closing in a death-grip about the younger man's neck. The impact carried the two writhing bodies back against the overturned table, which tripped them, and sent them crashing against the stove. Rapidly the room filled with smoke, as Billy hammered frantically against the other's ribs, and John tightened the grip about Billy's neck with his arms. Wood smoke bit into their lungs, strangling them, causing them to cough as they twisted and struggled. Then suddenly John cried out in pain, and his grip momentarily relaxed as he struggled furiously to regain his feet. His cheek had come into contact with the hot stove. Feeling the grip relax, Billy leaped to his feet just as John got to his knees. Dimly for an instant he saw his brother's face through the swirling smoke, and he struck with all his might. The blow landed squarely against the other's jaw, and he sprawled on the floor and lay still.

Throwing the door open, Billy reached down, and grasping the other's ankles, dragged him from the room. Outside, he dashed the water from his smarting eyes,

as he sucked great draughts of fresh air into his tortured lungs. Smoke poured from the cabin through the doorway, and after a moment Billy plunged again into the room, emerging a few moments later, he stood for several moments looking down at the prostrate figure in the snow. Then, stooping he scooped up a handful of the dry, flinty snow that had fallen during the night, and rubbed the bloody face roughly. After a moment, the unconscious man stirred. His puffed, and rapidly blackening eyes fluttered open, and he moaned, and retched as he coughed the smoke from his lungs. Billy stood looking down at him, and as full consciousness returned, John weakly raised an arm as though to ward off a blow.

"Never mind," Billy said. "I've finished with you. I couldn't leave you here to freeze, so I brought you to. And the cabin's all right—it isn't on fire. The stovepipe's knocked down—that's all. When you feel able you can set it up again. The table will need fixing, too. And oh yes—there's that knife on the floor. Never throw a knife, John, till you know how. If you'd kept it in your hand, you could have cut me to ribbons. So long—I'll be pulling out, now. Guess there's no danger of your tipping off the police for several days to come—even if you wanted to, John—you're not in good shape to travel."

He turned abruptly away, called to the dogs, and a moment later man and dog-team disappeared around a bend of the creek. As he passed the Swan claim, Billy noticed that the door gaped open—noticed also, an ominous white mound directly in front of the doorway—a longish mound, covered by the new-fallen snow. As he crossed the Allen claim he halted for long moments, gazing at the little cabin that nestled snugly against the rock wall. No sign of life appeared. "She's asleep—tired out from the dance—and old Tom's dead drunk. God—if I could only—" Abruptly he turned away, and

a few moments later the outfit was swallowed up in the willows at the mouth of the creek.

VII

ON THE third day after Billy's departure, John Ashton made up a pack and headed down the creek. He, too, glanced toward Swan's gaping door with the ominous white mound in front of it, and hurried on, noting with satisfaction that the new snow that had been falling intermittantly since the night of the shooting had covered all tracks. Smoke rose from the Allen cabin, and he rapped on the door. The voice of the girl bade him enter and he stepped into the room to find her dressed for the trail, and old Tom lying in his bunk.

"Father's sick," she said, "and I'm going to ask Billy if he won't go down to Sand Bar and ask that new doctor to come up and see him. But why—what's the matter with you—your face?"

"Billy's doings," replied the man, with a frown. "When he returned from that second dance I remonstrated with him for wasting his time sleeping when he should be working his claim, and he resented it. One word led to another and he assaulted me. I tried to defend myself, but I was no match for him, and he beat me unmercifully. Then he pulled out."

"Pulled out! Where did he go?"

"I don't know. He evidently left this note for you. I found it on the table when I came to. I remember fighting with him there in the cabin—and the next thing, I was lying on the floor, and Billy was gone, and his stampeding pack, and the dogs and the sled—and this note was on the table."

"What does it say?" asked the girl, snatching the paper from his hand.

"I didn't read it. It was addressed to you."

Turning the note to the light, the girl glanced at it and her eyes widened in

horror as she crushed the paper in her hand. "Henry Swan!" she cried, "Oh God—he says he killed Henry Swan!"

"Killed Henry Swan?"

"Yes! Oh do something, can't you! Don't stand there like an idiot!" She brushed past him and reached the door.

"Where are you going," he asked.

"To Swan's—to—to see if it's true!"

"I'll go with you," he said, as he swung the pack from his shoulders. The door banged, and the girl was gone.

CROSSING swiftly to the bunk, Ashton placed a hand on Allen's shoulder and shook him roughly. The old man opened his eyes and stared without recognition into the face with the blackened eyes, the crooked nose, and the missing front teeth that bent over him. "Listen, Tom, it's me—John Ashton. You remember what happened the other night—you got drunk and shot Swan. Get that—you killed Henry Swan. But the police will think Billy did it. He told Nellie he did, in a note he wrote before he skipped out. So keep still about it. Remember—you don't know a thing. Billy Ashton killed Swan—that's what they'll think. If you talk they'll hang you—remember, Swan was killed with your rifle. But you don't know anything about it."

"Billy Ashton killed Swan?" asked the old man, the vacant look still in his eyes.

"That's right—Billy Ashton killed Swan—don't forget that. I'm going up to Swan's now—stay where you are—Nellie will be back directly."

Five minutes later John Ashton joined Nellie Allen at Swan's door. The girl stood white and rigid, staring down at the patch of checked shirt that showed where she had stooped and started to brush the snow from that white mound and had drawn back in horror as her mittened hand had encountered that shoulder.

"It's best if we don't touch anything," said John Ashton, coming up behind her. The girl cried out, startled by the voice,

for he had approached noiselessly through the snow. She whirled to face him, and pointed to the open door.

"Didn't you see that door standing open in weather like this—and—and this—" She glanced down at the mound with a shudder. "Didn't you see it when you came past?"

Ashton shook his head. "No. My eyes, as you see, are swollen and very sensitive to the light. I use them only to see where to put my feet. I can open them only to the merest slits, and even that is painful. I must pick up some snow glasses at Sand Bar, if Crampton has any."

The girl seemed only half satisfied. "And you've been for three days, on the next claim, and didn't know there was anything wrong here?"

"I did not suspect that anything was wrong. How could I. I have been practically blind. I have not left the cabin since—since Billy went away, until just now. But," he added, "it's strange that you didn't notice. Your claim is as near to this place as mine."

"I haven't been out either—except for wood and water. You can't see this cabin from ours. I had to look after father."

"What's the matter with him—a hang-over from the last dance?"

"He didn't go to the last dance," replied the girl dully. "He was feeling terribly from the night before, so he stayed home, and he got very drunk—drank nearly two quarts of liquor all alone. It's made him terribly sick. He's had hangovers before—but not like this one. He's always been all right again in a day or two—but this time, he doesn't seem to snap out of it. That's why I wanted Billy to go for the doctor."

"I'll stop at Sand Bar and send the doctor up, then I'll go on to Dawson and report this—this murder to the police."

"Murder!" The girl winced, as she uttered the word. "Oh, it isn't a murder! It couldn't be. Billy wouldn't murder anyone—not even Henry Swan."

JOHN ASHTON shrugged. "That will be for the police to say. We must disturb nothing—leave things just as they are. I hope you are right. You say Billy admitted the killing, but if it had been justified, like self-defense—why would he have fled?" Stepping to the doorway, he peered into the interior, then pointed to the rifle resting on its pegs above Swan's bunk. "There's his rifle—and he had only one. I doubt that the police will find any weapon when they pull Henry Swan out of the snow."

"Billy never killed an unarmed man!" cried the girl, her eyes flashing angrily.

"Was Swan armed when he threatened him at the dance with an ax?" And again Ashton shrugged. "He nearly killed me—and I was unarmed."

It was on the end of the girl's tongue to retort that it was too bad he hadn't finished the job, but she checked herself. "It must be pleasant," she said, "for a man to report to the police that his brother is a murderer."

"All duties are not pleasant, but they are nevertheless duties," replied the man, sententiously. "I will be on my way."

"Where were you going with a pack?"

"To Dawson."

"Why?" she flashed, "if you didn't know Swan had been killed?"

Ashton hesitated only an instant. "For medical attention. I think my nose is broken."

"There's a doctor at Sand Bar."

"But no dentist. He drew back his lips. There is the matter of some missing teeth." He turned abruptly away. The girl followed him back to her cabin where he swung the pack to his shoulders and stepped from the room. "I'll send the doctor up," he said, as he turned down the creek.

In the doorway the girl watched him till he disappeared in the willows, a speculating look in her narrowed blue eyes. Then she closed the door, glanced about for Billy's crumpled note. What had she

done with it? She remembered crushing it in her hand—but had she tossed it onto the table? Dropped it on the floor? Frantically she searched the floor, the table, the wood pile beside the stove, her father's bunk—she knew she had not gone into her own tiny room—but the note was nowhere to be found. Then suddenly she paused, and her lips pressed tight. John Ashton had taken the note! He had picked it up after she left the cabin. He would turn it over to the police. "Damn him! Damn him!" she cried, in a voice that was a moan of despair. "He killed Henry Swan! But—after what happened at the dance—and that note of Billy's—we'll never be able to prove it."

VIII

FIVE days later Corporal Downey, of the Northwest Mounted Police, faced John Ashton across his flat-topped desk in the police detachment at Dawson. He smoothed the crumpled note that lay before him on the desk gently with his fingers.

"Let's just go over the main points again, now, so I'll be sure I've got 'em straight. In the first place, let's get the date of this killin'. You say you've been five days comin' down here—that's quite a while, ain't it, to come a little better than seventy miles?"

"It was because of my eyes—the sunlight on the snow was very painful. I could only travel early in the morning and late in the evening. I tried to get snow glasses at Sand Bar, but Crampton had none."

"All right—that's five days. Then you say you laid up in your cabin two full days after Billy beat you up—that's three more days—and he killed Swan the night before that, on his way to the dance?"

"That's right."

"That would place the killin' on the night of the nineteenth—the night of this second dance. Now at the first dance, the

night before that, you say Billy attempted to attack Swan with an ax, and when he was prevented, he threatened to get him later?"

"That's what he told me the next morning."

"Anyone hear him make this threat?"

"I don't know. I was not at either dance. You could check them at Sand Bar."

"Did he repeat this threat to you—when he told you about it next morning?"

"Yes, he said he would get Swan—said what Swan called Nellie Allen because she refused to dance with him—and he would get Swan for it."

"Did you believe, at the time, that he intended to kill Swan?"

"Well—no, I didn't really. Billy was hot-headed, but I thought he would cool off. Maybe give Swan a beating—but I didn't think he really meant to kill him. It seems, however, that I was wrong."

"Looks like it. Now—just why did Billy beat you up?"

"Why, as I told you—because I remonstrated with him about frittering away his time at dances instead of working his claim."

"That all?"

"Well, I had given him a piece of my mind the morning previous, when he threatened to get Swan—and then he was dissatisfied with the price I paid him for his claim."

"You bought his claim?"

"Yes."

"When was that?"

"The morning he left—the morning after the second dance."

"Did he offer to sell you the claim?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I didn't ask him. I supposed, then, it was because he was angry with me for meddling in his affairs—but I did it for his own good. After telling me to mind my own business and that he would mind his, he said he was going away—that he

wouldn't stay under the same roof with me—and offered to sell me the claim. I know, now, that he had to skip out after killing Swan."

"What did you pay for it?"

John Ashton flushed. "Really, Corporal, I can't see that that is any of your con-



cern. The sale was a private matter between my brother and myself. After all, you know, I am here merely to try and give you what information I can that will be of help in solving this murder. I resent being cross-questioned like a—"

"All right—pass up the purchase price. Now—Billy's rifle—what kind of a rifle did he have?"

"A three hundred and three."

"An' you have one?"

"Yes—a thirty-forty."

"Took his with him, I s'pose, when he left?"

"Yes."

"The night this note says he shot Swan—did he take his rifle with him that night to the dance?"

"Yes."

"Did he take it the night before?"

"No."

"Now, this night that he carried his rifle to the dance—you didn't, by any chance, hear a shot, did you?"

"Well, yes, I did—that is I think I did—but I didn't pay much attention to it at the time."

"Didn't go out to investigate—although

you say Billy had threatened that very morning to get Swan?"

"I didn't take his threat seriously. And I didn't bother to investigate. Thought he'd taken a shot at a moose or a prowling wolf—or that maybe it was just a tree exploding with the frost."

"How long after Billy left the cabin did you hear this shot?"

"I don't know—as I told you, it didn't impress me much."

"Long enough for him to have reached Swan's claim?"

"In view of what happened, it must have been."

"And you just stayed in the cabin—didn't leave it that night, at all?"

"No."

"And you didn't know anything about Swan's death till the third day after, when you say Miss Allen read Billy's note and cried out that he had shot Swan—and then you followed her to Swan's claim, and found his body covered with snow in front of the open door."

"That's right."

"You hadn't read this note before you handed it to Miss Allen?"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Ashton resentfully. "I'm not in the habit of reading other people's correspondence."

"Eyes were in bad shape, too—by the looks of 'em. Billy did a pretty thorough job of it, didn't he? Looks like you'll be in the hospital about a week, with that nose, and those missin' teeth."

"A week! Oh, I think a couple of days will fix me up, all right. If you'll wait two days I'll be ready to go back with you."

"Why do you want to go back with me?"

"Why—er—nothing—except that I might be able to help you get to the bottom of this matter."

"Can't hold up the investigation," Downey replied. "This is a murder. I'll get to the bottom of it, all right—an' you've helped quite a bit, already."

"I—I suppose I could go back with you,

and return to the hospital later, Ashton said.

Downey shook his head. "It's not necessary. You say it took you five days to get down here—I'll make it in two. You couldn't keep up. Anything else I want to ask you can wait till I get back. Better stay right here till you get patched up. That'll be all, now—I've got to get goin'."

John Ashton took his departure with a distinct feeling of uneasiness. This Corporal Downey—he's too damn brusque—suppose old Tom should crack, and talk, under his barrage of questions? Maybe Tom would be too sick to question. Oh, well—if he did talk, it would be just too damn bad for him. After all, Swan was killed with Tom's rifle. His own gun was of different calibre. The police could determine that—and they could never convict him on old Tom's unsupported word—no matter how much the oldster talked. Maybe it would be better if they did—convict Tom. That would get him out of the way—and with Billy's claim already in his possession—and Swan's claims bought from the Public Administrator—he must plug that hole in the bottom of Swan's shaft when he got back—make it look like bedrock—the Public Administrator must never know about that rich black gravel—then he and Nellie would have the whole creek to themselves—and— John Ashton reached the hospital, but somehow the feeling of uneasiness would not down.

After Ashton's departure from his office, Corporal Downey sat for a long time frowning at the note that lay before him on his desk. "Got to find out if this is really Billy's handwritin'," he muttered to himself. Then abruptly he thumped the desk top with his doubled fist. "But whether it is or not—Billy Ashton never shot Swan down in cold blood! I know Billy too well to believe he'd shoot an unarmed man. He might have killed Swan at the dance for miscallin' his girl—but

he'd never bushwhack him. There's more behind this killin' than just callin' a girl a name at a dance—an' John Ashton knows all the answers. I wonder how much old Tom Allen knows—an' the girl?"

IX

TWO days later, at Sand Bar, Corporal Downey heard the story of the trouble at the dance from the lips of a dozen eye-witnesses, including the trader, Crampton. All agreed that Swan had been drunk—mean drunk—and when Nellie Allen refused to dance with him, he had denounced her, that Billy Ashton was a bit liquored up, and when he heard Swan insult the girl, he grabbed up an ax that stood in a corner of the room, and made for Swan, but was promptly seized and disarmed by half a dozen men. Others had hustled Swan from the room, carried him to a cabin, and binding him hand and foot, left him for the rest of the night to sleep off his jag. These witnesses admitted that before Billy cooled off he threatened to "get Swan yet," but that no one paid any attention to the threat, and that within a short time Billy had apparently forgotten the incident.

As Downey was about to depart from Sand Bar the doctor called him aside. "Going up to Willow Creek on that Swan murder?" he asked.

"Yes. Know anything about it?"

"Not a thing. I just wanted to warn you not to question old man Allen too closely. He's in pretty bad shape, and any excitement might be too much for him. It's his heart—twice the size it ought to be—probably been bad for a long time. This last bender he got on nearly finished him, and he's got to stay in bed for a complete rest—his recovery is a long shot, at that. Any undue strain, like excitement, or physical labor, and he's liable to go out like a light. This Swan business, as it is, nearly finished him."

"All right," Downey replied, "I won't

bother him—glad you warned me—so long."

The officer went on to Willow Creek where Nellie Allen answered his knock on the door, and welcomed him with an air of relief. She knew Corporal Downey slightly, and like most of the residents of the Klondike country, knew him well by reputation.

"Oh, I'm glad it's you!" exclaimed the girl. "I was afraid they'd send some constable up here who—who—" she paused in confusion, and Downey smiled.

"We've got some pretty likely constables—"

"Yes, I know—of course—but there's only one Corporal Downey. Oh, I know you'll get to the bottom of this—this horrible murder! I know you'll find out who killed Henry Swan."

Downey nodded gravely. "I'll do the best I can."

"Then I know the murderer is as good as hanged already."

"Thanks for the compliment," smiled the officer. He paused and nodded toward the bed where Tom Allen lay sleeping. "Sorry to hear about your father. The doctor down to Sand Bar told me."

"Yes, he's got a bad heart. The doctor says if he has absolute quiet he's got a chance."

Downey nodded. "Accordin' to John Ashton," he said, "there don't seem to be much doubt as to who done the killin'."

"He told you, I suppose, that Billy Ashton killed Swan."

"Well, not just in so many words—but he didn't leave much doubt about it. Know anything about this note, Miss Nellie?"

The girl took the note that Downey drew from between the pages of his note book, and reread it. "So he did get the note—I thought so."

"What's that?"

"John brought this note to me the third day after the last dance at Sand Bar. Said Billy wrote it the morning after the dance—the morning he went away. I read it,

and told him what it said, and then I remember crumpling it in my hand—but I couldn't remember what I did with it, because I ran to Swan's claim to see if he'd really been killed. John followed in a few minutes, and we found Swan's body lying under the snow before the door, and he said we'd better not touch anything—we should leave everything exactly as it was for the police. Then we came back here, and he picked up his pack and went on to Dawson to report the killing."

"An' he didn't know Swan had been killed till he heard you read the note?"

The dark blue eyes of the girl met Downey's eyes squarely. "That's what he said," she replied.

"Did he say anything about hearing a shot soon after Billy left the cabin, the night of the killin'?"

"No."

"So you didn't give him this note after you got back to the cabin?"

"No. I looked all over for it, after he had gone. I knew then that he must have taken it—picked it up from where I threw it—either on the table or the floor, I don't know."

"Prob'ly took it to make sure the police would get it—prob'ly thought you might destroy it. Would you have destroyed it?"

The girl's eyes never faltered, as she answered. "I don't know. If I thought it would save Billy I would. I know he didn't kill Henry Swan."

"Distroyin' evidence is serious business," smiled the officer.

"I don't care if it is! Anyone with a grain of sense in his head knows that Billy Ashton never murdered anybody, and if I got hold of anything that made it look like he did, I'd destroy it, wouldn't I?"

THE smile widened. "Yes, I expect mebbe you would."

"Of course I would! Anything like that would just delay the police in finding the real murderer—and it ought to be destroyed."

The smile became an audible chuckle. "Your reasonin' seems sound—destroyin' obstructions to justice—but that ain't just the way we look at it. However, Miss Nellie, now I've got the note, I know you'll tell me the truth about it. Is that Billy Ashton's handwritin'?"

The girl nodded. "Yes, it is. I've had other letters from him. I know his writing."

Both studied the note which Downey held close to the window. "Don't look like a forgery—like someone else had written it to look like his writin'—an' it don't look forced—like he was writin' it under some kind of a threat, while someone else dictated it," said the officer. "Looks like the pencil just slid right along over the paper, natural."

"Yes," the girl agreed, "that's the way it looks."

"Now, Miss Nellie, if Billy didn't kill Swan, do you know of any reason why he'd voluntarily write a note to you, statin' that he did?"

"No," answered the girl after a moment of thought, "I don't." "But," she added quickly, "there must have been some reason—because he didn't kill Henry Swan—even if the note does say so!"

"Who did kill him?"

The question came abruptly, taking the girl by surprise. "Why—I don't know."

"Who do you think killed him?"

"Why—I—I—"

"Who?"

"John Ashton—I—I can't help thinking so."

"Why?"

"I don't know why. I—hate him—I just know he did it!"

"That all?"

"Yes—I suppose I have no right to say he did it—when I don't know—but—"

"Everyone's got a right to their opinion. I just wanted to know if you had any real reason. By the way, did Billy carry a rifle to the dance—either night?"

"No"

"Did he say anything, the second night, about havin' any trouble with John?"

The girl's brow puckered in tiny wrinkles as she tried to remember. "No," she answered at length, "he did say that John had hinted rather nastily that he'd never get rich dancing all night and sleeping all day—but Billy just laughed about it. It wasn't anything serious."

"Just one thing more, Miss Nellie, an' I'll be gettin' up to Swan's. What kind of a night was it—the night of this second dance? Was it snowin'—or clear?"

"It was a warm night—it rained most of that day, and the snow was wet and sticky. Toward evening it turned colder, and the rain turned to snow. Then, during the night, while we were at the dance, it turned colder, and in the morning when we came home the snow was frozen hard, and we had good walking. There was three or four inches of new snow that fell during the night, but it was hard snow."

"Not cold enough early in the evenin', just before the dance, so any trees was poppin' with the frost?"

"No, of course not—it was warm before the dance."

"That'll be all now. I'll leave my pack here an' pick it up when I come back." He departed with a camera slung from his shoulder by a strap, and the girl watched him make his way rapidly up the creek.

THREE hours later he returned and Nellie glanced eagerly into his eyes. "Did you find out anything?" she asked.

Corporal Downey nodded slowly. "Yes," he answered, "I found several things. But I can't discuss them now." He glanced toward the bed. "Does Tom sleep all the time?"

"No, he's been awake for about an hour, but he dozed off again."

"These his boots?" asked the officer, picking up one of a pair of rubber boots that stood at the foot of Allen's bunk.

"Yes, those are his. He wears them when it's soft and sloppy."

"Mind if I take them with me?" he asked. I've got three other pairs here." Stepping to the door he retrieved the three pairs of boots, proceeded to stow them into his packsack."



"No, take them if you need them—take anything we've got that will help to clear up this crime."

"This your father's rifle?" he asked, picking up the gun from the corner, and ejecting a shell from the chamber.

"Yes, that's his. But if you take that, I won't be able to get any meat."

"I don't need the gun," replied Downey, examining the cartridge. "Has he got any more shells than these in the magazine?"

For answer, the girl reached into a wall cupboard and produced a box of ammunition which she handed the officer. He examined the cartridges, slipping one of them into his pocket, and handed the box back. "I'll be goin', now," he said.

"Going! You mean—back to Dawson?"

"Yes, to Dawson—and beyond. I'm going to find Billy Ashton."

Sudden fear leaped into the girl's eyes, as the color drained out of her face. "Billy!" she gasped. "Oh—surely—you don't believe that Billy murdered that man!"

Downey swung the pack to his back, adjusted the straps for comfort, and regarded her gravely. "I think I know why Billy wrote that note," he said. "An' I do know who killed Henry Swan. But before I can go to court I must have evidence, that will convince a jury."

"But how will you ever find Billy?" asked the girl. "Oh, he may have gone—maybe heading for the outside, back to the States where he came from!"

Downey shook his head. "I hardly think he would try to go upriver. Especially at this time of year when no one else is going that way. He'd meet too many people comin' in—be too conspicuous. There's too many police posts to pass—Selkirk, White Horse, Tagish, and the passes. I believe he'd hit downriver, slip past Dawson and Fortymile, and on into Alaska. It'll take time—but I'll find him."

The girl's eyes widened in sudden horror, and even her lips went bloodless, as she pressed her clenched fists against her heaving bosom. She spoke, and the words sounded hardly above a whisper—as though she were afraid to speak them—to give voice to the thought that had leaped suddenly into her mind. "What if—if the man who killed Henry Swan—killed Billy, too? Killed him and hid his body so the police would think he skipped out. Maybe he's—out there—somewhere—now—under the snow—dead—frozen—like Henry Swan!"

Corporal Downey stepped toward the girl and laid a firm hand on her shoulder. "No," he said. "I thought of that—but there isn't one chance in a thousand that it's true. Buck up. You can't afford to go to pieces." He paused and jerked a thumb in the direction of the bunk. "He needs you. And there'll be someone else needin' you, too—later. Be a woman!" he added almost gruffly. "Don't fear the worst—hope for the best. And remember, the Mounted Police are on the job—and we'll see it through. I'll send someone up from Sand Bar to fetch Swan's body down there an' bury it. Good-bye, Miss Allen—an' remember—worryin' kills more people than disease."

IT WAS with no little trepidation, albeit admirably hidden behind a mask of forced nonchalance, that John Ashton once

again faced Corporal Downey across the flat topped table at detachment. The doctor and the dentist had nearly succeeded in obliterating all signs of his recent man-handling, and his smile disclosed new porcelain teeth.

"You sent for me, Corporal? I hadn't expected you back so soon. How did you find my old friend Tom Allen? He was in a bad way when I left—too much liquor, Miss Nellie said. Too bad—he's a fine old chap when he's not drinking."

"He's in a bad way, yet," said Downey, his attention apparently riveted on the letter opener that he turned over and over in his hand. The doctor says it's his heart. He wouldn't let me question him."

Out of the tail of his eye Downey caught the look of evident relief that flashed into the other's face to be instantly replaced with one of grave concern.

"You mean—he's dangerously ill?"

"Yeah—enlargement of the heart. The doctor says he's got to have absolute rest and quiet—no excitement, no physical labor of any kind."

"Poor Miss Nellie," uttered the other. "Alone on the creek with a sick man. I must get back there and see what I can do. Did you—er—come to any conclusion regarding the—er—death of Henry Swan?"

"Yeah, Billy's the man I want, all right—no question about it. That's one reason I wanted to talk with you. You got any idea where he'd hit for?"

"Not the slightest. That is, nothing that could be really acted upon. I know that my brother hated this country—he had no liking for hard work. He often talked about going back to the States—back to civilization, as he called it, where a man didn't have to break his back on the end of a shovel."

"You think, then, that he'd hit for the outside?"

"I believe that he would—yes."

"An' where would he be likely to go?"

John Ashton shrugged. "Your guess

would be as good as mine. We came from Spirit Lake, Iowa—but with a murder charge against him, I believe that he would avoid a place where everyone knows him."

"Most likely," Downey agreed. "Well, we may never catch up with him. He could change his name an' lose himself somewhere in the States—but we'll sure as hell try. Now, about his description—how old is he?"

"He'll be twenty-three in June."

"Twenty-three," repeated Downey, making a note. "Do you know his exact height an' weight?"

"No, I should say he was probably an inch shorter than I am, and I'm five-eleven—and he'd weigh a hundred and sixty-five or seventy."

Downey nodded. "Yeah, I guess that would be almost right."

Any scars or birthmarks anywhere on his body?"

"No."

"That's about all, I guess. Oh—by the way—these are his boots, ain't they—these rubber-footed pacs? I found 'em up in your cabin." Reaching down, he lifted a pair of pacs to the desk top.

"No, those are mine," Ashton replied. "I wear them when it's sloppy—keeps my feet dry. Billy's feet are larger than mine. He couldn't get into those."

Downey removed the pacs to the floor. "That'll be all. From here on my job is to find Billy."

Ashton's face assumed an air of profound sorrow. I can't exactly wish you luck—under the circumstances," he said. "After all, Billy is my own brother, and even though I can't condone a deliberate murder—I should hate to see him—cr—hanged."

"Yeah—I s'pose you would."

"I'll be going now. I'm pulling out at once for the creek. Oh, yes—those pacs—I'll just take them with me."

"Sorry, but they'll have to be released—matter of routine, you know. Thought

they were Billy's an' might come in somehow as evidence. Listed 'em in my report—the Inspector will have to release 'em. He's down to Fortymile, right now—you'll get 'em back in due time." The officer paused and drawing a pad toward him, wrote rapidly for a few moments, then shoved the pad across the table. "Just sign that an' I'll attach it to the pacs—it's a statement that they are your property."

"Red tape, eh—beastly nuisance, isn't it?" said Ashton, signing the papers. "I'll call for them sometime when I'm in Dawson. So long."

When the man had gone Corporal Downey grinned to himself. "That was a fast one—but he swallowed it, all right. So he's tryin' to steer me upriver, eh—then it's a cinch that Billy hit downriver for Alaska. The last thing he wants is that I should catch up with Billy—an' not because of any brotherly love, either. Said Billy hated this country—didn't know that I know Billy's crazy about the country, crazy about that girl of Tom Allen's, too. Billy oughtn't to be so hard to find—I'll stop in at Fortymile and ask the Inspector for the detail."

XI

JOHN ASHTON returned to Willow Creek. He filled the hole in the bottom of Swan's shaft, and fitted a piece of rock over the opening, to make the shaft floor look like solid bedrock. When the break-up came, he hired help in Sand Bar, and sluiced out his own dump, and Billy's.

Nellie Allen also hired help, sluiced out old Tom's dump, and started a new shaft, superintending the work, herself. Old Tom improved slowly, spending many hours in the warm spring sunshine, seated on a bench before the door, occasionally walking as far as the new shaft to see how the work was progressing.

John Ashton was a frequent caller at

the Allen cabin. He noted with satisfaction that the cracked floor of Allen's old shaft was now completely covered with gravel that had dropped from the sides during the spring thaw. It had been definitely abandoned. He talked with Tom, sitting outside the cabin where the smudge-pot kept the mosquitoes down, but always avoiding any mention of the night Swan was killed. He wondered how much the old man remembered of that night, but dared not sound him out. He hoped Tom would bring up the subject, and as time passed without any mention of the incident, he came to believe that the stupor the old man had drunk himself into had wiped out all memory of the earlier events of the night. That would suit his purpose to a dot.

Despite John's suggestions as to the operation of her claim, and his offers of assistance, Nellie Allen treated him with a cool aloofness that was maddening. Upon the few occasions when he could find her alone, her air of frigid reserve told him as plainly as words that she would have none of him. Toward the end of June, John made the trip to Dawson, and bought the Swan Discovery from the Public Administrator at a price based on test pannings from the dump. He dropped in at the police station and demanded his boots, but both the Inspector, and Corporal Downey were off on patrols, and the constable on detachment knew nothing about them."

"Where is Downey?" he asked.

The constable shrugged. "I don't know. Off on special detail sum'ers. You might ask the Inspector."

On his return to Willow Creek he stopped at the Allen cabin. Old Tom sat before the door in his accustomed place, and seating himself beside him, John drew the Swan transfer from his pocket and extended it for the other's inspection. Inside the cabin, Nellie was rattling dishes.

"I bought Swan's Discovery," he said,

as the old man eyed the paper.

The faded blue eyes were raised to his as Allen asked, "An' you'll be transferin' the lower half to me?"

Ashton frowned his disappointment. So he remembered, then? He had hoped Allen had forgotten, so he could convince him that he, Allen, had killed Swan while drunk.

"No," he growled, "I'm keeping the Swan property for myself—and that's not all. You're going to transfer your claim over to me, too. I have the paper here, and a fountain pen—the transfer's all made out. The price named is one dollar and other valuable considerations—all you have to do is sign it. Here's the pen."

The faded blue eyes flickered, but before the old man could speak, Ashton leaned closer. "Remember," he said, "it was your rifle that killed Swan. Corporal Downey knows it—I found where he'd dug the bullet from the place it had lodged in a cabin log after passing through Swan's body. He knows it was your rifle, but he thinks Billy used it, because Billy left a note admitting the killing after I told him it was you who had shot Swan. The fool did it to save Nellie the pain of seeing her father hanged for murder. Billy's gone, and the police will never find him, so now if you refuse to sign this transfer, I'll tell Downey that I know you killed Swan that night while drunk—saw you do it, in fact. He'll believe me, too—with the evidence to corroborate the story. I can say I have kept silent until now because I promised Billy to. And they'll believe that, too. I'll tell them that of late my conscience had been bothering me—for remaining silent, while my own brother is being falsely accused of a murder."

The fire died from the old eyes, as Allen realized the logic of the man's words. With trembling fingers he took the pen. "An' if I sign this—you'll keep still forever—even after I'm dead?"

"Certainly—all I want is the claim."

Allen's hand was shaking now so that Ashton grasped his wrist and steadied it, while the old man signed — a shaky, nearly illegible signature, but still identifiable as his handwriting. Ashton pocketed the paper.

"Oh, yes—there is one more condition—one more price you must pay for my silence—you must tell Nellie to marry me."

"What!"

"Yes—Billy will never show up again, and she needs a husband—needs someone to look after her and manage her affairs. You're not going to live long—and she'll be left alone."

"But," murmured Allen, aghast, "man, she'd never marry you. She hates you."

"She'll marry me, fast enough—to save you from hanging—and as for hating me—she'll get over that. She may never love me—like she would have loved Billy—but—we'll get along."

Fire flashed in the oldster's eyes and he leaped to his feet. "You go to hell!" he cried, his voice rising high and thin. "I'd rather hang than see her married to you—you—you—"

THE falsetto voice stabbed the air thinly as the slight form tottered and pitched forward. John Ashton caught him, and gathering him into his arms, started for the door, just as Nellie came rushing out. The girl drew back in horror.

"What—what happened?" she gasped.

"Your father," said John Ashton, "has fainted," and, brushing past her, he entered the cabin and deposited the limp form on the bunk.

The girl followed, her eyes blazing, as Ashton turned to face her. "Why did he faint?" she demanded. "What did you say to him?"

Ashton met the blazing eyes with a thin-lipped smile. "I merely made him a proposition, my dear—a simple proposi-

tion that seemed to—er strike him unfavorably."

"What did he mean—he'd rather hang than see me married to you?"



"Ah—so you heard? It is just as well—better, perhaps. I believe he meant exactly what he said."

"But—what has hanging got to do with it? Why should he hang?"

"For the murder of Henry Swan."

"The—murder—of—Henry—Swan!"

"Exactly. You will remember that your father was—er—not quite himself, that night. He got to brooding and drinking—brooding over the name Swan called you at the dance. I had come down here to pass the evening with him, and I tried to dissuade him. Had I an inkling that he intended to kill Swan, I most certainly should have dissuaded him—but he said he was merely going to demand an apology. He carried his rifle, and when Swan opened the door in answer to his call, he shot him dead, without a word. Of course, he was drunk when he did it—but the law will not accept that as an excuse for cold blood murder. I got him home and left. In the morning, when I told Billy what had happened, he said it would kill you if your father were hanged, so he wrote out and signed that confession. He made me promise to give him several days start of the law—and then gave me a terrible beating for not having prevented the murder."

The girl's face had gone paper-white. "—I don't believe it," she faltered.

"Ah, but you do believe it, my dear lady. I can see by your eyes that you believe it—despite your half-hearted denial—and the police will believe it, also—because it is supported by the evidence. Corporal Downey knows that a bullet from your father's rifle killed Swan. He dug the fatal bullet from the wall of Swan's cabin. Billy's bullets were different. He believes that Billy fired the gun—but I can soon disabuse his mind of that fallacy."

The girl's heart seemed to turn to ice, as her thoughts raced back to Corporal Downey's visit — his picking up her father's rifle, and ejecting a shell, and taking another cartridge from the box. Yes—Downey would know about the bullet— Ashton's voice came as from a distance.

"And—you have your father's own word for it. Why would he say he had rather hang than see you married to me? If he were innocent of that killing, why would he expect to hang?"

For long moments the two stood facing each other there in the little cabin. When the dark blue eyes finally rose to meet Ashton's gaze, the look of horror had given place to a level stare of cold contempt.

"And I am the price of your silence?" she asked in a hard, level tone. "The price of that sick old man's life?"

Ashton flushed, under the cold contempt of word and look. "Only the partial price," he answered suavely. "Tom Allen had already transferred his claim to me. I would hardly hold such love as you will give me so highly—my dear."

The girl's face seemed to grow even paler as she answered in a steady voice. "All right. I'll marry you. I'll be your wife. I despise you—and I hate you with a hatred that I would not have believed possible for one person to hold for another. But I'll marry you. And some day I may kill you. I don't know how much

the human brain can stand—before it snaps."

Ashton laughed shortly. "I'll take a chance on that—I'm not marrying you for your brains. And as for your hatred—hell, you'll be loving me in a month—or a year. If it ever comes to killing, though, you'd better think twice—I always go armed." Thrusting his hand beneath his shirt, he withdrew a short, black gun. "Killing is a game that two can play," he added, as he replaced the weapon.

"When," asked the girl, "will this marriage take place?"

"Ah-ha—the eager bride, eh?" Ashton smiled. "Well—the sooner, the better."

"I can't leave—him," she glanced toward the still form on the bunk.

"I suppose not. We can be married here as well as anywhere. There is no one in Sand Bar who is authorized to perform the ceremony. I will go to Dawson and bring out a preacher—it will not cost any more than if we both should go to Dawson and back—not as much. Might as well get it over with—I'll start for Dawson right now."

THE girl glanced again toward the bunk where the unconscious man lay. "Oh—must it be so soon? Have you no sense of decency?"

"I fail to see that there is any indecency in an early marriage."

"Oh—the whole thing is indecent—repugnant—horrible!" cried the girl.

Once more Ashton smiled that thin-lipped smile. "I have often wondered about those sweet nothings that the novelists always have engaged couples murmuring to each other. But brushing that aside, it may be that the indecency, and repugnance, and horror with which you regard your approaching marriage may be somewhat alleviated by the fact that you are marrying one of the wealthiest men in the Yukon."

The blue eyes flashed. "Nothing could

change my contempt and repugnance for you—gold least of all.”

“That remains to be seen. It would not be the first time gold has bought a woman’s love.”

“Oh, at least, what the fools that spent the gold thought was love,” sneered the girl. “And where is all this wealth you boast of?”

“It’s right here under our feet. I will tell you a secret, now that you are to become Mrs. John Ashton—I believe that the accepted theory is that husbands and wives should share all their secrets. The supposed bedrock that we struck at the bottom of these shafts is not bedrock, at all, but a mere shell of rock less than a foot thick covering the bed of an old creek whose gravel is rotten with gold. Your father does not know this—nor did Billy—but Henry Swan knew.”

“And now,” said the girl, “Henry Swan is conveniently dead—and you own the Swan claim, and Billy’s, and father’s.”

“How did you know I own the Swan claim? I only just now showed the transfer to your father.”

“I’m not a fool. The men came up and took test pannings from Swan’s dump for the Public Administrator—why else should you have gone to Dawson?”

“Yes—I own the Swan claim.”

“I have often wondered why Swan died,” said the girl with seeming irrelevance. “I think I know, now.”

“Yes?”

“It was so you could own all Willow Creek.”

“You will have to ask your father about that—he killed him.”

“Listen!” cried the girl suddenly, a gleam of hope flashing into her eyes. “If Willow Creek is what you want—and the gold that lies in the gravel—you can have it without marrying me! I’ll transfer my claim to you—and father and I will leave.”

Ashton shook his head. “No. The

gold is only part of it. You are the other part.”

“But—I hate you! Why should you want me?”

“I really don’t know,” answered the man, eyeing her with cool insolence. “Possibly it is because I want to see how you will appear as a rich man’s wife—possibly because I want to see you suffer—and possibly because I love you.”

“Love me!”

“I am not declaring myself. I merely said—possibly.”

“And you insist on going through with this—farce?”

“If you refer to our marriage as a farce—yes, I insist upon going through with it.”

“Oh, then let’s put it off till fall. Maybe, in time, I can become reconciled to—”

Ashton cut her off with a short laugh. “Stalling for time, eh? Think Old Tom might die, and all bets would be off, eh? Well, he might—and I’m taking no chances. If he dies I lose my hold on you; then maybe Downey would locate Billy—and you two could live happily ever after. Nothing doing. I’m off for Dawson right now to bring back the preacher. I’ll stop in Sand Bar and send the doctor up here to look after Tom. He’s got to last till the wedding—after that the sooner he kicks out, the better.”

XII

CORPORAL DOWNEY paused at the elbow of the man who squatted beside the little supper fire that burned in front of the tent door.

“Hello, Billy!” he smiled.

The man raised an expressionless face, and Downey noted with approval, that the hand that grasped the wooden extension to the frying pan handle did not tremble. “The name is George,” he said. “George Jones.”

The officer’s smile widened. “Glad to meet you, Mr. Jones. My name is Dow-

ney, Corporal in the Northwest Mounted Police, with headquarters in Dawson. I'm on special detail — hence the civilian clothes. I'm in search of a fugitive named Billy Ashton."

"Don't know him," grunted the other, meeting Downey's gaze squarely. "What's he wanted for?"

"For running away from a murder he didn't commit."

"What!"

"That's right, Billy," Downey continued. "You might as well come clean. The George Jones is no good—neither is the beard—and neither was the confession you left for Nellie Allen. I know who killed Henry Swan."

The man turned the meat in the pan with the point of his hunting knife. "All right, Downey. There's no use trying to fool you—about my identity. Fact is, I didn't recognize you at first, without your uniform. You say you know who killed Henry Swan—and you say I'm running away from a murder I didn't commit. That don't make sense, Downey. I killed Henry Swan—he deserved it. And I'll go back and plead guilty."

"Yeah? Well now—that would clean up the case right nice, wouldn't it? How did you kill him, Billy?"

"Shot him. I stood out on the creek in front of his cabin and hollered, and when he opened the door I shot him, and he fell dead in front of his door."

"Why did you shoot him?"

"He spoke evilly of Nellie Allen at a dance the night before. She refused to dance with him because he was drunk."

"Was Swan armed when you shot him?"

"I didn't stop to see. It was dark."

"What did you shoot him with?"

"A rifle."

"Whose rifle?"

"Why—mine, of course. It's right there in the tent."

"Would you mind bringing it out here—your ammunition, too?"

Stepping into the tent the man emerged with the rifle, and a couple of boxes of ammunition. Downey examined the gun, threw a shell out of the chamber, and glanced at the ammunition—one full box, and another partly empty.

"Where'd you get these shells?"

"In Dawson—before we went to Willow Creek."

"An' you haven't bought any since?"

"No—haven't had time to do any hunting."

Reaching into his pocket, Downey drew out four other shells, which he compared with the ammunition. He showed them to Billy. "These are yours, too, ain't they? I found 'em on the shelf behind the clock in your cabin."

"They're the same as mine—but I didn't leave any shells behind the clock."

Downey smiled. "Someone did. Now as a matter of fact, Billy, Henry Swan was not killed with your rifle. He was killed with Tom Allen's rifle. Your bullets are copper-jacketed, and the one that killed Swan was nickel-jacketed. I dug the bullet out of the wall. Tom Allen's ammunition was nickel-jacketed."

Billy was silent for a long time. "So you think that Tom Allen killed Henry Swan. But you're not sure of it. For some reason, you can't convict him without my help—or you wouldn't have spent half the summer hunting for me. Well—you're not going to get that help, Downey. You've got no authority to arrest me here—and I'll fight every move you make to take me back. If you're trying to convict Tom Allen of that murder—you can go to hell. I don't believe Allen killed Swan."

Corporal Downey chuckled. "You don't believe he did, eh? Well, Billy—if you'd killed him yourself, like you just got through tellin' me—you'd know damn well Allen didn't kill him. An' you'd be right, too—'cause he didn't."

"You say Allen didn't kill him—that you know who did?" cried Billy.

"Sure I know. John Ashton killed him."

Billy nodded slowly. "I've thought so, all along."

"An' you took the blame to save your brother, eh?" smiled the officer.

"No, not by a damn sight!" Billy cried. "John Ashton is a devil, if ever there was one—even if he is my own brother. I confessed that killing to save poor Old Tom Allen being convicted of it. He was drunk, that night, and John wasn't—John's never drunk—and when he told me about the killing in the morning—how Allen did it—with my rifle—all the particulars, I saw that he'd framed it so Old Tom wouldn't have a chance in the world to escape conviction. I knew it would kill Nellie, so I did the only thing I could think of to do—took the blame myself, and, because my disappearance suited John to a T, he promised to play along with me—to make it appear that I was the murderer."

"Yeah," answered Downey, "an' he kept his promise, too—to the best of his ability. But there was things he overlooked, an' a mistake or two he made."

"Can you prove John killed Swan?" asked Billy suddenly.

"Yes, I kin prove it."

"Then why," Billy demanded, eyeing the other shrewdly, "have you spent months hunting for me?"

"Because I need your testimony on the witness stand repudiatin' that confession note, an' tellin' the jury why you wrote it. Provin' a case is one thing, an' gettin' a conviction out of a jury is somethin' else."

"John knows about that note—an' his lawyer would make the most of it. We'd have to produce it, an' it would be a strong weapon against us in the hands of the defense. All of our explanations as to why you wrote it, would be called mere speculation an' theory by the defense lawyer—an' the chances are, no jury would agree to a conviction, with

that note unexplained by the man who wrote it."

"But—the evidence? What did John overlook—what mistakes did he make? I've got to know, Downey—I'm not going back there and help convict Old Tom Allen?"

"I wouldn't trick you like that," Downey answered. "John overlooked several things—the main one was the fact that the snow was wet that night, and wet snow leaves tracks. An' he overlooked the fact that cold weather freezes them tracks solid. An' also the fact that the new loose snow could be swept off them tracks leavin' the boot-sole markin' plain and unmistakable. He didn't stop to think that I would brush that top snow away an' photograph them tracks, an' make plaster casts of 'em besides. John told me he didn't leave his cabin that night, but the tracks tells a different story. They say he went down to Allen's, an' stayed there quite a while—the snow was a little sloppier when he went in, than it was when him an' Allen come out an' walked up to Swan's. The tracks show where they stopped in front of Swan's cabin. Allen was a step or two in front of John, when they stood there, an' he prob'ly done the yellin' that made Swan open the door—but it was John that fired the shot."



"How do you know that?" asked Billy, fascinated.

"Scraped around till I found the empty shell he ejected from the rifle so's to be ready for another shot, if he needed it to finish Swan off. It lay where it would

have been thrown from a rifle in the hands of the man who stood in John's tracks—it couldn't possibly have been thrown there from a rifle in the hands of the front man. Then, too, I knew it was John who carried the rifle. The tracks show that they stopped on the way up to Swan's for Allen to relieve himself. John waited for him, an' while he waited, he rested the rifle butt in the snow. They went back to Allen's, where John prob'ly showed Allen that Swan had be'n shot with his rifle—he prob'ly carried yours down there an' switched 'em on the old man—an' show'd him that all the evidence would point to him—prob'ly told him, he'd make it look like you done it—an' you'd skip out—but if he didn't keep his mouth shut, the evidence would point to him."

"John told me that Allen shot Swan with my rifle," Billy said. "And my rifle had been fired. I smelled the muzzle."

"He told me you carried it to the dance that night," said Downey. "Tell me this—did you keep your rifle loaded in the cabin?"

"I always kept four or five shells in the magazine."

"An' when you picked it up next mornin' an' sniffed at the muzzle—was there shells in it, then?"

"Why, I don't know—no there couldn't have been, because later on the trail, I wanted to take a shot at a caribou, and the magazine was empty."

DOWNEY nodded. "I thought so. These four shells I found behind the clock in your cabin was the ones that was in the magazine. John wasn't takin' no chances. He thought mebber you'd shoot, when you found out he was fram-in' the murder onto you—the murder he claimed Allen committed. That's the worst mistake he made—I knew when I found them shells that your gun never killed Swan. If it hadn't be'n for that I'd never worked up that foot track evidence

—I'd have believed you were guilty, an' he might have got away with it. Then there was some lyin' John done that didn't jibe in with what I found out—about hearin' you fire a shot that night soon after you left the cabin, an' not payin' no attention to it because he thought it was a tree explodin' with the frost—an' it a warm night."

"What does Old Tom have to say?" asked Billy. "And—Nellie?"

"Old Tom wasn't in no shape to talk when I was on the crick. He's got a bad heart—an' that bender he went on that night damn near finished him. Miss Nellie don't believe you done it, no more than I did. We both of us knew you'd never shoot an unarmed man. She's got a hunch John done it—but she don't know why. She's afraid of John, Billy. She didn't say so in so many words—but take it from me, she is—an' I don't know as I blame her."

Billy leaped suddenly to his feet. "Good God, Downey—with old Tom sick, and only he and Nellie on the creek with John—there's no telling what might happen!"

"That's right—especially, with Old Tom knowin' that John's got the evidence stacked against him. He'd have to agree to most anything John would want him to."

"Come on!" cried Billy. "Here's where we hit out for Willow Creek as fast as God will let us!"

XIII

AFTER five hard days on the trail, and four more days and nights on a steamboat, the two stepped ashore at Dawson.

"We'll stop for a minute at the recorder's," said Downey, "an' then hit out for the crick."

"Why stop at the recorder's?" asked Billy.

"I've got a hunch that we'll find that

John has bought in Swan's claim. What I'm huntin' for now is a motive for the murder—an' I'll want to know what I'm talkin' about when I arrest John."

In the recorder's office Downey asked for a record of all transfers made to John Ashton within the past three months. A few minutes later, the man handed him a slip, and as the officer glanced at it a low whistle escaped him.

"What's the matter?" asked Billy, glancing at the memorandum over Downey's shoulder.

"Here's your transfer to him, filed in April. And here's the transfer of the Swan claim by the Public Administrator, date a few days back—and here's one dated today—a transfer from Tom Allen to John of Number One below Discovery, on Willow Creek—for one dollar, and other valuable consideration."

"So!" exclaimed Billy, "he's beaten poor Old Tom out of his claim! With me out of the way, he could threaten to turn up the evidence that would convict Tom."

"Looks that way," Downey agreed.

"But—what's happened to Nellie?" Billy cried.

Downey regarded him gravely. "The transfer don't say," he replied. "I guess we better hit for Willow Crick."

"Ashton pulled out for there not over two hours ago," said the recorder. "He was going directly from here to the river."

"Alone?" asked Downey.

"No, there was another man with him—a sort of renegade preacher, who found out there was more money in peddling liquor to the Siwash than in saving their souls."

"You mean that fellow, Peters?"

"That's the man."

"I've had my eye on him for quite a while," said Downey. "I wonder what John's takin' him up to Willow Crick for?"

"I bet I know!" cried Billy suddenly.

"Why else would he take him—except to marry him to Nellie! Come on, Downey—we've got to overtake 'em!"

Pausing at detachment only long enough for Downey to throw a trail pack together and slip into his uniform, the two headed upriver in a police canoe.

"What we want to do," said Downey, "is to pass 'em without their knowin' it, an' be waitin' for 'em when they get there."

Toward evening Downey sighted the other canoe through his glass, and they trailed along till its occupants put ashore to camp for the night, when they slipped back, holding well out into the river.

At Sand Bar they stopped at the doctor's to ask about Tom Allen.

"He was doing all right—might have lived on for a long time, if he kept quiet and avoided excitement of any kind. Then, three days ago, John Ashton stopped in here and told me the old man was in a bad way. I went up and found him alive and that's about all. He'd had some kind of a shock that put him flat on his back—got a heart like a rotten squash—won't stand any strain. I got him goin' again on digitalis, but I told his daughter that he may drop off any minute. I doubt if he'll ever get out of bed again. The girl admitted he'd got excited about something. She wouldn't say what, but just between you and me, that damned John Ashton had something to do with it. I don't like him—he's too damned smug. I'll bet, Downey, that if you'd quit wasting your time hunting for Billy Ashton, and nose around some more on Willow Creek, you'd find out John Ashton knows more about the Swan murder than you think. I never did believe Billy killed Swan—in spite of the confession note they say he left."

Corporal Downey grinned. "John Ashton couldn't know any more about the Swan murder than I think he does. An' as for Billy—he's right here to speak for himself."

"Billy!" exclaimed the doctor, peering into the bearded face that smiled at him over the officer's shoulder. "Well—I'll be damned! I'd never have known you with those whiskers. He don't look like a prisoner—so I guess you don't believe he's guilty, either."

"Well," smiled Downey, "he's a kind of a technical prisoner—till we git this killin' cleared up. We'll be goin' on now—up to Willow Crick. An' by the way, Doc, John Ashton an' another bird will be along shortly—jest pass the word along to the boys that if them two stop in here, no one is to tip 'em off that we're on the crick."

"I'll tell 'em," replied the doctor. "You bet I will! Go on up to the crick. There's something wrong up there—damned good and wrong. If I ever read tragedy in any human's eyes, it was in Miss Nellie's the other day—but she was game, she wouldn't let on. She's going to be mighty glad to see you, Billy. But I'll lay you two ounces to one, she'll make you shuck those whiskers."

BILLY ASHTON stood to one side, as Corporal Downey knocked lightly on the door of the Allen cabin. The girl opened the door, and the officer spoke in a low tone, glancing past her toward the bunk.

"Would you mind steppin' out just a minute, Miss Nellie? The doctor said Tom had—"

"Corporal Downey!" cried the girl, coming swiftly through the doorway, and with scarcely a glance at the man who stood beside him, asked eagerly, "Did you find him? Find Billy?"

There was a twinkle in the gray eyes that looked into her own as Downey jerked his thumb toward the man who accompanied him. "This fella can tell you more about that than I—"

The dark blue eyes shifted to the bearded face, then lighted suddenly as, with a low glad cry the girl threw her-

self into the arms that waited to receive her. "Billy!" the name was a sob. "Oh Billy—Billy! I knew you didn't kill Henry Swan! I know you wrote that note to—to save father—but—but he didn't kill him, either!"

"There, there, darling," soothed Billy. "Corporal Downey knows all about that killing. He knows your father didn't do it—or me, either. The man who killed Henry Swan will be here directly. He is coming up from Dawson—with a preacher."

Hot blood flooded the girl's face, as she freed herself from the man's embrace and stepped back. "Oh—I—I couldn't help it, Billy. He—he threatened to—to swear that father killed Swan, if—if I wouldn't marry him. Oh, I—I hate him! I despise him! Some day I believe I would have—killed him."

"It's all right now, dear," said Billy. "Corporal Downey is here to—to take John off your hands."

"And the preacher can go back where he came from," cried the girl.

"There'll be a little job for him to do, first," grinned Billy, happily. "He came up to perform a wedding ceremony—and it wouldn't be right to disappoint him."

"He'll be disappointed all right, Billy Ashton, unless you get rid of that horrible beard!" laughed the girl. "There's hot water on the stove and I'll get the scissors, and father's razor."

Billy winked at Downey. "Glad that I didn't take the doctor's bet," he said. "Trot out the tools, sweetheart, and I'll get to work. John'll be along directly—and I sure want him to recognize me."

IT WAS late in the afternoon when a knock sounded on the door, and the girl opened it and stepped aside for John Ashton and another to enter. Ashton glanced about the room, and the color drained slowly from his face as his eyes shifted from Billy's face to Downey's. He stepped backward, placing the

preacher between him and the officer, and got hold of himself with a visible effort.

"So—you got him, eh?" he said in a voice that sounded in the little room like a snarl. "Well—what's the answer?"

"The answer is that your game is up. John Ashton I arrest you for the murder of Henry Swan, and it is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be used against you."

Ashton replied with a short nasty laugh. "Arrest *me* for the murder of Swan! You forget, Downey that there will be a little matter of evidence."

Downey shook his head. "No, I ain't overlooked that point. I've got what evidence I'll need."

"Listen," retorted Ashton, "you can't bluff me, Downey. Suppose Tom Allen has talked—it's his word against mine."

"Yeah," agreed Downey, "but his word is supported by the evidence—an' yours ain't."

"You haven't got a bit of evidence to support anything he may have told you—and you know it. I'll admit that I lied to you—tried to throw the blame into Billy, seeing that he seemed willing to shoulder it—wrote that confession, and then obligingly skipped out. But I did it for the same reason he did—to save the real murderer, Tom Allen."

There was a movement from the bunk, as Old Tom struggled to a sitting posture. "You lie like hell, John Ashton! You killed Henry Swan! You shot him with my rifle!"

Ashton smiled. "Sounds reasonable, don't it?" he appealed to Downey. "As I said, I'll admit I told you a few lies—but you can't hang a man for lying. I told you I didn't leave my cabin that night. As a matter of fact I did."

Downey nodded. "Yeah," he answered, "I know all about that. Your tracks told the whole story—that's the supportin' evidence I was talkin' about."

"My tracks! You're crazy! It snowed all night, and the biggest part of the next

day—whatever tracks I may have made were buried under the snow."

"That's right," Downey agreed. "That's probly why you overlooked 'em. But I didn't. You overlooked quite a few things, John. Murder is hard to git away with—it's got too many angles. You overlooked the fact that I would check up on the weather, so when I found out it was warm that night, I knew you was lyin' when you told me you thought the shot you claimed to have heard was a tree explodin' with the frost. A man don't lie, in a case like this, just for fun—he's got an object—so I had to find out what that object was an' I did. You also overlooked the fact that wet snow leaves tracks, an' that when it freezes, it leaves perfect imprints of the pattern on pac soles, for instance—imprints that can be photographed an' that form perfect moulds for plaster casts. An' you overlooked the fact that the loose, new snow could be swept off those tracks leavin' 'em exposed. An' then you made a mistake when you put them shells you took out of Billy's rifle behind the clock—you ought to have throw'd 'em away. That showed me what kind of ammunition Billy used, an' when I found the bullet that killed Swan, I knew Billy hadn't shot him. That was your biggest mistake—it started me huntin' for them tracks. They showed that you went down to Allen's that night, an' then you an' Tom went back to Swan's—"

"That's right," Ashton interrupted. "I'll admit all that. And Allen shot Swan. I saw him do it." I can tell the truth now—"

"Yer a liar," cried Allen, pointing a trembling finger at the speaker. "You couldn't tell the truth if you tried: You killed Henry Swan yerself!"

"Even if true," sneered Ashton, "that could never be proven. I lied—but I lied to save the father of the woman I am about to marry from being convicted of murder."

"Made him transfer his claim to you, to save him, too?" asked Downey.

ASHTON scowled angrily. "That transfer was a private transaction—and no business of yours."

"Blacknail is always police business," Downey replied, an' so is murder."

"You'll never prove that murder on me!" shouted Ashton. "It's his word against mine!"

"Yeah," agreed Downey, "only Tom's word is supported by the evidence. The tracks in the snow have convicted you, Ashton. The man who shot Swan stood in your shoes—the shoes I found in your cabin. I took 'em down to Dawson—an' you signed a paper statin' they're yours. The position of the empty shell you ejected from the rifle shows that—it couldn't possibly have be'n ejected from a rifle held in the hands of the other man."

"And—the motive?" sneered Ashton. "I believe it is customary for the police to show a motive for a murder, isn't it? Allen had such a motive—Swan had insulted his daughter. I had none—unless of course, your all-important foot tracks have disclosed some hidden motive that I haven't even suspected."

"Your motive, John," broke in Billy

Ashton accusingly, "is the same motive you've had for everything you've ever done—gold."

Driven to sudden fury by the sound of his brother's voice, John Ashton's hand flew to his shirt front and came out grasping a pistol which he leveled at Billy as old Tom cried a warning. Corporal Downey sprang into action, drawing his own gun, even as he shoved the preacher with such violence that his body knocked Ashton against the wall just as his finger squeezed the trigger. The bullet crashed harmlessly into the ceiling above Billy's head, and the now desperate man swung the gun on Downey, who fired instantly—and John sagged at the knees and slumped slowly to the floor.

Billy turned toward the bunk. "Thanks, Tom—you saved my"—the words froze on his lips as he stared in horror at the white face that had dropped back onto the pillow, the eyes staring glassily upward. Beside him the voice of the girl sounded in a low, plaintive moan. "Father! Oh—Daddy—look at me!"

But the glassy eyes remained motionless. Old Tom Allen was dead.

NOT GUILTY



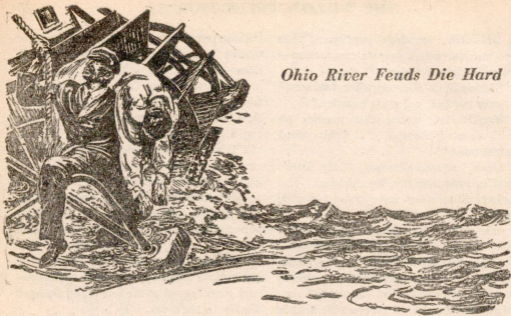
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Ohio River Feuds Die Hard

CROSS CURRENTS

By KARL DETZER

Author of "Winner Take All," "Captain's Wife," etc.

CAPT'N JEFF HARTIN let himself down from the jig-saw pilot house to the hurricane deck of his packet, and glanced with elaborate unconcern across the broad Ohio River. His craft, the *Carrie Hartin*, was moored here at its own wharfboat on the Indiana side of the stream, its long soiled hempen lines hanging idly to the iron rings above the sunken dead-men on the bank, its fenders moaning gently as the slow swirl of waters rubbed them against the wharf.

Behind the *Carrie Hartin*, a lazy rise of ground, pockmarked with cobblestones, lifted to the level of the village street of Hartin's Landing. Across the river, a mile away, lay the Kentucky town of Juddsport, concealed for the most part by a long spit of wooded land.

The tawny Ohio rushed swiftly between the two towns. Only close ashore, beside

Jeff Hartin's packet, it flowed more slowly, circling behind the boat, clucking sympathetically in the buckets of the big stern paddle wheel, as if its curiosity, or perhaps its pity, had been awakened by the sight of this steamboat with cold smokeless stacks.

Capt'n Hartin moved stiffly to the low deck rail and paused there, squinting against the morning light. He was a thin, tall man on the shabby side of middle age, in a blue coat somewhat glossy at the elbows, a pair of gray trousers slightly too short, and a blue cap with a long visor, tilted a little too far to the left. Under it, his hard blue-gray eyes examined the Kentucky shore, below the half-hidden town of Juddsport.

Below the bluffs, on the Kentucky side, a small white towboat with a gay red-leaded stern paddle wheel was visible. It lay under the outstretched arms of a black

conveyor, whose skeleton frame stretched inland among the huge cones of washed sand and crushed stone and river gravel.

A jet of steam flew like the plume of a war bonnet at the double stacks of the towboat, and even from where he stood on the Indiana side of the river, Jeff could make out the flashes of water at the stern, where the buckets of the wheel turned over. He glanced down at the letter in his hand, reached for his watch, and then remembered that he didn't have a watch any more. He had pawned it.

His eyes, a little harder now, returned to the towboat. A sudden larger burst of steam popped from its chime whistle, itself invisible at this distance. Hartin counted the seconds before the single long blast reached across the broad river. It echoed quickly, with an increased mellowness, against Indiana's low bluffs; then, winging once more above the swift yellow water, dissolved in a cadence of low sleepy notes among the Kentucky hills.

A BOARD creaked behind Hartin on the deck. He looked, over his shoulder, into the face of John Bogart, his mate.

"Oh, hello, John," Hartin said. "What can I do for you?"

His was a river voice. It marked the man as neither a Yankee nor Southerner, yet borrowed from both the south and north, from the soft accents of Kentucky and the slightly nasal tone of the Hoosier hills. But it was neither of these qualities men first noticed when Hartin spoke; what they heard, first, was pride, amounting almost to arrogance.

He repeated, "What can I do, John?"

The mate did not reply at once. At the moment he was busy, biting a chew from a twist of tobacco, and besides, he had steamboated long enough with Capt'n Hartin to understand his moods. While he gnawed at the tobacco, his eyes sought first the paper in Hartin's fingers, then the towboat on the Kentucky side of the

river. At last he allowed his gaze to settle on the neutrality of the yellow water in mid-stream.

"I was wonderin', Capt'n," he said uncertainly, keeping his gaze discreetly off Jeff Hartin's face, "I was wonderin' about the coal. It's such nice May weather."

"I'll tend the coal," Hartin replied. His voice was sharp, and Bogart shuffled his run-over shoes uneasily. Jeff Hartin could not control the muscles of his throat as he did his hands and feet and eyes. The mate glanced at them, twitching. "We'll get plenty coal, John," Hartin said. "Plenty. Be going out next week, I reckon."

"Next week?" It had been "next week" ever since the ice floated past in March.

"About then," Hartin answered. He raised his voice, as though his hopes, if spoken in a louder tone, might more readily materialize. "I've been waiting. Business affairs. You wouldn't understand. But I'm about ready." He paused again, to glance across the river. The white towboat was pushing steadily upstream now, under the opposite bank, and piling a heap of froth above the fantail at its stern, water which from this distance shone white as seafoam, but which Hartin knew was slightly soiled by a yellow tint, were one to look closely at it.

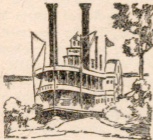
Black smoke blew down the small wind from the two high stacks of the towboat. Bogart glanced from it to the idle chimneys of the *Carrie Hartin*, then bit off a twist. Bogart, watching him, knew from his forehead what turn his thoughts were taking. When Hartin was at easy mind, a trio of small wrinkles gathered between his eyebrows, spreading outward from the bottom like a spray of leaves. When these three lines disappeared, and in their place a deep dark crosswise furrow appeared, then Jeff Hartin, being proud, was thinking angrily of the Juds of Judsport.

The deep wrinkle was there just now. Bogart knew why. He had known from

the start. That towboat, swinging out there busily in a wide circle, was the *Happy Valley*, with young Amos Judd at her wheel.

Those were Judd's big conveyors, standing black against the Kentucky hills; those silver and golden heaps of sand and gravel were Judd's. That smoke, pouring in rich, money-making, black clouds from those two stacks, came from Judd coal, while the *Carrie Hartin* idled there with chilly boilers and empty bunkers and an empty coal barge alongside.

"I was thinkin'," Bogart said, but Hartin's lean head shook irritably.



"Go ashore, Judd," he ordered. "Go up the path to town." He paused. The towboat was in mid-river now. Its flat bow was pushing toward the Indiana shore. He knew where it was coming. Right here, to his own landing. The letter in his hand had warned him. "Run on, John," he ordered the mate. "An' if that lazy watchman's aboard, take him along with you."

He waited, until Bogart and the shuffling watchman were atop the bluff, out of sight of the wharf.

WHEN the *Happy Valley* splashed alongside, Hartin was leaning back against the peeled white paint of his own pilot house. He heard young Amos Judd sound the gong in his engine room and then the back-up bell, with its shrill voice. The sternwheel of the towboat hesitated immediately, and splashed backward with straining crank and flanges and thrashing

pitman, against the insistence of the current.

Hartin stared; then scowled. The *Happy Valley* always had been a trim boat. But it was gaudy now in new spring paint. Its name, in letters three feet high, stood out proudly in black stencil, shaded with deep blue, along the sidehouse of the main deck. Its upper workings glistened with fresh splashes of cobalt and apple green, its knee fenders and timberhead were striped black and steamboat white, and its two decks shone with red-lead, lavishly applied.

The wheel continued to revolve rapidly in reverse, until at last, with headway stopped, the *Happy Valley* floated deliberately down the backwater toward the Hartin wharfboat, so close that Jeff could see the small ventilation holes, bored to form the outline of a crescent moon, in the front of the rope locker; could even count the buttons on Amos Judd's white sweater as he turned over the wheel to his pilot and stepped down to deck.

Judd waved a hand in friendly greeting. But Hartin did not reply.

"Mornin', Capt'n," the other called then across the water. He was a smallish man, four inches shorter than Hartin, twenty-five years younger. He grinned, almost amiably, and Hartin resented that, too. "May I come aboard your steamboat, Capt'n?" the newcomer asked.

Still Hartin did not bring himself to answer. It had been forty years since any Hartin had spoken to a Judd, or Judd to Hartin, so far as Captain Jeff knew. It could be forty more, for all he cared. Then he remembered the empty coal barge and his empty watch pocket. Other things, too. There was the leak in the roof of the big house behind its stone wall on the point, the verandah crumbling away for lack of repair.

There was his daughter Carrie, named, like the packet, after her grandmother. His daughter, Carrie, working in an office, in Louisville. A Hartin woman working

in an office! It made no difference if half the women of the world worked in offices; Hartin women never had.

Amos Judd was leaning across the rail of the boiler deck now. So close he had floated that Hartin could see the freckles on the young man's nose, and the way the wind was tossing his reddish hair.

"What you want aboard for?" Hartin asked, and having spoken to a Judd, heard the tradition of three river generations tumbling about his ears.

"Matter of business," the younger man replied, and added hastily, "Nothing personal, I assure you. Not right now, anyway. Just business, like I told you in my letter."

"Listen, Judd," Hartin began. His voice caught, twisting in his throat like a fouled mooring line. He saw the crew of the tugboat watching from the door of the deckroom. Well, let them watch. "I don't like you, Judd," he said. "Understand?"

"Perfectly," Judd told him. "You've demonstrated that." He smiled again exasperatingly.

"I don't like any of your tribe, Judd," Hartin went on. "Or anything that belongs to you. That clear?"

"Clear as crystal, I tell you, this is business. Strictly business."

"Come aboard, then," Hartin granted. He looked at his own steamboat, and pride again filled his voice. "But mind how you do it. I don't aim to have my packet smashed by any towboat, painted or not."

Judd laughed. "I'll be careful," he promised.

THE two men stood in the pilot house of the *Carrie Hartin*, five short paces apart, with all the animosity of four generations piled between them. Only Judd did not seem to sense its presence. He had talked briskly, without apparent malice; had made his proposition, and now stood easily, hands in pockets, unlighted

cigarette hanging to his lips, awaiting the reply.

Opposite him, Jeff Hartin braced his back against the spokes of the big steering wheel, as if somehow he were absorbing strength and confidence from it. He asked:

"And if I don't grant you the right to land your sandflats at my landings?"

"I'll land them somewhere else."

Hartin pointed out, "There is no other place. You say so yourself. The state road work starts here, just atop the bank. Your contract is to deliver the gravel there."

"Plenty of other landings, Capt'n," Judd replied. "All the way from town of Madison, down to Jeffersonville. I could truck it here from any of them."

"And lose money."

"I'll take that chance."

Hartin grunted, "It wouldn't make me stay awake nights worrying, Judd, for you to lose money."

Still Judd did not take offense.

"I told you I'd pay in advance," he argued, "and put up a bond to cover any damages to your wharfboat or landing. More than it's worth. I'd run my clamshell digger boat right in ashore—"

"My shore," Hartin interrupted.

"Your shore," Judd agreed. "Run her right in here above the wharf where your empty coal barge is tied. The bucket could reach out to the flats there, and in one lift drop the gravel in the motor trucks along the bank."

He paused. Hartin wasn't listening. He hadn't even heard the last sentence. Mention of the empty coal barge caused his anxiety to mount and mingle with his inborn hatred of the Judds. The packet couldn't start its summer run without coal. And hadn't the dealers refused to sell him fuel without some cash in hand? No coal, no cash; no cash, no coal. And the house of Hartin falling to pieces for want of small repairs. And the packet needing paint. And *Carrie* working in an

office. He fingered his empty watch pocket.

If he only could get going, business would pay this season. There was lots of repairing, always, after a flood. Every day he saw the Green Line boats passing up and down river heavily laden, and the *Cary Bird* and the *Frohman Coats*, their decks packed with freight.

"Get this clear, Judd," he persisted. "There's no favor in this, neither to you or to me. No favor and no friendliness. And I want a decent, protecting contract drawn up—"

"I've got it in my pocket, with the check and the bond," Judd replied. "I'll protect you, never worry."

"My lawyer can decide on that," Hartin said. His lips thinned out into a hard line. "You pay in advance, but what you pay don't change what I think. I mind your whole family, father and grandfather—a worthless lot. My father knew your great-grandfather, and he wasn't any better than the rest of you. All alike. Dirty towboat men, you Judds, and you always will be, no matter how much money you make. A gang of riff-raff. That's what I think of you. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, Capt'n," Judd said, and smiled more pleasantly. "I know we've wasted a lot of time fighting, the Hartins and the Judds. And no good ever came of it. I'm ready to call quits."

"Quits?" Jeff Hartin repeated. His voice was heavy with scorn. "Oh, no! I can't call quits with the likes of you! It's beneath my decency. We'll do the business, and when it's done, it's done. I'll hold you to the contract, and I'll not grant you a minute that don't belong to you. Or a worry, either. If your whole fleet, digger and towboat and flats and barges everyone was to sink in midstream, I'd not lift a hand. That's how I stand."

"All right, let's sign up," Judd answered.

"Go ahead," Hartin bade. "I'll meet you at my lawyer's office, but I'll not walk

there with you. I'll not be seen, anywhere, any time, walking with any Judd."

ONLY in the names of its dilapidated streets and in the double block of ancient red brick warehouses and tobacco barns which faced the river did the flavor of its former greatness cling to the town of Hartin's Landing. Tilted on rusted iron poles, the street names themselves were all but scrubbed away by forty years of rain—Memphis Street, Pittsburgh Avenue, Steamboat Lane, Warehouse Alley, Towhead Park.

Jeff Hartin did not look left or right as he stalked up the path at young Judd's rapid heels. No need for him to tell Judd who the lawyer was. Hadn't old Tabor Breckenridge brought suit in some Hartin's name against every Judd who came of age? Charging everything from trespass to violation of the navigation laws, from malicious mischief to damaging the business of the Hartin steamship line?

In those other days, when expansive newspapers referred to the Hartin packets as "gilded floating palaces, replete with every comfort and convenience," an early Hartin and an early Judd had quarreled. The trouble began in mid-river, on a foggy afternoon, when a Hartin steamboat bumped into a Judd raft, and scattered its logs along the banks of three states. Nothing more than that.

Old Tabor Breckenridge this spring morning ran with his shrewd eye through the contract, while Amos Judd stood before the desk and Hartin, with his back to the room, peered out of the window at a negro asleep in a mule cart. He'd rather look at that any day than at a Judd.

At last Breckenridge decided, "Reads right to me, Jeff."

"Very good," Hartin said. "I'll sign."

The lawyer dipped his pen into the ink and tested it against his dusty blue blotter. "Right here, Jeff," he directed. "I'll have Miss Graham—she's a not'ry, Mr. Judd—I'll have her witness it."

So the job was done.

Hartin turned to Judd and ordered, "Get out now. I'll have the landing ready."

Amos Judd still smiled. He was whistling softly as he went through the door, and Hartin heard his feet tap quickly and positively down the stair. The door at the bottom closed noisily, and Hartin picked up the check. He overcame the impulse to tear it into pieces. This was business. And he wasn't actually indebted one cent to Judd. Not one red cent.

"He's getting that landing cheap," he repeated aloud. "Dirt cheap."

"Oh, sure thing," the lawyer agreed.

Hartin placed the check carefully in the empty pouch of his large, flat, shabby pocketbook, and without further words departed slowly.

Bright sunlight lay upon the quiet street, turning the air to liquid gold, and Hartin paused, blinking into it, then walked to the right past a row of solid, two-story brick buildings with small iron balconies. At the corner, where the Ohio Valley House still wooed transients, with a row of hickory chairs in the blue shadow of its wooden awning, Hartin paused. Just around the corner in Calliope Street, he saw Amos Judd again. The young man's back was toward him, his bright hair glistened in the sunlight. He was laughing, talking rapidly.

Hartin paused for an instant, then went on. No mere Judd would make him turn back, or send him down another street. He walked ahead doggedly. He would ignore the young man this time. Then he stopped again, suddenly, as if he had walked into an invisible wall.

He felt a quick and fearful constriction of his throat; the sidewalk twisted, his head went light. Judd was saying:

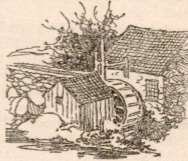
"Oh, sure, he signed. Made it plain he thought I was poison, but signed."

Hartin grasped the wall to support himself. That was his daughter Carrie, facing Amos Judd. His daughter, laugh-

ing. Laughing with a Judd. Not disrespectfully. But talking, laughing.

She was saying, "I wish all you river-men wouldn't be so stubborn."

Hartin stepped forward. Carrie saw him first. He spoke slowly. His voice



was not loud, but each syllable was packed with ice.

"Go home, Carrie," he bade. "At once."

Judd swung around. The smile fell from his face and left it expressionless, with the yellowish freckles standing out on his white nose.

Carrie protested, "Father! You don't understand!" But her voice was thin.

Captain Jeff did not sway again. He stood like an oak mooring post, unyielding. Carrie looked appealing at him, then he saw her left shoulder rise slightly. She was obeying. But not speaking. That is, her lips did not move. Only her lifted shoulder was eloquent. It addressed her father and Judd with the same small, proud motion.

"Sorry!" it was saying to Judd. "Sorry he behaves this way!"

But to her father it asserted, "I don't care! I'm free! I work in an office, Jeff Hartin!"

She walked unhurriedly away, and Hartin said to Judd, "Now you get out. Across the river where you belong!"

He went away himself, stiff-legged, like a man in a dream.

Judd still was looking after him when the kindly shadows of the bank door took

the older man in. He worked long and late, attending the details of the new river season. He sent for his crew, ordered his mate to start sobering the cook, saw to the printing of the tariff lists, ordered coal, figured cautiously square footage for a single thin coat of paint, bought lead and oil.

The long shadows of the May evening lay across the brown dust of the River Road when at last he let himself in at his own gate. He propped it shut after him, and before stepping up to the dilapidated verandah, reached into his pocket and drew out his watch. *His* watch. He'd keep it this time. It pointed to seven o'clock.

CARRIE and her mother waited in the living room. They both had been weeping, but now, as he entered, they said nothing, while he took a long time to hang his hat on its peg on the walnut mirror rack. At last he sat down heavily and faced them.

"Well?" he demanded. His voice was still ice cold. All day, men hearing it, had known that something was wrong. Evening and homecoming had not thawed it.

His daughter said, "Get it over."

She was twenty-two, and tall, like her father. But she had her mother's eyes, in color somewhere between velvet brown and purple, eyes transparent like windows, reflecting her smallest thoughts. Men, seeing the eyes, forgot the Hartin nose and the Hartin arrogance and pride.

Hartin said to his wife, "She told you?"

Carrie's mother answered, "Yes." She rocked, twice, and went on unexpectedly. "She told me you acted like a shantyboater, Jeff Hartin."

"Me? Like a shantyboater?" Hartin exclaimed. The furrow between his eyebrows was black and straight in the lamp-light. He had not expected to be put on the defensive. "Carrie talked to Judd," he said. "On the street."

"What of it?" Carrie asked.

"What of it?" he thundered. "This of it. You're a Hartin. Have you no pride? He's a Judd. That's all. You know."

"I know that's no excuse for the way you acted," she replied. "Speaking of pride!"

"You talked about me," he accused. "Laughed."

"Not at you!"

"Not at me, no. But with a Judd."

"I told him I was glad you signed the contract. He'd showed it to me last night."

Hartin stared, while her words sank in. Then he demanded, "Last night?"

She went on hotly, "I'd told him you'd never sign. You were too stubborn. Headstrong. You'd let the family starve first—"

Hartin repeated, "Headstrong." And then he added slowly, "Last night. So you—know Amos Judd? See him often?"

"For a long time. Months."

"Oh!" Hartin said. "And you kept it from me?"

"Not from me, Jeff," his wife said quickly. "She told me. I wouldn't let her tell you. I knew what trouble it was going to make—"

"Oh, yes, trouble," he said. He settled deeper in his chair. He felt outrageously mistreated.

"Talked to him about your family," he found himself saying. "And he listened to you. Sounds like a Judd. Making fun of your father—Carrie, I can't understand—"

Her shoulders gave their small, expressive shrug.

"We quite agree, Amos and I, about our families," she told him, "and about the ridiculous way you've carried on. He told me about his gravel. I asked why he didn't use your landing. It would help you both. I said you needed money."

Jeff thundered stormily, "You told a Judd that?"

"I did," she answered. "Wasn't it the truth?"

HE GOT up stiffly. There was nothing he could say, nothing that these women could understand. They had set their female minds against understanding. He felt old. All his life he had fought the river, and the weather, winter and spring floods and autumn drought, ice and heat. Fought Judds. But he couldn't fight women. He'd just keep on with the Judds.

He went out to the verandah and sat down. Below in the reedy chute where Rodgers Island cast its deep shadow on the darkening waters of the Ohio, frogs sang together. Down stream, the crimson pier lights of the Interstate bridge shone through the purple darkness, and across the stream the lamps of Juddsport flickered timidly. A train rumbled out upon the tall bridge, and crawling slowly, it painted the under side of its low smoke-cloud with reflections from its open fire-box door.

Jeff Hartin listened to the train and the frogs, and to the beating of his own heart, and to the creak of his wife's rocking chair. Then, upstream, another sound floated out of the still night, the low chime of a steamboat whistle, two short, three long, three short—the Judd company signal. The *Happy Valley* was greeting its digger up there on the gravel beds, calling for the first loads of material for the new road job. Its voice was gay. Young Judd no doubt was joking about the contract with his night digger crew.

Joking. And here sat Carrie, in the proud old house which tonight had lost its pride. What had come into her? Hartin jerked up his head. A painful, sharp suspicion had flapped darkly across his thoughts. But she couldn't be! Couldn't!

He got up and walked toward the door.

"Carrie," he called. He braced himself between the sides of the door. His daughter looked up from her magazine.

"Yes?"

"About this—this Judd." He had a hard time, now, uttering the name. "You

ain't thinking of falling in *love* with him?"

Hartin saw his wife's chair begin to rock quickly. He watched his daughter's eyes which remained as steady as the pier lights on the bridge.

"I love him now," she replied.

Hartin pressed the sides of the door tightly with his fingertips. He must keep on his feet, no matter what shame he felt. "Well," he said at last, "love him then. If that's the kind of Hartin you are. Love him. I can't stop you. Only, don't see him again. I *can* stop that. Don't see him, though. Or speak to him. Or write him. I'll not tell you to forget him. Wouldn't do no good. You'd remember in spite of me."

"Yes, I'd remember," she agreed. Her voice was as cold and emotionless as his own.

"One other thing, though," he added. "I hope he drowns in mid-river, him and all his crew. I'd not throw a life board to save him. I hope he drowns, and takes a long time drowning. And you watching!"

"Jeff!" his wife cried.

"That's how I feel," he finished.

He returned to the verandah. The frogs still sang untroubled in the chute. Up the river the voice of the *Happy Valley* echoed jubilantly among the hills.

IT WAS that way for many nights. Jeff Hartin sat alone on the verandah, his wife and daughter together in the living room. All day while he labored on his packet, patching, painting, testing boilers and hull, fitting new fenders, rigging new cables to the tiller, he pretended not to see Judd and the *Happy Valley* bustling in to Hartin's Landing, with flats of gravel for the new road, splashing upstream, empty, after more.

And each day, impatient to start his own season, he met first one delay and then another. Rain halted the paint job on the *Carrie H.* The new flues for the

boiler were a week slow in coming from the factory.

The new cordage, when at last it did arrive, was not the sizes he had ordered. So it was June before the *Carrie Hartin* made its first pay trip.

Captain Jeff had planned a double crew, with an extra pilot and engine room gang, so that he could run day and night, every day, and take advantage of the summer weather. But his daughter troubled him. Perhaps, he decided, it would be better to make only three trips up river to Cincinnati each week instead of six. That gave him three nights at home, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. Sunday night at home would be especially good. He would know, then, if Carrie were at home.

Besides, he argued, he was an old packet man. He didn't need six trips a week to make the season pay. Didn't even need wharfboats to land. Why, there were only three wharfboats left between Hartin's Landing and Cincinnati. But that didn't matter to him. He could nose up to the bank and swing his long white landing stage to dry footing anywhere the merest dog path ran down to the water. He carried any kind of freight, too—motor trucks and jars of buttermilk, a calf and a barrel of potatoes, a thousand bricks or a new hat for some woman on one of the islands, vats of pickled pork, crates of fresh berries.

The season started well. He had a roll of money in his pocket when he came in from his first up-river run, so he called to his daughter and directed:

"You'll not work any more in anybody's office. Tell them you quit Saturday. I can support my family. Always did."

"I'd rather not quit," she argued.

He stood up, shaking. "We'll not discuss that. You don't love the office, too, do you?"

"No," she replied. "Not the office, too."
"Then you quit," he thundered. "Understand?"

She did not answer.

You quit tomorrow. Not Saturday. Tomorrow."

His vehemence frightened her, he supposed. She did not return to the office. Instead, day and night, she remained in the big old house and watched Judd and the *Happy Valley* pass up river and down.

It was a hot August. The night of the second Tuesday was one of those gasping river nights when the steamboat whistles echo endlessly, over and over, among the hills. Lightning played in the north, promising rain.

And in spite of the floods, the river now needed rain, Capt'n Jeff reflected. It had lost its yellow complexion of the spring, and flowed dark above the pools, and wore white lace along the rapids below the bridge.

ALL week steamboating had been difficult. Just this evening, on the down trip homeward from Madison with a deckload of iron castings and crated furniture, he lost the channel above Five Mile Island; got into the shallows and discovered a new sand bar. He had missed it by only a pole length, and had seen Amos Judd watching him from the *Happy Valley* as he swung back to midstream.

Judd's towboat was tied up beside his digger now at the lower end of the island. Some time tonight it would bring down a pair of flats, each laden with six hundred yards of fine washed gravel for the road.



Hartin grunted. He must moor his own packet carefully again out of Judd's way on that portion of the wharfboat he had reserved for his own use.

He tried to forget Judd as he tied up. His roustabouts began at once to trundle their iron-wheeled trucks of freight to the warehouse. Hartin took a final look around his boat. On the boiler deck he met his chief engineer.

"I'm goin' to draw off fires, Cap," the engineer reported. "Want to look over the flues."

Hartin nodded. "Very good. Soon's the heavy cargo's unloaded."

He returned to the hurricane deck and sat down there, where a small breeze played across the boat. He'd have to wait till the freight was unloaded before he went home.

He lay back and went to sleep.

It was dark when he awakened. Bogart the mate was standing over him. "All done," he said.

"Tell chief to pull fires—" Hartin began.

Then he stopped. The mate was not listening. He had turned and stood bending forward, watching the black water upstream.

"What's that, Cap?" he asked.

Hartin stood up. A boat was drifting down river toward him. It was turning slowly, broadside on, head on, broadside. Its lights shifted, red and green and white.

It came on and on. Hartin saw the two dark patches following it. They were sand flats; cast off, when it found itself helpless.

"That's Judd's towboat!" the mate cried.

Hartin grunted. He knew. He'd recognized it. Recognized the *Happy Valley* at midnight on the blackest river in hell! A quick exultation seized him. Judd in trouble!

That was fine. Let him get himself out of it! There wasn't anything in the binding contract about Jeff Hartin going to any Judd's aid!

The helpless boat floated nearer, out of the channel, on this side of the river.

"Ain't he going to blow short blasts?" Bogart cried.

"He knows we wouldn't come to help him if he did," Hartin replied.

THE mate stared at him, muttered something under his breath.

"What's that?" Hartin demanded.

"Nothing," Bogart answered.

The *Happy Valley* drifted opposite the landing. Hartin could see men out on its stern. They were on the fantail, and cylinder timber, chopping with axes, pounding mauls. He guessed what had happened. Judd's towboat had old-fashioned outside cams. A rope had got caught in them, wound up, probably had broken them, making the paddle wheel helpless.

Hartin walked to the edge of his deck, where he could see better. Let Judd figure it out.

Figure it quick, too. The Interstate bridge was only a quarter mile below, and below the bridge, the rapids started.

"He ain't got much time," Bogart said.

Hartin grunted again. He could hear Bogart's deep breathing in the darkness beside him, and the low voices of the men, on the maindeck. He heard the chief engineer running up the narrow stair.

"Going to give a hand, Cap?" the engineer cried.

"He didn't ask for a hand," Hartin said.

"No, didn't ask. Only——"

"Only nothing," Captain Jeff retorted.

"But he's headed toward the north bridge pier, Cap! If he hits——"

"He'll sink," Hartin said savagely.

"In the rapids!" Bogart cried. "And he's going to hit! Can't miss——"

"Going to hit!" the engineer's voice lifted.

"Going to hit," Hartin agreed.

The words were not out of his mouth before a cry struck sharply across the water. A woman's voice. Shriill with panic. A woman, standing on the bank above the landing road.

"Amos! Amos!" it screamed. "Sound your whistle—he'll have to help—*have to*—"

Jeff Hartin felt his spine stiffen. What was Carrie doing out on the river bank, this time of night? He started toward her.

Then he paused, expecting, himself, to hear Judd's distress whistle. But Judd did not call.

"He won't ask any help off you," Bogart muttered.

The *Happy Valley* was drifting rapidly toward the bridge pier. Up stream, coming more slowly, the two laden flats thumped together. The pier lay straight before the boat. In four minutes, five—

Jeff Hartin suddenly bade, "Cast off them lines! Get up your steam, Chief!"

He was climbing to his pilot house. Cursing himself, but climbing. Snatching open the door, gripping his wheel, stepping on the whistle trip for one long blast. Cursing himself and Judd.

Why was he going out? Judd hadn't asked for help. He owed Judd nothing. Nothing. He'd rather see the towboat sink and Judd with it, than lift a finger.

He sounded the gong, and then the backing bell, half speed. Then stop. Half speed ahead. Full speed.

He swung the steering handles. The phosphorescent tiller marker slid over obediently on its long wire while the spokes of the great wheel spun. He headed for the towboat and pier and sounded his whistle again. The *Happy Valley* did not reply.

Would he make it? Would he get there in time?

HE YELLED for more speed. But he was still eight boatlengths away when the *Happy Valley* hit the pier. He heard the rip of timbers and the snap of iron, saw Judd's two tall stacks shake their heads, then list to port. Limping, the boat edged around the pier and turned toward the rapid.

Bogart, from the door, cried, "She's going down, Cap!"

Hartin answered, "Get below. Get lines ready to take hold of her." He still was calm.

"She's sinking, Cap! We can't get her ashore!"

"We can get the crew off."

Hartin swung his packet alongside the sinking boat. He couldn't down the guilty feeling in him. He hadn't started soon enough. Steam was roaring from emergency cocks in the *Happy Valley*, guarding against too much pressure when the boilers touched cold river water. He hadn't started soon enough—Judd hadn't asked him to, either.

Ropes thumped. Through the slot between the head board and the breast board of the pilot house, Hartin saw Judd's crew climb to the *Carrie Hartin's* deck. He counted them—cook, deckhand, mate, fireman, engineer. Five off.

Where was Judd?

"Best hurry!" Hartin shouted.

It was then he saw Judd.

The young man was standing, feet braced, arms at his sides, on the front of the boiler deck of the towboat. Hartin stared. Judd wasn't coming off. He would go down the rapids with his boat. Turn over with it. Sink with it. Drown.

Hartin released the tiller handles.

"Come along, Judd!" he invited.

"Go to hell, Hartin!" Judd replied.

His voice was cheerful. Jeff grunted.

He ran down from the pilot house, and leaped.

The deck of the sinking boat was too steep for comfort. And Judd had backed, obstinately, against his tilting pilot house. Hartin reached for him.

"Get off my boat, Hartin," Judd bade.

Hartin swung from his shoulder. His great, clamped fist caught Judd unexpectedly and the younger man dropped.

Hartin caught him in his arms as he fell. Awkwardly he pulled him down the narrow, unaccustomed stair, hit him again

when he struggled, found the deck of his own boat.

"Cast off!" he panted. "Quick! Have to run for it, Bogart!"

The current of the rapids already was sucking at the *Carrie Hartin's* sides. Dropping Judd, unconscious, on the boiler deck, Jeff ran for his pilot house. His stern wheel turned over. He headed up stream.

It was fifteen minutes before he felt his fenders scrape the wharfboat. He turned then, and looked. There was no sign of the *Happy Valley*.

"Tie up," he ordered the mate.

HE WENT ashore without looking at the prostrate Judd. On the bank Carrie was waiting.

"What you doing down here?" he demanded.

"I saw him in trouble," she answered. "Each night I watch for him. I hear him signal me, when he starts down from the digger. I watch him go past."

He looked incomprehendingly at her.

"I didn't promise I wouldn't do that!"

"No," he agreed. "Nor that you would forget him."

She asked, "Where is he?"

Hartin pointed toward his boat.

"He's a fool," he said. "Wouldn't even come aboard. I made him. Made him, understand? I hit him. Hit him!" He looked at his fist. "He didn't ask for help. But I went."

"Late!"

"Late. But I went. In time to get *him*, anyways. He said he wouldn't come aboard. But he came. Understand?"

She was trembling. "No," she said.

"I'll tell you, then. Hartins are still better men. Better'n all the Judds. If there was ever any doubt in your mind. Now come home."

"And if I don't?"

"Come home," he repeated.

He took three steps up the bank, then turned. She had not moved.

"Come," he bade again, and took three more steps.

"Father," she began.

In spite of himself, he waited to hear what she would say.

"You promised you'd let him drown in mid-river," she reminded him. "With me looking on. Remember? I haven't forgotten, either."

He waited.

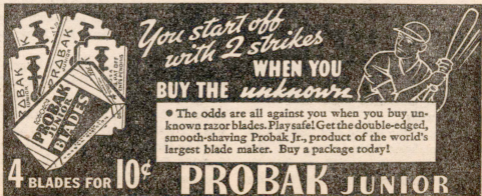
"You broke that promise," she said.

"And I promised not to go to him. Not to see him. Now, I'm breaking mine."

She walked slowly down the bank and across the plank stage to the deck of the packet. A dark shadow was waiting for her there. Jeff Hartin turned his back. He didn't need to look. He knew. After all, Carrie was *his* daughter.

A Hartin. She'd take what she wanted. He lifted his chin.

"She's got it, too," he said, and what he meant was Hartin pride.



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I

MCDADE rode into the little border town of Piedras Negras. The town was as empty as a sun-bleached cow skull. Along the glaring street the white dust lay undisturbed beneath the brazen September sky. Windows were boarded up or wantonly splintered. Doorways were closed fast. Signs twinkled with holes where rollicking riders had punctured them with leaden fare-you-wells.

In front of the swung sign "Drink Corral," a lone horse basked at the rail. One horse, but enough to indicate that the thirst emporium was still doing business. Saloons were the last to go, always.

Sighting the horse, McDade heaved a sigh of relief. He was due to freshen his dry throat at last. All along the trail things had been going from bad to worse. Bone bare pastures, wide ranges lifeless, a few fluted cows harshly bawling at dry troughs and dry holes, carcasses with stiff legs and parched hides and skinny necks, ranch premises where no living soul waved greeting.

Even after all this, Piedras Negras hit him hard. This place, close to the end of his trail, was tectotally dead. Tomorrow, and even the saloon might not be here. He was not worried over the saloon, but was beset by the fear he might be too late to find old John Puett. He had waited a long time, he had come a long way, to find a gray wolf named Puett.

Two Outlaws Waited—Him Called the Falcon in the Low Country, and the Dreaded El Tigre in the Hills



McDade turned in at the hitch rail, sharp-eyed and alert. The horse standing there was a *castaño*—a chestnut bay, lean but not lean with drought; merely well conditioned. Therefore, he had not come from these nearby ranges.

A silver saddle with black-and-white hair rope, a curb bit with jingle chains, caught McDade's eye. He looked for the brand. It had been worked over and was hard to read. But this horse, he perceived from the rig, had come from below the line, from those mountain ranges in Mexico where, according to report and the occasional thunderheads to be sighted, there was grazing and water to spare.

McDade swung off, looping his lines over the rail. He slipped his holster to a more convenient place, lifted his hot hat and scratched his brick thatch. A sign tacked on the 'dobe front of the place drew his attention. The joint was closed, then? No! The smearing inked placard announced in large letters: "Man Wanted." It was signed "J. S....." The last name had been altered by a hair brand and read "Skunk." There it was. Man Wanted; J. Skunk.

Enough said. McDade grinned, licked his dry lips, and stumped across the

threshold. The door closed behind him, the thick adobe walls closed out all the world of thirst. McDade's hazel eyes flicked a glance at the single client, a man sitting at a table. Then, with a nod and a "Howdy" to the unkempt bartender, he planted his six-foot-one against the bar.

A drink was poured. McDade drank, smacked his lips, and poured another.

"Come far?" The bartender casually wiped the mahogany.

"Toler'bly," acknowledged McDade.

"Welcome to our midst, then. If you happen to be looking for a job, lord help you! This country is a fust class sample of hell. Take it or leave it if you can. Most everybody's leaving it."

EVIDENTLY the bartender was eager to talk.

McDade chuckled. "So I'd guess by that sign tacked up outside."

"Oh, that? Jack Shank's sign?" The bartender laughed. "Yep, means just what it says. The gent has a little job and nobody to do it—not for him. So he's advertising."

"What's the job?"

"Shank has the last bunch o' cows in this here section. I tell you, stranger,

what with drought and rustlers raiding over the line from Mexico, the cattle business is busted flat! Also, he's had the only water left. You bet he gun-guarded it, wouldn't spare a drop; now it's about gone. He can sell this bunch to a rico down in Mexico, if he can get 'em there. He can't."

"Funny business, then," said McDade.

"Maybe. Skunk—that's the way his name is called around here—ain't got a rider left. Not a man in this section would even take down a rope to hang him. Let him lose his cows and go broke, like everyone else! What hands he had, done pulled out while they could pack their saddles. They wouldn't burn powder to save his bacon."

"Can't blame a man for hoarding his water," McDade observed.

"Why, he wouldn't give a dog a drink, let alone a hoss! And when a human stopped by, he charges by the cup. And now his cows drink him dry, or he losses 'em. He's in a pinch, you bet! Too much danger in running them cows acrost the line, too."

"Pardon me, *senor*. I think you mistake."

It was the man from the table, coming now to the bar. A Mexican, he of the chestnut bay outside. McDade swept him with wary glance. Light, flashy, a lean determined face. Silver sombrero, fine blue flannel shirt with red kerchief, wing chaps set with silver conchas, like the studded belt from which hung an ivory-handled gun.

He spoke excellent English.

"I am from below," he went on. "I can assure you the cattle will be perfectly safe. No bandits will bother them."

"Maybe you know," the bartender said. "But they've been bothering plenty, both sides the line. A heap o' cows have been on the move out. And I ain't heard of anybody rounding up that bad hombre they call the Falcon. No, sir! This country ain't safe for cows."

The Mexican smiled, and made a graceful gesture.

"The cattle of this country aren't worth stealing any more," he said. "They can't be driven fast. Hides are a drug on the market. If this gentleman undertakes the job you mention, he may deliver the cattle to Don Pancho Garcia at the Rancho de los Alamos, without the slightest interference from bandits. I am here to tell the owner so."

"Seen him yet?" queried the bartender.

"Not yet. But I tell this gentleman."

"*Muchas gracias*," McDade drawled, "but your outlaws don't interest me. I've helped shoot a few, helped stretch a few. Falcon, huh? Forget their fancy names. Just plain coyote, all of 'em."

A TOUCH of ice seemed to stiffen the Mexican's voice. "But, *señor*, men must live."

"Yeah? I've seen guns a-smoking over that argument." McDade straightened up a trifle. "Sorry; the job doesn't interest me. I've got one more important. Got to kill another coyote who's lived too long." He turned from the Mexican, coolly avoiding the challenge of eyes and voice. Or was it challenge? "Just where," he asked the bartender, "does the Puett outfit lay?"

The other stared at him blankly.

"Puett? Never heard of no such name around here. I been here a couple years. You might ask Shank. He's an old-timer; fifteen year. You'll smell him about three mile out on the crick road. I hear tell he's flat in bed, with only the Chink cook left on the place."

McDade frowned and spelled out the name. "You're sure?"

"Dead certain. But I dunno everything. Old Shank, he can tell you for sure."

McDade started for the door. He heard the suave voice of the Mexican following him.

"And Shank has cattle to be delivered, *señor*. You can set your own price, and later on kill the man you seek—"

Without turning, with only a wave of the hand in negation, McDade stepped out into the hot world again. He mounted and rode away, with sudden comprehension and wonder bursting upon his brain.

Shank? Shank? Of course. Twenty years back, there had been only John Puett. Puett, of the McDade & Puett outfit, up in the short-grass country far away.

Puett had doublecrossed Alex McDade; and robbed him, stealing every ace in the deck except one, the good will and good name of the outfit. He had left Alec McDade with nary a cent or cow to call his own, and only that name to make good on a forged note.

Alec McDade had worked hard, from the bottom, on an uphill drag. At the last, after long years, he had paid out every cent; and he died, worked out, with vengeance deferred but with his name clean.

And now the boy, become man, was riding, riding to kill John Puett. Rumor said Puett had prospered. From Montana, from Oklahoma, Puett had headed down here for the border. John Puett—John Shane Puett—J. Shank, why, of course!

McDade laughed softly, joyously, as he rode for the crick trail. He had found John Puett at last, and unexpectedly.

II

A THIN trickle of water spattered into the corral trough from the pipe of the windmill tank. Cattle were there, the weaker ones; others were bawling along the fence. Others were farther out, to be seen and heard. All were gathered here; beyond, the whole range was bald.

McDade looked around, saw nobody, and dismounted, dropping his lines. He stumped up to the porch and across to an open door, and paused.

"Hello!" His voice rose, resonant and clear. "Anybody around?"

"Hey! Come in," floated a startled response. "Come in, this way!"

He obeyed, and found the speaker in a bedroom. It was a hot and mussy room, a mussy bed; and upon the bed, a gaunt and withered figure. The man was gray and stubbled, plucking with nervous talons at the sheet drawn over him.

McDade halted, all astare. Suddenly twenty years collapsed into this moment. John Puett, yes, looking like Death in skin and bones. He may have prospered once, but he was not prospering now. So this was trail's end—and no joy in it. Kill this old withered varmint? No.

"Well, well, who are you?" Shank was crying out testily. "Where's that damned Chinaman? What d'you want, huh?"

"Your Chink ain't needed, Mr. Shank," said McDade grimly. Mentally, he ran the rope of vengeance through his fingers and found it bad to the touch. "I come on a piece of business."



"Well, what is it?" queried the brown hawk-face on the bed.

"You got a job waiting, ain't you? The sign said so—"

"Saw my sign, huh?" Shank clutched eagerly at the word. "So that's it, so that's it, huh? Want that job, do you? Sit down."

"No, I ain't sitting. I can do the business standing," said McDade coolly. The old hatred surged into his mind. He fingered his gun, half impelled to go through with it after all. But the look in that skinny old face, the look in those bleared

old eyes, shamed his purpose. No; an old man, in bed, was not to be shot down.

"I don't know you," said Shank. "You ain't from these parts? What's the name?"

"Mac," rejoined McDade. "Nope, I'm drifting through from Oklahoma."

"Mac, huh? Good enough handle." The old face held cunning, the plucking fingers were still now. "Well, I'm John Shank. I been here a long while; now I'm down with a misery and I can't get around. I want them cows driven out. You're hired."

"Yeah? Got to be driven out? Why and where?"

The old man broke into gusty, petulant response, lifting himself to one elbow.

"Across the line into Mexico. To the Rancho Santa Maria de los Alamos, to Don Pancho Garcia. He's a rico, savvy? He's got water, grazing, everything. He sent two vaqueros; they're around somewhere, waiting. A few more days, and the animals will be too weak to travel. I'm down flat. I'm damned near ruined. Every day means more loss." The petulant voice shrilled and thinned.

"If I can't make delivery, I'm done! And I got nobody to send. I don't know you, but you're hired. I depend on you. Look like you had guts. Push the cows through, fetch back the money. You'll be well paid."

McDADE listened and gazed, with never a glint in his hazel eyes, but his thoughts were milling. He was glad of it all; John Puett was done. Here in his bed, while his famished cattle bawled and never a man moved to the rescue, he was done. And what was McDade to do? This remained uncertain. He could not make up his mind. If he did nothing at all, this evil old rascal was doomed. John Puett was done; yes. Shank, as he now was, had become desperate beyond words, clutching at any straw regardless.

"I'll pay you when you fetch back the money, or get back yourself."

"Yeah?" McDade drawled. "I ain't

worrying about that. You'll pay up, all right. I got a notion to take your job. Where are them two vaqueros?"

Into the vulture face came instant relief.

"Good. They're somewhere around. So's the Chinaman. You'll start at once?"

"Maybe. Maybe in the morning. And I'll be back to collect, never fear. Guess I'll look up your Chink and get me something to eat, first thing."

With a nod, he strode out, and Shank fell back in exhaustion.

McDade had come to decision. He was sorry for the bawling cows, but not for this man Shank. And Shank, who needed that gold from Mexico, was never going to touch it. Killing him would be a waste of money. To bring back that money and then to reveal his own identity—this tempted McDade. The old devil wanted that money, needed it, must have it; and the son of Alec McDade would take it. It was the first cut of a long overdue reparation.

Out by the corral, after a time, McDade found the two vaqueros. Meantime he had raided the kitchen, had found the Chinaman, had wolfed some grub. Due to this delay, he found the two vaqueros were no longer alone.

They squatted on their heels against the corral fence, cigarette smoke idly drifting from beneath their sombreros. But a fine chestnut bay was standing there at the fence; and talking with the two men was the Mexican whom McDade had seen in the saloon. He must have come along promptly indeed.

McDade walked over to the three. The murmured talk had ceased. The squatting men dumbly eyed him. The caballero leaned at ease, flashed a smile, and spoke.

"Ah, señor! If you had waited but a little while, I'd have ridden with you. I am Don Luis Esteban. You have not found your man?"

"No. He can wait," said McDade. Turning to the squatting men, he switched

into Spanish. "Well, hombres, you're from that Rancho Los Alamos?"

They stood up at once. "Yes, señor."

"You have names, no doubt?"

"Yes, señor. I am Juan Tonto; this is Jose Largo."

McDade eyed them grimly. Juan Tonto, Stupid John, short and pocked and broad in the face; Jose Largo, Long Joe, seasoned as thin as a match, with one eye. A fine rascally pair, thorough scoundrels by their looks.

"And how far to that ranch, with a drive of cattle?"

"Four days, five days, señor. Quien sabe?"

"Señor, you will go with us and the cattle?"

"Yes, Jose Largo."

The response seemed to make electric contact between the two vaqueros and the lounging Don Luis. They relaxed, in satisfaction and relief; it was natural. The vaqueros had been waiting, the drive had been held up; now it was ended and action promised. Don Luis, lighting a cigarette, smiled under his black mustache at McDade.

"You have not told me your name, I think."

"Huh? Oh, sure! Mac."

"Then you will go through to the rancho, Señor Mac? That is good. I came here to assure Mr. Shank there was no danger to his cattle from any thieves. I am a minor official, a very minor one."

"You know the country across yonder, then?"

"Assuredly," said Don Luis, letting smoke trickle from his nostrils. "And I know these two vaqueros, and their master. They're good men. You'll find the trails easy. You should get the cattle through in four days easily. I've ridden that road many times. I hope you make Shank pay you well for the trip?"

"He'll pay," McDade said curtly. He was far from certain of this handsome, aggressive caballero.

Don Luis tossed away his cigarette. "I'll assure him that the trail is open. Good luck to you in your search for the coyote you seek, señor."

DON LUIS departed to the house, McDade followed him with speculative eyes, then glanced at the low sun and turned to Jose Largo.

"You and Juan can start your gather any time. Get the animals in, so we can keep them under herd."

"Yes, señor. And we start—"

"Early in the morning. How far to the first water?"

The match-thin, one-eyed man considered.

"If we give them water, not too much, and start early, we should reach the next water in plenty of time."

"And after that?"

"Oh, plenty grass, plenty water, down there!"

"And what about *ladrones*?"

The two vaqueros grinned and shrugged. Squat Juan Tonto made reply.

"No danger from the thieves, señor. To be sure, certain men have to make a living; but these cattle are for Don Pancho Garcia. They are safe. Don Luis has said it."

"What sort of official is he?"

"Quien sabe, señor?" and Juan Tonto shrugged. Then he leaned over and drew with his finger in the dust. "Look! Here are two ways to reach the rancho. One by the high country here; the bandit El Tigre holds these roads. We do not go this way. We go by this other way, through the low country. True, the bandit called the Falcon is there, but Don Luis knows him and says there is no danger. Where Don Luis rides, he carries the law, señor. We take the lower road."

McDade grunted. He did not pretend to understand the Mexican ethics on bandits and such things. Below the border, life was not worth a continental; officials and bandits were probably in cahoots.

The two vaqueros set about their gather. McDade stayed, receiving the animals, bunching and holding them. Presently Don Luis Esteban came from the house, mounted his splendid chestnut, and rode over to where McDade sat in the saddle.

"Everything's all right," he said with a smile, and waved his hand to Juan Tonto as the latter approached briefly. "Be sure and take the lower trail! It is safe. Also, this señor can then find his way back without trouble."

The vaquero assented. Don Luis swung his horse and put out his hand to McDade.

"Adios and good luck, Mr. McDade. I may see you down there. I want Don Pancho to get his cattle safely.

He cantered away, jaunty and well satisfied. McDade stared after him, startled and pondering. "McDade," he had said! Then his name was known. How? Only one way. Don Luis had heard him inquiring for John Puett at the saloon, and had repeated the name to Shank. Old Shank instantly knew that this "Mac" was no other than McDade's son. The cunning old devil! He did not suspect that McDade knew him for Puett, either.

It tickled McDade, after his first startled thought. Fair enough, he reflected; he would not let Shank know that he had found John Puett—not until his return with the gold. Play the old scoundrel along—and watch out for tricks!

That night, he got a new angle on Shank. Not new, perhaps; just one that might be expected of such a man.

McDade was in the kitchen, smoking, while the China boy potted about and made talk.

A little old Chinese, this, a wrinkled, faithful, monkey-faced chap.

"Fi' hundred dollah, goo-by!" said John suddenly. McDade grinned.

"Five hundred dollars? Lottery tickets or poker?"

"No. Boss say please lend fi' hundred dollah. Long time saved up. Gold money."

"Huh?" McDade frowned. "You mean your boss, Shank? Borrowed your savings off you?"

"You bet. He bloke, I bloke, goo'by." John regarded him anxiously. "You go way off with those men?"

"Yeah. In the morning."

"More so better not. Bad men."

McDade tapped his holster. "I got something here to make 'em good, John. Too bad about your money. I bet it's goodbye. Your boss is no angel."

"I think so. Fi' hundred dollah!" Evidently the thought rankled. A damned mean trick, reflected McDade, to borrow that money from this faithful old chap. Then he realized that John was addressing him. "Boss give me note fo' those men. No can read. You tell me?"

The Chinese produced a scrap of paper. McDade took the note; it was in Spanish. It was directed to Don Pancho Garcia, and told him not to send payment in gold as agreed, but by mail, in a draft on his bankers.

Cunning old devil! That method might require a month or so. Shank could wait; he had staked himself with the cook's savings.

"About my fi' hundred dollah?" queried John anxiously.

"Nope." McDade pocketed the note. "I'll deliver it. You say nothing to the boss or you'll rile him and then you won't get your savings back. Maybe I can fix it so you'll get it back, when I return. Leave it to me."

Shank was working a double-cross, obviously. The cows safely delivered; no gold back. No payment. When he returned, Shank would laugh at him—more likely, would have skipped out, with only the postoffice knowing his address.

McDade grimly smiled. To his direct brain, the challenge was obvious; the answer was equally obvious. He would take the cows down, collect the money, come back on schedule, and play out the hand.

That would hurt the old devil worse than anything else.

It did not occur to him that Shank, knowing the son of Alec McDade was looking for him with expressed intent to kill, might have taken his own means to get rid of young McDade forever—and therefore wanted his money sent by bank draft.

III

AFTER that first push across the cactus flats into the sun-drenched hills, to make the timely water hole and the scant grazing there, the cattle picked up and traveled better.

McDade enjoyed those four days immensely. The two vaqueros, for all their rascally looks, knew their business and did it well. The peaks of the high country, over on the left, occasionally thundered. Rain was falling over there, with only the fringes of it hovering here.

So came the trail's end, the white-washed adobes of the Rancho Santa Maria de los Alamos, set amid the green of the cottonwoods which brightened the place and gave it a name. Big corrals, wide, grassed valley, full-running creek, many vaqueros—Don Pancho Garcia was a rico and was richly nested. The cows were turned over for the count.

A courteous dark man, Don Pancho, who made an honored guest of McDade; a gray-bearded old man with the high courtly manner of a hidalgo. McDade made the most of the day's rest and refreshment.

He breakfasted early with his host, before starting back. The money was paid over in gold coin. All was settled; a package of food was being made ready for his journey.

"You have all you need, señor?" asked the rancharo.

"Everything, thanks," McDade replied. "You'll take the same trail? The lower road, it is called. Yes, I advise you to go as you came." Don Pancho was hon-

est, pleasant, sincere. "You carry something of value. But you're an American, you're armed, you have a good horse; with a little care, you'll not be molested."

"No *ladrones*, then?"

"Oh, there are always thieves, and also many stories." Don Pancho smiled. "One hears of a robber captain called the Falcon, also of El Tigre on the upper road. But these gentry are rarely seen."

"Then they don't bother you?"

"When they need meat, they kill a beef; it is understood. And I have many men. These rascals would rather have money than abundant blows."

McDade was nudged by a thought. "By the way, do you know one Don Luis Esteban?"

"Esteban?" Don Pancho meshed his shaggy brows. "No, señor. Not in these parts. The name is well known in eastern Sonora, but not around here."

McDade did not press the matter. The other offered to send a couple of men with him as escort, but he refused.

So, in the new morning sunlight, McDade made his farewells and rode away.

He had covered something over ten miles, when his wary eye caught a dust-spurt on the road behind. Two men, riding hard to overtake him. He bided his time, drew rein in good position, and waited.

They proved to be Jose Largo and Juan Tonto again, this time with cartridge belts over their shoulders and carbines under thighs. They gave him eager, laughing greeting and the one-eyed Jose Largo explained.

"Thank the saints we caught you, señor! Don Pancho sent us. Word just came in that bandits are on the lower road, watching for you. Don Pancho says you are to take the upper road, around by San Tomas, and sent us to escort you."

"Yeah?" drawled McDade. "What about your friend Don Luis? He said the lower road was perfectly safe."

"Yes, señor, for the cattle. It is no

bueno now. These roads have other eyes and ears. The lower road is guarded against you. You're only one man."

"But you go with me, and that makes three men."

"No, señor; our orders are to escort you around by San Tomas. Then you'll come back into this lower road, beyond the long canyon where the bandits usually wait, and you can go on with a safe throat."

"How far is this San Tomas?"

"Forty miles," said Jose Largo. "On these horses, we can make it by sundown. The trail branches out a mile ahead."

McDade deliberated as he talked, sparing for time. He did not trust these two men, yet the message was clear enough. Don Pancho was certainly honest. He was uncomfortably aware of the little sack of double eagles—twenty dollar gold pieces—hidden in the slicker roll behind his saddle.

Still, he had to take one chance or the other. Better to risk these fellows, and keep an eye on them.

"All right," he decided. "Ride ahead, hombres, and I'll follow."

THE narrow trail for San Tomas forked to the east. It wriggled on, up among the high foothills of the main divide. As the hours passed, McDade's uneasiness and half suspicion died away. The two vaqueros jogged steadily along. The day passed into afternoon with no indication of anything amiss.

Dusk had gathered about San Tomas when they rode in. The place was no more than a couple of dobes and a squalid crossroads inn—a low structure with annex of hard clay court and broken walls, with a row of open stalls. Court and stalls were chambers for man and beast.

A train of mules from some silver mine were here, the muleteers stopping for the night. McDade ate, drank, and stretched out in a corner of the court with his saddle for a pillow.

In the main room of the inn, a game of monte got into swing. McDade was awakened out of his first sleep by a furious storm of voices, a rousing exchange of oaths. The figure of the landlord appeared, bobbing lantern in hand. He came running, hastily pouring out entreaties at McDade.

"Señor, for the love of God come and control those two vaqueros! They are killing each other—my reputation will be ruined!"

McDade leaped to his feet and followed the other into the main room. Chairs were overturned, muleteers were cursing, and in one corner Jose Largo was engaged in a furious fight with his companion. In fact, he had Juan Tonto penned in the corner and his knife was driving in fast and deadly, when McDade intervened.

Gun in hand, he whirled the one-eyed man around. Juan Tonto wriggled out and was gone like a shadow, with panting breath.

"You drunken fool, put up your knife!" stormed McDade, and the vaquero obeyed sullenly. "What d'you mean by it?"

"Only a bit of fun, señor," said the thin vaquero, his one eye blinking. "This Juan, he does not like the knife. He thinks everybody with a knife is out to kill him. I would not hurt him—"



"None of your lies," said McDade. "Have a free-for-all any time you want, but not here tonight."

"It will be all right," said Jose, and flashed a smile. "You see; all will be right tomorrow."

McDade went back to his hard bed, with a grunt. As he settled down again, he thought of the money. To the feel, his tied slicked-roll was undisturbed; the lump was hard to his fingers. In ten minutes he was asleep again.

Morning brought sunlight, a voice, the figure of Jose Largo above him.

"Your horse is fed, señor. Juan and I will ride with you till noon; if you'll make ready, we'll eat and start. After you come back into the lower road at noon, you can go on alone in safety."

"Where's your partner?" McDade asked. "Friends again?"

"Oh, *sejuro*—sure!" The one-eyed flashed him a grin. "All is well, señor. Hand me the cinch. I'll watch the horse while you eat."

"No," said another voice. "I'll watch the horse myself."

A choked cry from Jose: "*Madre de Dios!*" McDade whirled. There, with a slight smile, stood Don Luis Esteban, jaunty as ever. Juan Tonto appeared; he and Jose stared at Don Luis, wordless, their faces blanched a sickly gray.

"A fortunate meeting, Mr. McDade," said Don Luis. His garments were splashed with mud; he must have been riding through the night. "So you decided not to take the lower road, I see."

"Apparently this road was better for my health," said McDade. "What of it?"

"Much," said Don Luis gravely. "I was waiting for you. As you did not pass, I came up here—and found you. Why? Your safety means much to me."

McDade frowned uncertainly. There was something here he could not understand; something that eluded him. Don Pancho did not know this Don Luis Esteban at all. The two *vaqueros* did.

Now Don Luis turned to the two, and loosed quick words in Spanish. Sharp, swift, like the thrust of a blade.

"And you thought to find this road healthy also, perhaps, you two?"

"We had our orders," blurted Tonto, "Now that you're here, we'll return—"

"No; you surely wouldn't disobey your orders, hombre," said Don Luis purringly. "But we'll wait together while the gentleman has a bite to eat. All gentlemen, all true *caballeros*, together!" He turned with a laugh to McDade. "Perhaps they had designs of their own, eh?"

"Don Pancho sent them after me with word the lower road was unsafe," McDade said. "And I might add that Don Pancho didn't know your name at all."

Don Luis smiled. "Naturally not. He knows me by another name." With a wave of his hand, he dismissed the matter. He glanced at the two *vaqueros*, who had settled down against the wall and were rolling cigarettes. "I'll talk with these *hombres*, while you get something to eat. Then we'll go on together, with your permission."

"As you like," and McDade shrugged. Yes. Perhaps Don Luis was right. At all events, there was something shady about the whole affair. About Luis himself.

IV

MCDADE was not particularly worried. He was rather amused by the whole matter. He did not take Mexican threats very seriously anyhow. As he ate, he could see the three talking, and could keep an eye on his horse and saddle-roll. It was clear that the two *vaqueros* held Don Luis in considerable respect, even fear. Then the landlord came and spoke, as McDade paid his bill.

"I am an honest man, señor. You will remember that. I do not know you, I do not know those others, out there."

McDade gave him a sharp glance, took his change, and went out.

The others were ready. As he mounted, McDade's hand felt the slight lump in the slicker. It was reassuring. But the

words of the landlord lingered. McDade suddenly understood them, too late for questioning. The fellow did know those others—at least, he knew Don Luis, and wanted to go on record as not knowing him. Why?

"You two *valientes* ride ahead," ordered Don Luis. "We follow."

The vaqueros rode on, slouching; their backs spoke of rebellion, uneasiness. McDade gave brief answers to the affable chatter of his companion.

The sun rose higher. The trail was narrow at spots, rocky, deserted. McDade shifted his gun a little. He had the sense of riding with danger. He looked for some drop of the trail toward the lower country, but none came.

Now the road swung on a sudden curve, in between rocky ridges. And here, without warning, the lightning struck.

"Halt! Hands up, caballeros!"

The two vaqueros halted, their arms going up. Four carbine muzzles, topped by peaked hats, poked over the rocky ridge hedging the trail. McDade reined in; his hand dropped to his gun. Then he straightened up with a low oath of comprehension, as the gun of Don Luis jabbed into his ribs. He turned his head and looked into the flashing dark eyes.

"Up, McDade!"

Under the silvered sombrero, the swarthy handsome features of Don Luis meant business. McDade did not lift his arms, but rested his hands on the saddle pommel. He was caught.

"So this is the sort of official you are?"

"Precisely," and Don Luis chuckled. "You're not going back to Piedras Negras, Mr. McDade. You're staying here, in Mexico. You're bad for John Shank's health."

McDADE caught his breath, as the truth flashed upon him. That visit of Don Luis to old Shank—ah! And the five hundred dollars borrowed from the Chinese cook.

"Hired you to kill me, did he?" McDade snarled.

"He made it worth while, at least."

"Five hundred, eh? You're cheap, Don Luis."

The other smiled. "You forget the contribution which you bring. The old fool will have no need of that. Come down, my honest fellows, come down!" and Don Luis sent his voice at the men among the rocks.

Yes, here was comprehension enough, full force. No wonder Shank had wanted payment for those cows sent by mail! Everything was explained now.

There was a scrambling among the rocks. A grinning peon appeared, and saluted Don Luis, who nodded amiably to him.

"Tell the caballero here my name."

"The Falcon, my captain."

"Yes. The Falcon." Don Luis eyed McDade with sudden vindictive glance. "And you remember your big talk in the saloon that day—eh? About thieves, *ladrones*, with fancy names? Coyotes, you called them. Well, Mr. McDade, coyotes have teeth. Here, take this caballero's gun from him."

The vindictive hatred in eyes and words lashed McDade to swift, desperate action.

The man came close to him, reaching up a dirty paw to his holster. Foot freed from the stirrup, McDade lashed out with a vicious kick that sent the man doubled and gasping. His spur went in, his rein tugged, his horse reared about and crashed into that of Don Luis. It was all done in a flashing instant.

Don Luis lost his silver sombrero in the shock. McDade snatched out his gun and struck—struck the sleek black pate with the barrel. One of the men among the rocks stood up, carbine leveled. McDade fired; the figure slumped down.

Then his horse was off with a leap and a rush, carbines were exploding, bullets were whining and screaming. He was through them and gone before they knew

it, heading full gallop down the trail, around another bend, and safe. His sharp, swift action had caught them all by surprise, but he would not be safe for long. Those two vaqueros no doubt belonged to the Falcon's outfit, while holding down jobs with Don Pancho Garcia. They would be after him, and Don Luis as well. Best to make time while he could.

So he did, reining in at last to a rough descending slope; gaze sweeping the road ahead. He sighted a fork there. A draw crossed the road, deep and bushy to the right, where it headed upward. A trail there struck his eye. If there was a trail, it went somewhere. Not his road, but good enough for all that.

He struck into the draw, turned in among the brush, and dismounted. Gun in one hand, the other held over the nostrils of his horse to prevent a whinny, he stood and waited. He had a glimpse of the road from here. At his feet in the sand were the marks of other horses. This trail went to some ranch, perhaps.

He was set on evasion now, not on fight. Never fight in strange country—a good motto. One five-hundred-dollar packet of yellow boys was in the pockets of Don Luis at this moment, no doubt; that was not his affair. The roll behind his saddle was all that interested him. He wanted to get away, throw Don Luis off the trail, and get back for his interview with John Shank. Now he had something to talk about on his own account when he saw that old devil—

"Faster, *valientes!* We have him!"

The voice of Don Luis. Now Don Luis himself in sight, head bandaged, spurring along the trail. The two vaqueros and another rider with him; no others. They slowed for the rough descent to the fork, struck in spur again, went thundering on and past with the dust drifting up into the late morning sunlight. Then another rider, his horse limping, who slowed and halted with carbine over saddle, waiting.

The back trail, then, was closed. Mc-

Dade led his horse through the brush, and when all sight of the road was closed out, mounted and rode on. This would lead him somewhere, to someone.

It was a rough little mountain trail, but bore signs of much use. He pricked on, over a hill shoulder, on into a winding canyon. The canyon went on and on, interminable and cool with mountain breeze. Water here, too, a tumbling rill that refreshed McDade and his mount alike.

McDade's impatience grew. He was out of his route here; he wanted to cross the Border again, get back to John Shank, and settle his business. Kill the old devil? No, he knew this would be impossible for him. That is, unless John Shank met him gun in hand. Just what he would do, he was not sure; but he wanted to get there.

In this mood he plunged around a bend of the canyon and came smack into a camp. Half a dozen men were lazily tending a cook-fire; horses were at one side; a long covered shack showed near the creek.

A yell and a scattering arose at sight of him. McDade had a glimpse of darting figures, of rifles and guns suddenly leaping into sight; too late now to turn back. Two of them were in the trail behind him.

Before the shack and the fire, in the shade, sat a huge man, bearded to the eyes, who had snatched up a rifle and held it loosely, waiting. McDade waved his hand, and this man, evidently in charge here, sent a bellow at his scurrying men. McDade rode on, and dismounted before the shack and the sitting man.

The loose-held rifle swung and covered him.

"Americano, eh?" growled the big fellow. "*Los Manos arriba—quick!*"

McDade had no choice. Two men ran up and relieved him of gun and belt, ran swift hands over him, stepped away.

"Nothing, El Tigre. No money."

El Tigre! McDade started, then felt a wild impulse to laugh. He checked it in a hurry. Getting out of the Falcon's grip, he had jumped squarely into that of El Tigre—who, from his savage eye, was a person much more to be feared.

IV

EL TIGRE surveyed his prisoner. A big brute, unkempt and overgrown, his little pig-eyes had an ugly glitter.

"What do you mean coming here without any money? Do you speak Spanish?"

"Enough to serve, caballero," McDade responded easily. The spitted meat, the tortillas, the coffee, made his mouth water. "I invited myself to lunch with you."

There was a burst of laughter. El Tigre grinned sourly.

"And no money, eh? Maybe you're worth more than you look."

"True," said McDade, and fell to rolling a cigarette. "I was worth five hundred dollars in gold, but someone got ahead of you."

El Tigre darted an eye at his men. "Go on. We eat. Feed this poor caballero who has lost five hundred dollars. He'll tell us about it."

"Not lost, Captain; it can be found. It'll pay for my dinner, eh?" McDade grinned and turned to his horse. "I'll unsaddle, and we'll talk as we eat."

His perfect coolness carried off the thing well. McDade was cool; he had to be cool. This outfit was bad. These men were killers.

McDade adjusted himself accordingly. He lugged off his saddle, seated himself on it, ate and drank and talked with a right good will. The Mexicans were curious, amused, not at all threatening; however, the menace remained clear enough.

He told his story, or the story he chose to tell—close to the truth, except that Don Luis had taken his five hundred dollars.

"Then I clipped him over the head and made off," concluded McDade. "That's all. A bit more of that coffee, caballeros? It is excellent. I thank you."

The courtesy of the Spanish tongue on his lips charmed them. But El Tigre, having digested the story, scowled blackly and rumbled an oath of fury.

"Don Luis, eh? That was the paltry little sneak-thief who calls himself the Falcon. And at San Tomas, on the road yonder? Caramba! It was agreed that he'd keep to the low country. This is my territory. Thunders of heaven, but I'll get my claws into him!"

"And get back the five hundred," suggested McDade. "If I must lose it, I prefer that it go in payment for an excellent meal, rather than to a lying rascal."

El Tigre, for all his bulk, had energy enough. Now he fairly exploded with sharp orders and commands.

"Dieguito, Miguel, Juan Chico! You have heard. Ride hard for the road; better take two other men with you. Read the sign. One of you come back and tell me whether this man has lied. The others wait for this accursed Falcon—use your rifles.

"Bring him back here—no, wait! I'll strike him myself. Go, bring back news of him, and see how many men are with him. Ride! No mistake or I'll nail your ears to a tree."

The men scattered briskly. They went streaming away, fast as they could saddle and mount. One remained here, with the captain; a guard, his rifle close. McDade weighed the chances of action, and found them poor.

It was, he told himself, a regular comic-opera situation; but there was nothing comic about it. His earlier judgment, that these men were killers, was good. El Tigre had a .45 under his hand, and it was cocked. He gave McDade a level look.

"Americano, you don't look like a liar. I don't like liars. I don't miss my siesta

for anyone; so make yourself comfortable but don't try to get away."

"I didn't come to stay," said McDade. "I'll wait till your men come back with proof of my story, then I'm off."

"Perhaps, perhaps not," said El Tigre. "You're in a hurry?"

"Yes. I have to cross the Border and kill a man."

El Tigre's frown cleared. He could understand this sort of talk.

"Spoken honestly. If all is as you say, you shall go with us, see the end of this upstart Falcon, and then be free to go on. Make yourself comfortable. Ortiz! If the Americano comes within twenty feet of you or does anything suspicious, kill him."

The assent of the guard floated back. El Tigre tossed away his cigarette and went into the long shack, for his siesta.

McDade suppressed his curses and his facial muscles, rolled himself a smoke, and made the best of the matter. His ruse had worked better than he could have hoped, and with luck he would be on his way shortly.

The gold in his slicker was safe enough. His apparent frankness had been saving recourse, but he was not deceived; in El Tigre he faced a creature of savage humor, a beast ruthless, greedy, suspicious. If he tried any kind of a break, he would be run down by men who knew every trail and water hole.

MCDADE, sticking close to his rig, stretched out in the shade and dozed. Over the sierras massed the thunderheads. Every now and again a long roll was heard, a flash of lightning swept the eastern sky. But the sun remained bright and hot; the clouds were creeping up, but there would be no rain until night, perhaps.

An hour passed, and more. Then the pound of horses' feet shook the sand. The guard called out alertly. El Tigre appeared, yawning. McDade roused him-

self up, came to his feet, then sat down again on his saddle at one side. Three men were riding in; two of them El Tigre's men. The third, between them, was Jose Largo, the match-thin vaquero of the one eye. And his one eye rolled about most uneasily as he was dismounted and led to the bandit chief. He cast a glance at McDade, looked startled, but said nothing.

El Tigre questioned him. Jose gave his name and job; yes, he had been with the Falcon that morning. He had been pressed into service as a guide.

"Don't lie, hombre," said El Tigre, "and you'll not be harmed. Did this accursed Falcon rob the Americano, yonder?"

"Yes, yes," said Jose quickly. "And more; *mucho oro*, Captain! He would not divide the money with us. I left him."

"Sounds honest," commented El Tigre. "How much gold has the Falcon?"

"I do not know, caballero. He had five hundred dollars; he said it was payment to kill the Americano, here. I think it was money he took from the Americano. He is not honest with his own men, this Don Luis."

"But I'm honest with mine," and El Tigre chuckled. "Where is the Falcon now?"



"His head is hurt. The Americano hit him. He's camped at the Ojo Hondo, the Deep Spring, until morning."

"He'll be in hell with morning," said

El Tigre. "Hombre, you may go. You're free. If you've lied to me, I'll come to the Rancho de los Alamos and cut off your ears. Go!"

The one-eyed rascal, whose confession in regard to the Falcon's gold had borne out McDade's story well enough, departed in all haste. El Tigre swaggered over to McDade, with a grin.

"You stick close to that saddle of yours, *Americano!* Anything hidden in it?"

"Hidden? Lord, no! Look for yourself," and McDade shrugged. "It's old and it fits me, and I don't want to lose it. Well, you know now that I told you the truth?"

"Yes." El Tigre glanced at the saddle and turned away. "You shall go with us; you shall see how I treat these petty thieves who dare to challenge me! And then you may go free. Not until I have the gold, however. Saddle your horse. Ho, my brave ones! Mount and ride!"

SO McDade rode out of camp, with his reins made fast to the lines of a guard and sharp eyes watching him.

Upon reaching the road, two more of the band were waiting, with word that the final two had gone on to scout the Ojo Hondo. The Falcon was camped there with five men, no more. El Tigre showed a flash of white teeth through his beard, in a snarl of delight.

"Good! We catch them at the supper fires. Forward!" And to McDade, with a grin, "Ha, *Americano!* It is on your way to the Border, so all is well."

McDade was resigned. He knew when to take chances and when not. There was a look in El Tigre's eye that he did not half like. Also, he was puzzled why Jose Largo had left the Falcon's band, without his constant companion, the swart, pock-marked Juan Tonto.

They rode on, by a gradually descending trail. As the sun lowered, the masses of clouds banked higher across the sky,

black and ominous. Mile after mile fell behind. McDade talked now and then with his guard, questioning him about the roads, and as the fellow spoke freely, he soon learned all he needed to know about his way home.

A man appeared in the road ahead, afoot—one of the last two scouts. When the party reached him, he spoke rapidly. El Tigre turned, with a swing of his hand to the man guarding McDade.

"Wait here with him. Watch him; do not be afraid to shoot. Everyone else, with me! Forward!"

The whole party swung off at a canter, rounded a bend of the canyon road, and were lost to sight. McDade glanced at his guard, who grinned and fingered his rifle.

"Careful, *amigo*. You're a good fellow, I'd be sorry to kill you."

"No need," grunted McDade. "How far is that Ojo Hondo?"

"Half a mile. When we hear the shooting, we can go forward."

The wait seemed interminable. McDade cared nothing about the outcome of the raid; let these rascals kill off one another and welcome. His one concern lay in getting clear, away and ahead of the storm, back to Shank's outfit and Shank.

A rumble of thunder, a flash overhead, and the horses jumped. Almost on the heels of this sounded the metallic reverberation of a rifle-shot. Then a whole burst of shots, a dozen more in ragged succession, and silence. The guard chuckled.

"Come! We can go now, *señor*. They were caught napping."

McDade sent his horse forward.

They came down into a widening of the valley, where was a small spring and big cottonwoods around it. McDade found his estimates of the Tigre's men justified. Here was ruthless work, a clean sweep of bullets. Five men lay dead as they had been caught between campfire and horses. The Falcon's party

wiped out to a man; but no sign of the squat Juan Tonto among the five.

The Falcon himself stood between two captors, before El Tigre. Still jaunty, Don Luis flashed a glance at McDade, then looked again at El Tigre and shrugged to a curt question. In both hands, El Tigre was juggling fat gold pieces, then pocketed them all.

"To be shared with my good men," said he. "The sum is correct; five hundred good dollars. Where is the rest?"

The Falcon looked blank. "The rest? That's all."

"You lie," said El Tigre, and gestured to his men. "Turn him loose. You're free to go. Take a horse and depart."

The two men stood away, obediently. Don Luis turned white under his bronze, then thumbed his little mustache, smiled jauntily, and started away. He must have known what was coming. McDade had no suspicion—until El Tigre whipped out his .45 and fired twice, with lightning rapidity.

Don Luis crumpled up.

"So! One rascal the less," El Tigre declared, while yells of applause broke from his men. McDade, a little sickened, repressed his sentiments. El Tigre turned to him, with a flash of teeth through beard. "Ha! Americano, you've paid for your dinner. The accounts are clear. You're an honest man. Come! I'll ride down the canyon a little way with you myself, and set you on your road."

A growl of thunder broke from the clouds overhead, but no lightning. The air was heavy, oppressive, close.

"You're kind—perhaps too kind," McDade said, as El Tigre's horse was brought up. In those slumbrous yet fiery eyes he read strange things. "Perhaps you're aiming to give me the same dose you gave him?"

El Tigre broke into a laugh. "Nonsense! You're a friend, a good friend; I owe you much."

"Then, my gun and belt, if you please."

"No hurry." El Tigre swung up into the saddle, and waved one hairy paw at his men. "Comrades, take care of the supper on the fire; don't let the meat burn. I'll be back in half an hour. Ready, Americano? Come along, then."

And he led the way back to the road.

McDade followed, wary, suspicious, yet seeing no reason for suspicion. The men waved and shouted farewell as to a good comrade. If El Tigre had wanted to murder him, it would have been done already, he reflected, and plucked up heart as he sent his horse after the bandit chief.

In the road, El Tigre waited for him with a wide grin, and fell in alongside.

"I must point out the way, señor," said he amiably, "for just below here the roads come together and you might lose your trail. That would be a pity, with storm coming on. But, with luck, you can be on the lower road before dark, and then all's clear."

McDade, who knew already of the crossroads ahead, uttered a word of thanks.

"Bah! It is nothing. Once I worked across the Border, on an American ranch," El Tigre said, and gave him a sharp, sweeping look. Also, kept hand on gun.

"Yes?" said McDade, wary and watchful.

The other chuckled. "But yes. I became acquainted with the ways of American vaqueros. Ha! Well, here is a good sum to divide with my honest riders, a good sum! But it would be better if I had more gold that did *not* have to be divided with them." El Tigre grinned again. "You comprehend, Americano?"

McDade felt a cold chill up his spine.

"No, I don't get you," he said. "What are you driving at?"

The gun jerked up in the hands of El Tigre, just as another rumble and rattle of thunder swept the black clouds.

"Eh? Why, my good friend, at you!

Come, listen to me! You see that it is going to storm? Well, I have no poncho. You would not see me ride wet this night? Assuredly not. Hand over your slicker, then; I think it'll be so valuable that in return for it I'll bid you go with God! You're an honest man, caballero. Quick!"

In the mocking words, in the wide grin, in the deadly eyes, McDade read the truth. El Tigre had guessed his secret, had waited until this moment, wanted the gold for himself alone. No jumping this intent, greed-crazed man!

Thus, under menacing gun, McDade saw he had lost his play.

"All right, damn it," he grunted.

V

THE setting sun was brilliant, flooding the far western sky with gold, but overhead the black massed clouds rolled close along the hills, growling mutters threatening to burst loose at any instant.

With ill grace, McDade twisted about in the saddle and fumbled at the straps holding the slicker roll.

"So you did lie to me after all!" observed El Tigre with relish. "Yes; I thought you held that old saddle very precious, caballero. I begin to see the truth. You had the money for the cattle. That accursed Falcon had the money paid him to kill you; just as that one-eyed vaquero said. So you tried to make another man pay for your dinner, eh? Well, it doesn't go, *amigo*. Come closer—hand it over! That's right."

With the cold-blooded murder of Don Luis fresh in mind, McDade had no choice.

The slicker came free; but as it did so, as McDade was in the act of handing it over, the heavy little package in the roll slipped out. It fell to the road and burst—a package wrapped in old newspaper. Not the neat handkerchief-wrapped roll of money McDade had put there.

It fell behind the two horses, which were side by side. There broke to view, not double eagles, but a little mass of worthless metal, iron junk of all kinds. El Tigre sighted it. Wrath rose in his bearded face, a bellow came to his lips.

"*Caramba!* You have tricked me, you damned Americano—"

His gun jumped up. Desperate, McDade tossed the slicker full into the bearded face, and ducked low. At the same instant a frightful burst of lightning rent the whole sky; a crackling, sizzling thunderbolt which seemed to wrench the very heavens apart. The two horses jumped in a frantic plunge, and smashed together.

Whether the gun exploded, McDade did not know; that crepitation drowned out everything. With the plunge, he was unseated. Already he was at El Tigre's throat; he had that massive beard in one hand, the other was reaching for the gun, found it. The hammer came down on his thumb and spurred him with frantic agony. He was clear out of his saddle now, hanging to El Tigre, pulling him down.

Another plunge of the frightened horses. The two men went rolling in the dust, the two horses leaped and went careening away down the road at full gallop.

The shock of the fall tore McDade's hand loose from the gun-grip, tore the flesh of his thumb, but freed his hand. For one mad instant the two rolled and struck, grappled, twisting and writhing. The gun slammed McDade over the eyes and blinded him, dazed him.

Then his groping hand clutched at a rock. He gripped it and smashed home one terrific blow. A low, gasping cry burst from El Tigre, and he relaxed. The jagged bit of rock had struck him squarely over the temple.

It killed him instantly.

McDade, gasping for breath, found his feet and looked down at the dead man.

He sucked the torn flesh of his thumb; it was hard to realize that so chancy a blow had killed this huge animal. But El Tigre was dead, and he was free. Free! And left afoot.

This fact, with all it implied, drove in upon him slowly. He stooped, took the gun-belt and gun, examined it, found it had been fired once. During that splitting thunder-crash, no doubt; the fling of his slicker had saved him from that bullet. He picked up the slicker again. Then, stooping, he examined the body of El Tigre and rose with the money taken from Don Luis. Five hundred dollars—gold. The blood money paid for his murder. The money borrowed from the Chinese cook.

McDade pocketed them, and considered. He could see straight down the canyon road for some distance; no sign of the horses. He grimaced uncomfortably at thought of being thus afoot in his high-heeled boots, with storm and night at hand, with certain pursuit from El Tigre's men sooner or later. Before morning he must be far from here if he valued life.

The crossroads must be just below. There lay his way to the lower country and the Border. Better get off while daylight lasted. He looked again at the bit of newspaper and the pile of junk in the road.

"Ribbed me!" he thought angrily, as he started off at a swinging stride, intent upon covering as much ground as possible. "And they did it neatly, too!"

Everything was clear enough now. The past night in San Tomas, the sudden summons, the fight between Jose Largo and Juan Tonto. A fake fight, of course. That slick one-eyed Jose had kept him talking, while the squat Juan had slipped out to the courtyard and stolen the roll of gold, replacing it with this junk.

McDade strode on, with fresh anger and comprehension. The two rascals had not told Don Luis of their cunning

stroke. That was all their own business. They had slipped away and left Don Luis at the first opportunity—this was why El Tigre's men had found the one-eyed Jose alone and had brought him in. They must have searched him, also, and had found nothing.

"So Juan Tonto has the gold, eh? And done got clear away with it," thought McDade as he walked. "Damn! I'll have blisters on my feet sure, before morning. But I got to keep going. And if I ever run into that squat, pock-marked Juan Tonto again, I'll sure as fate plug him first and talk later!"

A turn in the canyon below, a widening. Hope quickened in him that he might find one or both of the horses. As he plodded around the bend in the fading daylight, this hope died.

Brush enough, a wide flat, the cross trail cutting this main road. He must turn off here for the lower country. But no horse. The first drizzle of rain was sweeping down at his back. He donned the slicker, with an oath of disgust.

Here was the cross trail. Not inviting, so thick was the brush hereabouts on the flat; a small, rough trail. It was the right one for him, however, as he had learned. He turned off to the left, only to come to sudden halt, listening, alert.

FROM behind him, somewhere up this cross trail, came the nicker of a horse. From dead ahead, down this cross trail, came a plunge in the brush. Hurriedly, McDade shrank aside, took to cover. A horse and rider broke into the road just ahead, and he recognized them. It was the one-eyed Jose Largo. The man had been concealed here—why?

As McDade crouched, the answer came to him, with full explanation.

Jose Largo halted in the trail, not twenty feet from McDade, peering and blinking. His carbine was out, was held over his saddle. Suddenly he swung down to the dust, took his horse quickly

aside into the brush, across the way from McDade, and tethered the animal. Then, rifle in hand, he stepped into the trail again. From up the road came another nicker, a jingle, the sound of hoof-beats.

It was Juan Tonto who came riding down this cross-trail, and who pulled up short at sight of Jose Largo. The latter spoke, mockingly.

"Well, well! It is no other than that excellent caballero Juan Tonto! As I thought. There are just so many trails, caballero; not many of them, in these hills. You had not come this way. There was no sign in the trail. Therefore, you must come sooner or later. I was right, eh? You are glad to see me?"

"Why not?" Juan Tonto made reply. "We are friends. We are comrades—"

"Liar!" spat out the man afoot. "You kept all the gold. You slipped away, you thought I would not catch you, you said we'd divide the money later—smart fellow!"

"The money is safe. Half of it is yours," said Juan Tonto. His broad, pock-marked features showed gathering terror.

"Indeed!" sneered the other. "All of it is mine, do you understand?"

"No, no!" A scream broke from Juan Tonto. "*Madre de Dios!* Listen to me—I tell you—"

The rifle of Jose Largo smashed out.

Juan Tonto was flung out of the saddle as his frightened horse turned and bolted. Not that it mattered; he lay inert, shapeless, dead. Rain was spotting the dust, the last light in the west was dying out, evening and storm were at hand.

The one-eyed Jose paused to reload his rifle. Then he swung around, as the brush crackled a little. His one eye widened in utter amazement at sight of McDade.

"Up!" snapped the American. "I don't aim to kill you, but—"

Jose Largo had tasted blood. Perhaps

he did not see the gun in McDade's hand. A snarling oath burst from him. He crouched and flung his rifle up—

McDade fired. The detonation seemed to unloose a rolling mutter of thunder that spread and spread in a low growl across the sky. Jose Largo fell forward on his face and lay motionless.

"Bloody gold!" said McDade, when he had recovered from the body of Juan Tonto the clinking gold-pieces Don Pancho had given him. "Bloody, every bit of it. Killing right and left—all but me, the one supposed to be killed. Well, I guess I'd better be ambling along."

He went to the tethered horse, patted the animal, noted that the saddle was new and excellent, and with a grunt swung up. He headed the horse down the trail, down toward the lower country and the Border. A sweep of rain came down from the sierras, a flash of lightning ripped the black sky asunder. McDade gathered his slicker more closely around him, felt the sagging weight of gold in his pockets, and grinned.

He was bound at last for his meeting with John Shank.

VI

NOON. A hot and sultry noon in a burned-out country.

Now no cows bawled along the troughs and fence as McDade rode up to Shank's outfit and dismounted. As when he had come before, the hatred of twenty years rose in his heart; added to it, this time, was the grim thought of that murderous bribe.

McDade sent his horse with a slap toward the troughs where water trickled. From the back door bobbed out the figure of John, the Chinese cook, waving a hand in recognition. McDade nodded, then turned away and sought the front door.

This time he did not call out. He swung open the door and strode in,

heading for the bedroom. Long days had passed; perhaps Shank was on his feet



now, up and around. But no. At the bedroom door, McDade paused, and sighted the gray old buzzard still in bed as before. Grayer now than ever, grayer and more withered.

"You!"

The gasping word broke from Shank. His talon fingers clawed emptily at the sheet, as though clawing at a gun.

"Me. Alec McDade's son," said McDade grimly.

Shank half raised up in bed.

"No, no! You're dead!" he croaked out. "Go away and don't come back!" McDade smiled.

"Yeah? You wish I were dead, don't you? Hired that feller to see that I was dead. Well, he's the one that's dead. So, John Puett, thought I didn't know you under the name o' Shank, huh?"

McDade's voice was cold, level, monotonous. It had the driving insistence of a drum-beat, repeated over and over. A mortal pallor stole into the unlovely stubbled face of the old man.

"I knew you, all right," went on McDade. "I'd run you down before I ever got here. Yeah, I come to get a settlement out o' you for what you done to my dad. Remember? And now there's more. There's my own score to settle up, John Puett. Tried to have me killed, huh? Well, you failed. I done brought back your money myself—all of it. Payment for cows, and payment for killing

me. Every red cent. A thousand dollars in gold. Hear it clink, do you?"

The dull clink of gold came from his pockets.

John Shank tried to speak. His mouth opened, but no sound came forth. He stared at McDade, made frantic motions with his thin talons—and suddenly he collapsed, fell back on the dirty pillows, uttering an incoherent sound.

"You don't need to beg," said McDade in contempt. "I ain't killing an old man, not even an old buzzard like you. I meant to do it, all right, but you're safe. I ain't that kind; your kind. Go on and live out your dirty old life for all o' me—hey! What's the matter?"

His demand came sharply. He stepped forward. Shank's eyes had closed all of a sudden, his fingers had fallen quiet. McDade came to the bedside and touched him, then stepped back.

John Puett was dead. The old life had flickered out.

With a grimace, McDade drew up the sheet over that gray stubbled face. He went out of the room and headed for the kitchen. The Chinaman was there, busy at the stove, and turned with a cheerful grin.

"Your master's dead," McDade said abruptly.

The yellow man blinked. McDade repeated his statement.

"Hear me? He's dead. Passed out while I was talking to him—"

A wail broke from the old Chinaman.

"Ai, ai! Fi' hunded dollah gone—you say mebbe you find—"

"There's your fi' hunded dollah," and with a grin, McDade emptied a pocket and sent a stream of gold pieces cascading on the table. "Take better care of it this time, John. So long."

And, with a clink of gold in his other pocket, he headed out for his horse and away. His errand here was finished.

*Who Knows What Goes on inside a Chinese Head? Perhaps
the Reader Can Out-guess the Inhabitants of the
Head-hunter Island of Singing Sands*



YELLOW HEADS

By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

Author of "South Seas Slickers," "Trade Heads," etc.

"DIDN'T you know that this island is full of dangerous head hunters before you built your hotel here?" I asked Wyatt.

"I don't scare wuth a damn about head hunters," said Wyatt across his zinc bar. "I been open six months now, and all I've seen is a couple of dark-complected boys that run into the jungle when they seen me coming."

I shook my head. Wyatt was a tough New Englander who had been in the South Seas for more than thirty years. He arrived as cook's boy in a brig and took French leave from it in New Guinea.

He knew more than I did about the latitudes, but I happened to know a lot about the wild hillmen of Singing Sands Island.

"They'll hang your head up, nicely smoked, in a jungle head house away up the Mawa River," I told him.

"Oh, shucks!" Wyatt snorted. "Mebbe they would be dangerous to some people. I ketch one of 'em around here that pulls any funny business I'll put a charge of shot in him that'll cut him in two. That ought to be a powerful lesson to both pieces of him."

His leathery face grinned at me. He was a tall, lean and shambling man who had played his native shrewdness against

the chicane of the Chinese in the islands and had made money by out-thinking them. Not a hard job for a New Englander, if he puts his mind on the problem.

"You may not have any trouble," I told him, "but it'll be bad for your business if some of your guests lose their heads."

"Just so long as they ain't in debt to me, I won't mind. And I'll take eight dollars."

"I don't owe you eight dollars yet."

"You will by the time you ketch that schooner out of here. If things are as bad as you say from head hunters and all, you might as well pay in advance." Wyatt turned loose a new grin on me.

"You've the Cape Cod knack of collecting money ahead of time," I told him—and paid him the eight dollars.

"My clock's full of future, Mister. It's up to you to live up to the future."

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, Wyatt. I've seen the future stop short on more than one man around here. The hillmen came down and did a good job. I was here when a Chink named Jim Sing had a bamboo hotel on this very spot. Ever hear of him?"

WYATT lit a long cigar from Java and squinted one eye at me over the rising smoke ribbon. "Mebbe I did. I don't pay much attention to Chink names."

"The hillmen burned his hotel—and took his head. I was here the night it happened. I shot a few of the head hunters in what's your front yard."

"That Chink wa'n't a Cape Codder, was he?"

"No. Even if the beaches do look pretty and the sand plays tunes when the wind comes from the right point, this island's a slaughter house. You'll find it out one of these days."

"Yair. I heard tell of some of them things you mention. But I built the hotel

here just the same. There ain't much trade in the place—seen a month when nobody showed up. Besides, what you talk about was before we had police on this island."

"Police! What do you mean, police on this island?" I had arrived at midnight the night before in a copra schooner, and had slept until nearly noon.

"Oh, you don't need to be scairt. You don't look like you pinched somebody's watch. Yair, we got a police force. Major Swift sent a sergeant over from Lantu Vanna to kind o' keep my courage up. Like you say, the major warned me about this island. So Sergeant Stafford stays at the hotel here with me, and runs back and forth with the coast guard cutter. It comes in tomorrer mornin', and he'll be runnin' across. This Stafford, he used to be a hoss soldier in the army. I've seen him bury a dime in a coconut tree at a hundred yards with one of them big pistols he carries, and didn't look twice at the sight while doin' it."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone down to the mouth of the Mawa River to have a look around. He does a lot of moochin' around. Head hunters, hell! The sergeant, intends to collect 'em alive and sell 'em to a circus back home. You take one look at him, and you won't lose no sleep about head hunters."

I picked up the gin and bitters that Wyatt shoved across the bar to me. Mosquitoes had bitten me the night before and I took no chances. Wyatt took off his bar apron and came round to the dining tables and began dusting the vinegar bottle in the revolving pewter cruet. Tiffin was nearly due.

"What was that music I heard this morning — or what was intended for music?"

Wyatt put a hand on hip, crossed a foot, and leaned with the other hand on a table. "You hear that? 'Bout daylight, wa'n't it?"

"Just about. I thought it was a native, but you've got no natives living nearby in the jungle—or have you?"

"That was Lun Kee, my bar Chink and general handy man. I call him Lunky. Nice a heathen as I ever had 'round. Plays the flute."

"You mean he's learning to play the flute, by the sounds that woke me up."

"He can play pretty good when he puts his mind to it. Trouble is, he's learnin' some new Chink tune lately, and ain't got it licked. Bogs down right at the start. I wish to hell he'd learn it. Just tweedle-tweedle-dee-dee and a few more tweedles. I know how it is when a tune bothers. I used to play the slide trombone back in Cape Cod. Some tunes just won't come till they're ready—and by that time the neighbors are out of their heads."

"Then I heard somebody fixing something with a file on the back veranda."

WYATT took his long cigar from his mouth, licked it carefully, and gripped it again with his teeth. "That'd be Hesh sharpenin' his fish spear. Skipped a limejuicer tramp couple o' months back and has gone to work for me ketchin' turtles for soup and shell. I make a little on the side with the shell. But Sergeant Stafford don't know that Hesh deserted a British ship, so keep your lip buttoned." Wyatt turned and wiped the horse radish bottle.

A thin-faced little Chinese came in. He looked anywhere from sixty to eighty years old. He had not cut his queue, but wore it wrapped on top of his head, and his spindle shanks were tightly wrapped half way to his knees, while his balloon blue trousers and blue blouse gave him the aspect of a fat man walking about on thin stilts.

"Lunky," said Wyatt, "fill up the water jug from the spring and see about fetchin' tiffin." Lun Kee gave me a glance from his tiny black eyes, took a bamboo

conical hat from a hook, got the water jug from the end of the bar, and trotted out to the back veranda to the cook house. As he passed me I saw the outline of a flute under one of his wide sleeves. Apparently, he had a special pocket there for his flute. Lun Kee stirred a memory in me which refused to come to the surface of my mind.

"I've seen that Chinese before somewhere, Wyatt—and he's seen me, I'd say, by the look he gave me."

But Wyatt did not answer promptly. He took a Malay gong from a nail in the braided wall, stepped to the front veranda, and clanged rapidly with the stick. An alarm clock roared from the cook house, telling of noon.

"Where have I seen Lun Kee?"

"Why, you might've seen him anywhere. He drifted in with a trepang boat while I was buildin' this hotel, and I hired him." But I knew that Wyatt was evading a complete answer. There was something under cover about Lun Kee. I surmized that he was a smuggler on the run from the law, and as in the case of Hesh, Wyatt saw an advantage in having in his employ men who were fugitives.



Then my memory leaped backward and I knew where I had seen Lun Kee before. "Say, that Chink worked here for Jim Sing who owned the first hotel here. Jim was burned out by head hunters—and lost his head!"

Wyatt slapped the table with his hand.

"By Godfrey, you got it! Chink names don't mean much to me, and I forget 'em quick. I knowed when you mentioned this Jim Sing that there was somethin' funny, but it didn't stick in my mind. Lun Kee's a cousin of some sort—about thuttythird on his mother's side—of that Jim Sing, and used to work here for Jim Sing. That's why I hired Lunky—he knowed the island."

I could have asked Wyatt if he did not also suspect that Lun Kee knew about big gold nuggets in the upper reaches of the Mawa River on the island—also that Jim Sing had traded tin hatchets to the hillmen for gold. And Lun Kee should know that the method of trading with the dangerous head hunters was to leave a couple of hatchets on a stump in the jungle behind the hotel, wait until daylight, and pick up the nuggets left on the stump by the head hunters.

WYATT, I knew then, was evading my questions about Lun Kee because the hotel keeper was not in business for hotel profits. There was no money to be made by keeping a hotel on Singing Sands Island, for except as a haven in bad weather for trading vessels, there was no reason for anybody going there.

Occasionally, as in my case, a man left one vessel and waited for another at the island only because there was a hotel to provide shelter. Wyatt was there because he wanted to get Mawa River gold, and he believed that Lun Kee knew how to turn the trick. Without doubt, Wyatt lied when he said that Lun Kee drifted in with a trepang boat, the fact being that Wyatt built his hotel after Lun Kee claimed that he could get head hunter gold. And Hesh was probably in the game, for as a fugitive because he had run away from a ship, the secret would be safe with him.

Naturally, the police sergeant sent over to the island by Major Swift, would not

know what was going on. Not that trading with the hillmen was a crime, but that gold coming out of Singing Sands Island would be subject to some tax—probably a mining tax—and Wyatt would not want prospectors swarming down on him. As I had long since abandoned attempts to get Mawa River gold, I did not care what Wyatt did. But it would be interesting to observe what was going on while I waited for a schooner to take me to Australia.

I saw Lun Kee leave the cook house with his jug. A few minutes later I heard the peculiarly high and thin notes of a flute in the jungle—an attempt at what must have been a bar of Chinese music, if the Chinese have bars. Before any tune came, the flute stopped abruptly.

"He kind of slipped there on the alto," said Wyatt, grinning. "Flopped again. I can tell, even if I don't know heathen music. He thought he'd try to ketch it while he waited for the water to run into his jug at the spring. I could do better myself on a bull fiddle. Trouble is, Chinks got no business monkeyin' with music. If they was to learn somethin' Christian, like Marchin' Through Georgy, f'r instance, they'd get somewheres and maybe make some money out of it. As it is, Lun Kee just makes a noise like Zeb Atlee's melodeon back in Cape Cod when he used to try and play hymns of a Monday mornin', soberin' up after Sunday."

I read an old newspaper while Wyatt put a clean tablecloth on in honor of my presence. He had barely put the revolving cruet stand back into place when I heard something that made the back of my head crinkle and my spine chilled.

The low, dull reverberations of head hunters' drums in the hills shook the air! But there was no alarm in the drums, only a lazy gossiping, as if to warn the white men down on the far beach that there were listeners in the hills.

"Sounds as if they're answering your

gong—or Lun Kee's flute," I said to Wyatt.

He cocked a shrewd eye at me, then turned his head to listen. He heard the gentle distant thrumming, then turned to me again. "You don't mean, do you, that Lun Kee talks to them hellions in the hills with his flute?"

I laughed. "Only one of my fool jokes, Wyatt." But I could have added that I would be willing to bet a small sum at good odds that either the gong or the flute cautioned the hillmen that there were strangers at the hotel—or that the policeman was walking around on the beach and should be avoided.

LUN KEE was back in the cook house, by the gabble from that quarter. There was a Chinese cook and his apprentice in the place, and they had a lot to say to Lun Kee—or he was telling them the history of China. Wyatt wandered across the onion garden to see about how the tiffin tray was coming along.

I was looking out through the open *ka-jang*. I was startled to see two figures approaching—one in khaki shorts and helmet, and beside him a brown man in only a bark loin cloth with long hair. A hillman! A young head hunter—and the glint of sun on nickel at the wrists of both policeman and native, told me that the native was handcuffed to Sergeant Stafford!

Wyatt ran out of the cook house as Stafford passed. "How'd you ever come to ketch him?" demanded the hotel man.

"Just stepped on him by accident. He was hiding in the grass to blow-gun me." Then I saw that Stafford was trailing after him the long shaft of a *sumpitan*, or blow-gun.

"Well, the son-of-a-gun!" said Wyatt. "Layin' for you, hey?"

"Sure! Didn't know anything was wrong until I took a short cut across a point of jungle down near the river

mouth. Turned in from the beach, and walked into half a dozen of these chaps. Surprised 'em so that they cut and run, but this one was under grass, and as I say, I stepped on his back—and got the shackles on him quick."

They walked to the back veranda. Stafford unlocked one cuff on the native, passed it around a big bamboo stanchion, and locked the cuff again to his prisoner. The chain connecting the cuffs thus held the man shackled to the stanchion.

He was a youngster of about eighteen, with long hair reaching to his middle, and hanging to his back a sennit basket—used for carrying home freshly taken heads. As his back was to me I could not determine by tattoo marks on his chest whether he had ever taken a head. He seemed dazed, and squatted on his heels when Stafford walked in to the bar with Wyatt, but I saw no signs of fright in the captive.

Wyatt introduced me to the young sergeant. He was a lean and keen young man with gray eyes and a strong chin, straight as a lance, and inclined to grin. He had the walk and legs of a cavalryman and I remembered that Wyatt had said the policeman had been a "hoss soldier."

"Well, Sergeant, you had a lucky escape," I said.

He took off his helmet and hung it on a hook, hitched up his pistol belt—he wore a pair of heavy automatics—and sat at the table. "Yeah!" he said. "This time, I did. What's for chow, Wyatt?"

"Bacon and eggs, now that Lun Kee's got chickens. Cold beer to start you off with." Wyatt brought a bottle.

"There's a blow-gun arrow in your helmet, Sergeant. They must have taken at least one shot at you."

"Sure!" he said. "Just missed my phiz. But I don't pay much attention to them thorn points with a bit of pith on 'em—they don't do no harm."

"You'd've been dead in fifteen minutes if that thorn point had scratched your skin."

He pulled the arrow out of his helmet. "That kill me? I've seen 'em before. I was a pin cushion full of 'em once in the northern islands."

"Not with arrows with that bluish stain on 'em—and these are not northern islands. You might have been shot at up there by a bunch of natives who happened to be out of poison for their arrows at the time."

"He missed me, anyhow," said the sergeant, reaching for the beer brought by Wyatt.

"What'll you do with the prisoner?"

"Take him in the cutter in the morning to Major Swift just to show him I can bring 'em in. Major'll likely try to talk to him, tell him we don't want to hurt anybody, and we don't want anybody to hurt us white folks here. Then I'll bring him back and turn him loose so he can pass the word to his people that we're not so bad as we look—but can get 'em when we feel like it."

WYATT gave me a triumphant eye. "Told you that the sergeant ain't scared none by head hunters."

"Any prospectors been here looking for gold?" I asked—and kept an eye on Wyatt to see how he would take the question.

Wyatt stiffened and answered the question himself. "What gold?"

"Gold out of the river."

"Oh, that! Yes, I guess there's gold up there—if you go far enough to get to the sandy part of the river. Anyhow, the river's full of gold to hear some folks talk about it."

"I'd like to see somebody that got gold out of the upper Mawa," said Stafford. "Maybe can do—but with a few thousand head hunters on your tail coming back—me no want."

I did not feel inclined to tell them

that I had seen plenty of Mawa River gold, most of it being there yet, but I had established to my satisfaction that if Lun Kee was getting gold for Wyatt, then Sergeant Stafford was not aware of it.

Then I shot up out of my chair. A drum, not far away in the jungle, spoke. It was in the direction of the Mawa mouth, where the sergeant had taken his prisoner. A sharp swift clatter that made a report to the hills, telling of the loss of a man from the head party. Then silence for a minute. Presently the hills answered—a fury of drumming, and again silence.

"They'll likely be down on us," I said, and sat again.

"Let 'em come," said Wyatt. "I guess we can handle 'em."

"They know better than to pull anything around here," said Stafford.

I was about to make some trifling remark on the situation when I heard Lun Kee's flute—and the same notes of that tune which seemed to baffle him. There was a double burst of drumming from the hills, as if in answer to Lun Kee. Perhaps those strident notes from the flute did carry vibrations to the hills—or the answering drum was not so far away as I assumed.

Wyatt stepped to the back veranda. "Hey, you stop that tootin', and fetch that tiffin tray, or you'll eat that flute ahead of your noon rice! Git goin'!"

Lun Kee made no answer. But I saw the twinkle of blue of his blouse as he ran from the jungle to the cook house.

Then I caught sight of a strange figure coming up through the palm grove from the distant beach, heading for the back of the hotel—a frail little man in faded dungarees carrying a long fish spear. I knew him at once for Hesh, the man who had run away from a British tramp, as related by Wyatt. And Hesh was wearing a conical bamboo splint hat, such as Lun Kee wore—a

coolie hat that looked like a giant candle extinguisher.

Hesh walked to the back verandah, with the prisoner, and stopped to stare in wonderment. "'Ullo!" he exclaimed. "'Wot we got 'ere? A blinkin' zoo! My solemn word, but the bobby in the Gypsy pants got a nytive!"

Lun Kee trotted down with his tiffin tray. He stopped with Hesh to stare. "No good business!" declared Lun Kee. "Him no catch him long time quick him maybe plenty dead. Hell-ee bell-ee!"

"Now listen here, Lunky!" yelled Wyatt. "You drift along in here with that chow, or I'll hell's bells you! And I'll do the Christian swearin' around here. Where in hell it is you pick up such language around here, beats me."

Lun Kee took it on the run, laid the tray on the bar, sorted the dishes, and served us. He did not seem to be bothered by Wyatt's reprimand.

"What's the matter, Lun Kee? You no likee if I catch man?" asked Stafford with a grin.

Lun Kee flared up. "Me no likee! Plenty bad business. No can do this! What for you want? You hang him up to be dead?"

"No," said Stafford. "Me no likee hang him—me likee more better hang Chinaman."

Lun Kee scowled at him. "No can hang Chinaman. Plenty big trouble job hang Chinaman, you see!"

"How'd you like to go back to China?"

Lun Kee froze. For an instant, I saw terror strike across his yellow and skinny face. "What you talk? What for me go back China?"

"I'll find out if you want me to," said Stafford. "Perhaps I could make it work." The sergeant was joking, but I knew that Lun Kee was really afraid of the idea that he might be shipped back to China—and a good bet that the law wanted him in his home town.

"You git that jug of fresh water that

you tootled out of the spring," said Wyatt. Lun Kee trotted to the cook house.

HESH came in, after washing up. I saw that two of his front teeth were gone. "'Ow'd you 'appen to pick up the black bloke outside, Sergeant?"

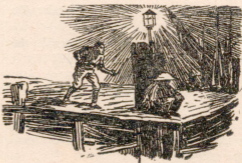
"Just by accident. Lun Kee thinks I'm going to hang him, and the Chink doesn't like the idea."

Hesh sat down and took the cover off his plate. "Them 'ead 'unters ain't no joke." But Stafford did not answer, for Wyatt turned on the radio set behind the bar and we ate to music from Australia. Lun Kee, coming back with his jug, filled an empty beer bottle with water, and gave it to the prisoner.

Stafford looked at his watch as Lun Kee came in, placed his jug, and began to move bottles about on the shelves of the bar as a pretense of working so Wyatt would not heed him.

"Tune in Lantu Vanna," said Stafford. "Time to pick up the police reports."

Wyatt turned the dial. We got the last of the government weather report, followed by code giving coast guard vessels private information, and code reports from the same vessels. Then came the voice of the man on duty at Major Swift's headquarters in Lantu Vanna.



"All constables on island patrols," it came in. "Constables and commanders of island patrols. Hold for vagrancy and deliver to these headquarters—hold for vagrancy deserter from British steamer

Foray Firth—name Hesh—Alfred Hesh—lampman, British subject—illegally in islands, left his vessel as deserter in vicinity of Singing Sands—Sergeant Stafford attention—arrest Alfred Hesh, seaman, wanted by British consulate, deliver Alfred Hesh to these headquarters.”

I looked at Hesh. His face was white and his body rigid. He stared with unseeing eyes at the radio set, a look of anguish frozen on his face.

Stafford laughed. “Too bad, Hesh. You’ll go for a boat ride with me in the morning with the cutter. You heard my orders, Limey—J’ve got to take you in.”

“Aw, hell!” exploded Wyatt. “He’s workin’ for me—and the British can’t touch him as long as he stays here. What if he did jump ship? Lot of us done the same.”

“Blarst the luck!” said Hesh faintly. “I’m just makin’ a go of it ’ere, and I’ve got to be took and put in a crimson jyle!” His eyes spouted tears, he threw his arms down across the table, dropped his head on them, and wept.

“Alle time you raise hell, catch ’em black feller no do bad, catch ’em white feller no do bad,” said Lun Kee, his black eyes from beyond the bar boring into Sergeant Stafford. And the Chinese spat bubbles as he spoke.

“You keep your head shut, Lunky!” said Wyatt.

“I’d send that Chink back to China for a dime,” said Stafford, but he winked at me, as if to hint that he was fierce only for official reasons.

“Now look here, Hesh,” said Wyatt. “Don’t you take this too hard. Major Swift’s a friend of mine—and he’ll fix things so you can come back. It’s just a process of law, anyhow.”

“Chuck it, Limey,” said Stafford. “I’ll give you a break. If I have to take you to a British consulate from headquarters, I can come this way with you—and you might get away from me around here.”

Lun Kee, I noted, listened, but I

doubted if he understood just what Stafford was driving at.

Hesh lifted his head. “I can’t go back to sea again. I ain’t got the stren’t’h. That’s wot they made me lampman for. But you can’t tell no blinkin’ consuls wot to do. So if I’m took to one, ’e’ll likely put me in jyle and back I go ’ome in a ship.” He got up and without bothering about a hat, walked down into the palm grove. We watched him walking about like a man in a dream, stopping now and then to wring his hands and stare at the sea.

“Tough luck,” I said. “Strikes me as a decent man. It’s a pity he can’t be left alone.”

“Best little man to get turtle shell I ever saw,” said Wyatt. “Most of these ship jumpers keep theirselves pickled with gin—but not Hesh. He’s always as sober as a judge on election day.”

LUN KEE, choking with indignation, trotted out to the back verandah, dug up some of his own lunch rice, and fed the prisoner, who was so surprised that he could barely take the rice from the spoon the Chinese thrust at his mouth.

Stafford rose. “Me for the big siesta,” he said. “I’ve been up poling around since midnight. Then drums last night kept me awake, and I wanted to have a look-see around.” He climbed the stairs to his room. Presently I heard his rattan bed creak as he turned in.

“This head hunter business just tires me out,” grumbled Wyatt. “You can all say what you like, but I don’t scare wuth a damn. And I’m sore to have to lose Hesh, the only man I ever had around that had any sprawl—outside of the Chinks.” He walked out to the front verandah, dropped into a reclining chair, and in a minute he was snoring.

I picked up the old newspaper and began to read. But I fell asleep myself. It was half an hour later that I was waked by a furtive rattling of a chain. The sound

must have meant danger, even while I was asleep. I opened my eyes. On the back verandah, just outside the kajang, I saw the bent figure of Lun Kee. He was fumbling with the handcuffs on the head hunter.

Before I realized what was happening the young prisoner bolted for the jungle and disappeared. Lun Kee turned nervously and looked at me, but I got my eyes shut so quickly that he did not know I was watching him. Through slitted lids I saw him shut the opened cuffs and put them down. With a key ring in his mouth, from which stuck a few keys, he took another glance at me, and padded away silently for the stairway. I heard him moving overhead in Stafford's room. Presently the Chinese sneaked down again and slipped over to the cook house. Then he and the cook gabbled—and laughed quietly.

I grinned and tried to go back to sleep. But before long I heard the notes of Lun Kee's flute in the jungle. It was not exactly the tune that he had been trying before—it broke on a high C, or what I took for that—and I realized that he was struggling with a new tune.

Wyatt began to swear on the front verandah. "I'm just all tangled up with a damned Chink band! Minute I try to ketch a nap, tweedledy-d-twee-twee-twee! Hell's bells!"

The floor above creaked. Stafford came down, face damp and hair sticky. "Coney Island snake charmers!" he declared.

"I'll charm him!" said Wyatt. He yawned and came into the bar with the sergeant. Then Stafford stared in astonishment as he saw his handcuffs at the bottom of the stanchion. "Gone!" he said.

"Gone?" I asked. "Must've been while I was asleep."

Stafford went out and examined the cuffs. "Must've slipped his hands through, somehow. But I had the cuffs tight on his wrists."

"Oh, well, what's the odds?" asked

Wyatt. "Good thing he did git away, or we'd had the tribes down on us tonight. Now we won't be bothered by the drums so much."

Stafford came in. He was thoughtful and perhaps a trifle suspicious. He threw the cuffs on the table and pulled his key chain forward to examine the ring. But as he found the key to the cuffs he was puzzled, as if while he was asleep, he had known vaguely that his key ring had been unsnapped from the chain. He unlocked the cuffs and stowed them into a leather-lined back pocket. Then he clapped on his helmet and went down into the palm grove to talk with Hesh.

Wyatt opened a bottle of beer. "Don't things work out funny," he said. "If that native hadn't got away, I might've argued the sergeant into leaving Hesh behind. Now that the native's gone, it's a case of take Hesh—because somebody's got to be nabbed when a cop gits a mad on hisself."

"He'll let Hesh come back," I soothed. "You send a note, and so will I, asking Major Swift to fix things. He might intercede with that British counsel to let the matter drop."

Wyatt nodded. "That'll be fine, if you'll put a word in for the major. He's all right—and so's Sergeant Stafford."

Presently Hesh came up from the grove alone. "So the nytive got away. More bad luck for me. The sergeant, he's got an idea, but he didn't say so, that I 'ad a 'and in lettin' that black go." He dropped into a chair, haggard and discouraged.

"Nonsense!" I said. "You were not here when it—"

Wyatt broke in with a harsh laugh. "You better keep quiet on that, or Stafford'll think that you wasn't asleep yourself, and had something to do with the business. Stafford's bound to ketch somebody, Hesh can't get away, and that's all there is to it."

"Right you are!" agreed Hesh heartily. "Damn bobbies, any'ow! They never give

a man any peace." He finished what was left in the bottle of Wyatt's beer.

I PUT on my hat and walked out, hoping to have a few words with the sergeant. But by the time I got down to the shore I saw him so far in the direction of the river that I did not follow him, but strolled among the palms.

I could not throw off the feeling that Wyatt was using Lun Kee to trade for native gold, and that Hesh was also useful. But I knew what was happening to me. The old fascination for the big nuggets up the river and the growth of that old greed was upon me. So I put it all out of my mind. Mawa gold had always meant for me the swift death of a friend. Up in the distant head houses there were many of the heads of my friends. I shivered a little at what I had already seen on the Mawa. But I would have bet with anybody just then that before I left the island I would be invited by Wyatt to stay and help him get gold.

It was late in the afternoon when I got back to the hotel. I saw a little flour bag tied up on a chair in the bar—Hesh's poor trifling possessions prepared so that he could leave early the next morning with the cutter.

But inside I found Hesh in good spirits. He was talking with Wyatt and laughing. "Thank you kindly, sir," Hesh said to me, "for wot you'll do with a note to Major Swift in my be'alf. Wyatt was tellin' me."

"I'll do what I can, Hesh. The result is up to Major Swift. I know him—and he's a most reasonable man and will go out of his way for his friends. And I'm glad you feel better about it. Go along with Sergeant Stafford—he's said he'd give you a break, and he will."

I went up to my room at sundown and asked Wyatt that my dinner be sent up. By that time Stafford was back, but I heard little talk among them below. Lun Kee came up with my tray. He was a

little too polite to suit me. I felt that he was deferential because he had some game up his sleeve along with his precious flute. There was a twist to his upper lip which itched to break out into a grin.

When he went down from my room, I heard Wyatt growling at the Chinese. "Don't you play that damned flute of yours, especially at night, within a mile of this place. I ain't runnin' no Chink music hall. I need sleep. You was tootin' around last night near the cook house. You take that flute to hell and gone down the beach until you've at least got the tune you're clawin' around for. I'd rather see you lose your head, flute and all, than for me to lose my mind listenin' at you. And another thing, you pick up that tune so it'll run, or give it up. Damned if you ain't got me tryin' it in my head. We got to have some damned peace around here, Lunky, or I'll raise hell."

"Can do, can do!" cried Lun Kee, eager to agree with Wyatt and put an end to the growling. He hurried away to the cook house.

Wyatt settled down to a game of dominoes with Sergeant Stafford. Hesh went to his room on the back verandah and began sharpening his fish spear with a file. It struck me as odd that a man who was to leave at dawn and might never come back should worry about how sharp his fish spear was. The file rasped at my nerves and I came down to sit on the front verandah and watch the moon rise.

AS THE sandy and coral dust of the beach turned white, and the palms and jungles turned black, I looked out upon a night of velvet and silver, with the moon pale gold and the bay's moon track like powdered copper. I could see nearly a mile of the beach in the direction of the Mawa River. I had seen men die on that beach from head hunter arrows. But with the gentle waves mur-

muring and the beach gleaming like a burnished boulevard and the soft rattle of the palm tops it was hard for me to realize that Singing Sands Island was dangerous.

I saw Lun Kee move down from the cook house toward the beach. He wore his conical hat, so there could be no doubt about the figure that walked into the moonlight. He followed a water line on the sand, and before long he was nearly a quarter of a mile away. Then I heard the plaintive notes of his flute. But this time he played a short tune.

I called inside to Wyatt. "You're going to lose that Chink if he runs around that beach at night. I've seen more than one man blow-gunned there."

"Them head hunters don't come down at night," said Wyatt. "Anyhow, they'll keep away as long as he's got his flute. They don't like Chink music any more than I do."

Lun Kee went farther away. He moved up from the shore to the shadowed edge of the jungle. Presently I could not see him, though I could see the beach far beyond the spot where he disappeared from my sight. But at intervals I could hear him play that tune, though the sound diminished with distance. I began to feel nervous.

"That Chinaman ought to come back," I said. "If he doesn't know the danger, I do, and—"

My words were cut by a shrill scream. It came from far down the beach but the bay water gave the voice of Lun Kee a chilling resonance.

I heard Hesh yell, "They've got the Chinkie!"

Lun Kee cried out again. It was a yell of terror that took the last bit of breath from his lungs. That scream stopped short.

Sergeant Stafford plucked his pistol belt from the wall and without stopping to open the buckle, slung the belt over his neck. He leaped past me and raced

into the shadows of the palms, one gun already out of a holster.

I saw Hesh run toward the beach, his fish spear under his arm. Another scream from Lun Kee interrupted the rapid thudding of Stafford's shoes over the hard sand and the stream of gurgling profanity from Hesh's gasping lips.

Wyatt came out to the front verandah, struggling with a long revolver that persisted in sticking in a dried leather holster.

"One more Chink head to hang up and dry—with a queue to hang it," I remarked.

"Where is he?" demanded Wyatt.



"Far up the beach." I pointed a hand at a black patch that was moving, or rather revolving, as a black silhouette against the white sand nearly a quarter of a mile away. I felt certain, by that moving group of which Lun Kee must be the center, that he had not been blow-gunned; instead the head hunters had dashed out of the jungle and seized him. He was giving them a fight, but I knew he would have no chance. Stafford would not get there in time. I could see him running swiftly, and Hesh not far behind.

Wyatt got the big revolver loose. I grabbed it from his hand, snapped open the cylinder and ran my thumb over the cartridge heads, and sure that it was loaded, dashed down the steps for the beach.

I HEARD a pistol shot and a yell from Stafford. As I glanced ahead, running as fast as I could, I saw the

gang of natives clearing out, some of them already making for the jungle, others going down the beach.

The next time I looked ahead there was but one figure visible against the background of the bright beach. The sand and coral dust laid in wind ruffles from shore to jungle, so the whole surface of the beach was not visible as a hard and flat moonlit plane.

When I looked again I recognized the lone figure as Hesh. He stood with his fish spear shoulder high, pointed at the jungle, his arm up ready for a thrust of the weapon.

"Where's Sergeant Stafford?" I yelled.

He did not turn to look at me. "Mind yourself, sir! The brush is fair crawlin' with 'em." His voice had a peculiar gurgling sound, as if sobs shook him while he called out.

Then before me, stretched on the sand, I came upon something which stopped me short.

It was a black and irregular pattern, and at the far end I saw the conical hat which Lun Kee wore when he left the cook house. I mistook the irregular object for Lun Kee's body, but it proved to be only his loose blue blouse. It was ripped down the back, and spread out as it was with the arms extended, from a few feet away it looked like a prone body—especially with that hat at what would be the head of an out-stretched man.

"Where's the sergeant?" I demanded again, a trifle bewildered at seeing nobody but Hesh.

He did not answer, but continued to stare into the jungle, crouched a little, listening. Then I heard a faint rustling in behind the black wall of jungle. Somebody was moving in there. I assumed that it was Sergeant Stafford.

"They got Lun Kee?"

"Yus, 'e's gone."

"But where's Stafford?"

"You keep back. I've seen a crimson

lot more than I want, this night, so you keep aw'y, or you'll be—"

Hesh dropped his spear and fell backward to the sand. He turned on his side and drew his arms about his head, panting for an instant. Then he began to sob with a bitterness that shook his whole frame.

"Hit? A blow-gun arrow?" A man with a poisoned dart in him is first stricken with partial paralysis, and then is violently ill when the poison takes full effect, and death follows in a few minutes.

"I'm sickish," moaned Hesh. "I didn't know—'ow could I know? Gawd! Wot a night's work!"

I ran to him, for as he moaned, he had begun to thrash at the sand with his arms, and his legs kicked in what I took to be convulsions. But I stopped before I reached Hesh. I saw something beyond him in one of the tiny sand valleys cut out by surf and wind.

It was a body, arms out-stretched and legs drawn up—the bare legs of Sergeant Stafford. Where the head should be, there was a great round stain in the sand.

"Stafford!" I cried.

"Right you are!" said Hesh. "They got 'im fair—'ad 'is 'ead before I comes up. One gang takes the Chinkie, I'd say, and 'ad 'im finished off in the brush—and another gang pops out and does for the sergeant." Hesh staggered to his feet, and stood staring at the body, wringing his hands and blubbering in anguish.

"Get out of here!" I cried. "There's nothing we can do now—if we stay, there'll be a couple more heads to smoke in the hills." I ran to where I saw one of Stafford's pistols, snatched the other from a holster on the nearby belt, and then shoved Hesh in the direction of the hotel. We hot-footed it as fast as we could go.

"Both of 'em done for!" I reported, as we reached the foot of the steps and saw Wyatt in the gloom of the verandah. He

had shut the kajangs and only a few spears of light struck out between the rattan slats.

"No!" said Wyatt. "You two got scairt!"

I HANDED over Stafford's pair of pistols. "Have it your own way. Take these guns and go down the beach yourself and look things over."

"What'd the natives do to 'em?"

"Took their heads. Of course, the natives around here are not dangerous—they just collect heads. Probably nobody would believe that on Cape Cod."

"Wa'll, I swan!" said Wyatt, and sat in his big chair.

Hesh sniffed and shivered on the top step. There was not much to say, nor much inclination to say it. The subdued gabbling of the cook and his helper came from the cook house. Neither of them seemed curious about what had happened. At times they giggled, as if they thought it was a joke to lose Lun Kee.

All of a sudden I was stricken with a feeling of rage. After all, it was Wyatt's orders that Lun Kee go far away from the hotel to play his flute which had caused the death of Stafford and the Chinese.

"Wyatt," I began, "you've got to take these natives seriously, and keep your people off the beach, day and night, or you'll lose all the money you put in—"

Before I could finish my harangue, the air was filled with a sound which brought me to my feet, though I thought at first that what I heard was only a trick played by my taut nerves on my ears.

Twee-twee-tweedle-tweedle — twee-twee-twee.

Wyatt jumped up. "Did you hear that—too?" he demanded in awed tones. He pulled his big revolver from a back pocket.

"Look! Down there to the left? Near the jungle!" I cried.

Out of blackness, into the moonlight, appeared the figure of Lun Kee, hatless and bare to the waist, his yellowish skin plain in the moonlight, drawn against the velvet of the curtain of brush. He was trotting toward the cook house and we saw his queue whipping from the back of his head as he moved up the slope and ran into a brilliant patch of moonlight.

Hesh leaped upward, then peered. "A crimson Chinkie ghost!" he whispered.

"Lun Kee! Come this side!" I bawled into the night.

The Chinese stopped in his tracks. But he did not move toward us. So Wyatt yelled, "Come here, you yellow hellion! What you mean, runnin' around dead and playin' that damned flute?"

"No got dead," replied Lun Kee.

"It's 'im!" gasped Hesh. He bolted for the door to the bar, left the door open behind him so that Wyatt and I were drenched in a flood of yellow light, and grabbed a bottle from the shelf behind the bar.

He knocked the head from the bottle and we heard the gin gurgling in his throat.

Lun Kee trotted over to the front of the verandah.

"Listen, you!" I began. "How come you no dead? What for you holler that side like plenty trouble?"

Lun paused in the moonlight at the foot of the steps. He looked up at me and Wyatt. "Me see plenty man, me 'flaid. Me look-see, me holler. Me lun like hellee, policey-man, him come shoots 'em good. What for you be mad me?"

"Mad at y'!" raged Wyatt. "You imp out of hell, the policey-man him dead for you holler! You savvy that?"

"Me savvy," said Lun Kee in placid tones. "This velly bad for policey-man. Lose my coat, lose my hat, but no can lose head. Policey-man, him lun like me lun, him keep head. Him got gun, him

shoot, what for him lose head. Plenty damn fool lose head."

I TURNED to Wyatt. "This Chink of yours went down the beach and played his flute—drew the head hunters to him—and Sergeant Stafford walked into an ambush."

"Hey?" said Wyatt. "What's that?"

"Lun Kee yelled. Not a head hunter touched him. He tore his blouse, threw it away, bolted into the brush—knew he was safe—because he knew that'd get Stafford—but not the flute player."

"But what for?" demanded Wyatt. "It ain't good sense to talk like that, when you got no proof."

"Figure it out yourself," I said sharply.

Lun Kee moved away. "Me go sl'ip now," he said. "Nobody go away from this side in boat come day time."

"A-ha!" I exclaimed. "And don't you know it."

"Go sleep your fool head off," said Wyatt.

"Can do," said Lun Kee over his shoulder as he trotted for the cook house. As he disappeared inside, we heard Chinese gabble — and then three Chinese laughing.

Hesh came out. "A rotten bad trick," he said. We did not ask him what he meant, but I knew. Hesh had realized what was wrong, or had suspected it, long before I did. But until he saw Lun Kee alive Hesh could not be sure. And it was not what Hesh saw on the beach that made him ill, but his suspicions. He knew now that the man moving in the jungle after I arrived on the scene, was not a head hunter, but Lun Kee.

The cutter took Sergeant Stafford's body in the morning. I held my tongue. As Wyatt had said, I had no proof of my suspicions. But that evening, as I was leaving to go aboard the schooner which came in before sundown, Wyatt

mixed me a parting drink. Hesh had one, also.

Then Wyatt thrust across the bar to me a gnarled piece of yellow metal. "You been mixed up in the minin' business," he said. "I might be fooled, but you'd know. What do you make of this?"

"It's Mawa River gold, Wyatt. Where did you get it?"

"Lun Kee asked me to give it to you. Just a little present. He said he picked it up on the beach last night."

"Before they killed Sergeant Stafford, I presume."

"I presume so myself," said Wyatt. "I had an idea that if I looked hard enough, I might pick up some more like that on the beach."

"No. You've got to go up the river several miles to get gold—and risk your head. But you don't need to take that risk."

"No? Why not?"

"Because I think that Lun Kee can get it in your back yard. He knows how to talk with the head hunters with that flute of his."

"Talk with his flute! Hell's bells, where'd you git that idea?"

I shoved the nugget back across the bar. "Give this back to Lun Kee with my compliments. I wouldn't like to cash in on Sergeant Stafford's head—and tell Lun Kee that I can keep my mouth shut without any *cumshaw* from him. And I'll say nothing about Hesh being here. And the best of luck to both of you—or I should say, the three of you—getting Mawa River gold."

I walked out to the verandah and picked up my bag.

"We might have a little luck at that," said Wyatt. "Special, if Lun Kee ever learns that tune of his'n. Of course, being from Cape Cod, I don't put no stock in the idea that Lunky can talk with his flute—but you might be right at that."

Adventurers All



Baboons of the Abyssinian Border

A BABOON male in his prime is not always the bored looking old gentleman who sits scratching himself on the floor of a zoo cage, while visitors feed him with nuts and bananas. Not by any means, and this is particularly the case with regard to those Baboon families who frequent the borders of Southern Abyssinia.

One is aware of the damage Baboons can do to crops, while often campaigns are made against these predatory animals to kill them off and also to discourage their activities on farms.

The Baboons who live among the mountains that form the frontier between Kenya Colony and Abyssinia are of a much larger size than those usually seen in the Union, while it is no uncommon occurrence to meet families of several hundreds strong trekking through the forests and bush of the wilderness.

A few years ago I had been sent from Moyale, a British frontier post, to a place facing the Abyssinian Settlement of Gaddaduma, which lay ten miles on the other side of British soil. It had been garrisoned with some three thousand troops, and we were anxious to keep an eye on their activities.

I took with me some fifty mounted Somali "askaris," and my cook and Nandi boy. We built the usual stockade of thorn and scrub, and pitched our tents in the centre, and sat down to await developments.

To one who has tried it, this game is extremely boring, for apart from small patrols, there is nothing to do. There is practically no game to be seen in the district, except for leopards and an occasional buck, but the country seemed to swarm with Baboons, who, more often than not, simply sat tight in the middle of the track, and refused to budge from our way until a couple of shots were fired over their heads. Then with angry chattering they would scatter into the bush.

ONE evening I was sitting by the camp fire enjoying for a change a meal of bread and sardines instead of the monotonous sardines and bread, when I heard a low cooing sound from nearby. It was a plaintive little sound, low and melodious. "Cooooo, cooooo."

This went on for some time, and at last I called my orderly to search for the origin of the sound, which we knew was being made by a small monkey. After a while the man returned, and he held in his hand a tiny Baboon. It could not have been more than a week or so old.

The tiny object was one of the most pitiful sights I had ever seen. It stood about six inches high. Its body was extremely thin, the bones being covered with loose skin sparsely hidden by tufts of soft silky brown hair. But it was its head that held my attention, for compared to the body it was huge. The little face that peered into mine, had a pair of the largest brown eyes, the ears were small and well

formed, the skin was wrinkled and old, like that of an ancient human being, while its neck was thin and scraggy.

For some unknown reason it seemed to have been lost by its mother, which was very strange, for as a rule, youngsters cling to their mothers' fur with an iron like grip, and it is not often that a young one is separated from its parent.

The men were of the opinion that its mother had been killed by a prowling leopard and so the young one had been cast into a bush to fend for itself. At any rate here it was, and we immediately called it Koko.

My sergeant disapproved very strongly of our keeping the animal, for he said that its cries would attract other Baboons to our camp, and as we had already suffered from their raids, when dates and other rations had been stolen, he wanted me to leave it in the distant bush.

For a moment I hesitated, but one look into the pleading little eyes decided me that I would keep the animal.

I took an old army sock, and cutting off the foot from the ankle, made Koko an excellent jersey, for the nights and mornings were cold and misty, and small monkeys catch pneumonia very easily.

It fed on goat's milk mixed with water, while all its spare time when not feeding, it clasped its legs and arms around my putted leg and remained staring up into my face.

Naturally I had more to do than to nurse a monkey, so we arranged a bed of gunny bags on which we placed Koko. Then the trouble began. Hour after hour it wailed without ceasing, until at last I began to think seriously of giving the struggle up. Then Koko developed a cold, so could not be abandoned.

It was then reported to me that more and more families of Baboons were congregating in the vicinity. All through the days that followed we heard them chattering in the bush while contrary to custom, when we met them on the paths they scuttled out of our way.

For three days Koko cried incessantly. His cold became worse, and at last I could see that the poor little chap was dying. We did what we could, but one morning we found him curled up in his sacking dead.

We buried Koko, and thought no more of the matter.

But not so the Baboon families. With Koko's death they became more courageous. No longer did they lurk in the shelter of the trees, but came into the open, when sitting in a huge circle around the camp, they watched our movements with gleaming eyes. This state of affairs began to prey on our nerves, while the Somalis openly stated that they were frightened.

When we saddled up for patrols, the Baboons vanished into the bush, but we

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knew that many of them followed our mules, for from time to time we would hear their angry chatter from the undergrowth.

One day when we returned to camp, we found the sentries and my boys in a great state of fear. They said that no sooner had we vanished from sight, than the Baboons assembled in their hundreds and had sat snarling and grinning in their usual circle.

There seemed to be one, a huge fellow, who was their leader. In his ungainly fashion he would walk along the ranks of his army, gibbering and snarling, as if exciting them to attack.

Gradually they had closed in on the thorn fence, until one of the sentries had fired. With their nerves at breaking point, the others had followed suit, when the Baboons had vanished leaving four dead on the ground. These were produced for my inspection, and then cast into the undergrowth some distance from the camp.

I wished that I had never seen Koko or his cursed relatives.

It was then that I noticed that the Baboons were taking particular interest in my orderly and myself, until I did not care to leave the camp alone, and never unarmed.

One morning some duty took me to the top of a small hill a hundred yards or so from the camp. The way led through dense bush until the summit of the knoll was reached. The far side was bare of undergrowth until at the foot a clearing was reached which stretched to a thicket on the far side.

The summit of the hill was out of view of the camp.

Accompanied by the orderly we set out armed with our rifles, and as we had seen no Baboons for the last twenty-four hours, we hoped that they had given up their siege.

We reached the summit without untoward incident, and I sat gazing towards the border.

My thoughts were broken by hearing the orderly's voice.

"Ah, Bwana, see, the monkey King, and all alone."

I LOOKED in the direction of his pointing hand, and sure enough, walking across the clearing at the foot of the hill was the leader of the Baboons. He must have been about an hundred yards distant.

Fascinated, I watched him. Without doubt he was the largest Baboon I had ever seen, and the clear light magnified his size out of all proportion. There was no sight or sound of any other Baboons in the vicinity.

Slowly he crossed the clearing, then without pause, turned and retraced his steps. His feet and arms moving backwards and forwards in an irregular ungainly motion.

"Now is our chance," I muttered. "Here is the King all alone, and if we shoot him the others will go away forever."

For a moment the boys looked doubtful. "If you kill their King, perhaps they will attempt revenge," one of them said.

"Nonsense," I replied. Picking up my rifle I took careful aim, and fired.

With the crash of the explosion, I decided that never again would I shoot a monkey unless absolutely forced to do so.

The Baboon had been standing upright as I took aim, but just as I pressed the trigger, he had sunk to his usual crouching position. Instead of my bullet piercing his heart, it had smashed the shoulder.

The animal lay writhing on the ground, while uttering the most human wails and shrieks I had ever heard before.

I felt my hands shaking. "Quick, Kipkaino," I cried to the orderly, "run down, and put the poor beast out of his misery."

The boy pushed a cartridge into the breach of his rifle, and dashed down the hill.

As he reached the wounded Baboon's side, it turned and snarling made an at-

tempt to attack him. Kipkaino leaped back, then leveling his weapon shot the animal through the head.

At the sound of the second shot, I saw the far edge of the clearing had become alive with Baboons. Literally in their hundreds they emerged from the trees.

Kipkaino turned to run, but paused, and bringing his rifle to his shoulder fired rapidly into the mass. Meanwhile I had commenced to empty my rifle over the orderly's head. The sudden fusillade, made the Baboons pause, while Kipkaino ran back a few steps, while he reloaded.

The Baboons' attack was most determined, and in spite of their heavy casualties, for we could hardly miss as we fired into the mass of brown bodies, they came on.

Five minutes must have elapsed since the first shot had been fired, and the sound had brought a Corporal and a few men rushing from the boma to see the cause of the volleys, for on the Border one has always to be on the alert against attack from Tigree outlaws.

As the party arrived, Kipkaino had reached the foot of the hill, while the clearing was black with Baboons. The screeching of the wounded was deafening, while the snarls of the attackers made the surroundings akin to the demons from the Pit.

The Askaris took in the situation at a glance, and their rifles added to the din. This was too much for the Baboons, who paused, then turning, vanished from sight.

I rose with a sigh of relief, while Kipkaino joined us breathless with his exertions. His ebon face was gray with fear. I must own that my hands were shaking.

After this episode the Baboons left us in peace, for not again during the time I was out on that patrol did I hear a Baboon.

Even to this day I feel a sense of fear when the cough of a Baboon sounds in the undergrowth, while not for all the wealth of the Indies would I keep a monkey in captivity.

Alexander Doull.

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IT'S HELL TO BE A RANGER

By CADDO CAMERON

Author of That Other Thriller about Blizzard and Badger, "Rangers Is Powerful Hard to Kill"

SOMETHING ABOUT THE STORY AND
WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

CAPTAIN HENRY CLAY HOUSTON, Commanding Company X, Texas Rangers, sat in his tent on the banks of the Nueces and read a telegram.

The message scarcely merited that title, since it had traveled by horseback, stage, telegraph wires, star mail route, and horseback again; but it deserved attention because signed by a man whom he

had known for years, a man who would be the last person on earth to call for help.

The communication was from Trinity Joe Slocum, manager of Miss Belle Ranson's great Box J outfit in Whirlwind County, and it read:

"Old Satan is runnin' wild on this here range, and the Good Lord has done took to the tall timber. Send a army."

So he sent Badger Coe and Blizzard Wilson.

*Men Is Like Trail Herds. You Can't Never Tell What They're
a-Fixin' to Do Next—Especially Women*

PART II



The Rangers travel as two outlaws, Buffalo and Pelican, and go to Whirlwind to size up the situation. They round up the marshal first and judge him to be crooked, but they don't know that behind the scenes is a woman, one whose enmity they had aroused in other days and whose one thought is revenge. She calls herself "Miss Constance," and owns the Wild Rose Saloon and Dancehall, but runs plenty else besides. It is she who is back of the attack on the Ransom ranch, because she's jealous of the absent owner, Belle. She eggs on Carlos, one of her killers, to get rid of Blizzard and Badger, and they sense the play. "I shore as

hell wish I knowed who sicked him on to us," mutters Blizzard.

CHAPTER IV

THEN HE SHOVELLED ASHES ONTO
THE BLOOD

KING STANNARD jerked his head around quickly, and looked keenly at the Ranger. He started to say something, but apparently thought better of it and kept silent until they covered the short distance to the corral.

Having put up their horses, they started walking back to town. Badger had some-

thing on his mind and figured he might as well get shed of it before going any further.

Stopping at a point where they were not likely to be overheard, he called a halt. "Hold on a minute, fellas." Hands on his hips, he cocked his head to one side and asked quietly, "Sheriff, if you don't mind sayin', how come that there Buffalo and Pelican break you made back yander?"

Stannard tried to look innocent. "Why, those are your names aren't they?"

Folks who knew him well, declared that Badger could act the part of a bad-man better than the wickedest gunman that ever blazed his way across the country. Standing with feet spread, he thrust his head slightly forward and answered with slumbering belligerence, "I ain't sayin'. But far as you and the balance of this here Whirlwind country is consarned, we're Badger Coe and Blizzard Wilson. And it won't be no ways healthy for nobody to forgit it, neither."

To Badger's great surprise, the pudgy sheriff stood his ground; but nevertheless, he was inclined to be cordial. "I don't give a damn what you fellows call yourselves," he retorted with a friendly smile. "Next thing we know, you'll be swearing to God you're Rangers, but that won't bother us in the least."

His smile became even more friendly. "We'll hang you if we think you need it, providin' Carlos lets you live that long."

Blizzard's high-pitched voice broke in lazily, "I ain't a-hankerin' to start no argyment, Sheriff, but jest for curiosity's sake I'd sorta like to know how you come to figger we was Buffalo and Pelican."

Stannard's round face was the picture of good nature. He glanced humorously from Blizzard to Badger and said, "I had the pleasure of talking to a fellow who knows you, and he swears you're Buffalo and Pelican."

"Where is he?" snapped Badger.

King took off his derby hat and carefully brushed its crown with a sleeve, using a circular motion. "That poor fellow left town on the run. He said you're gunning for him."

Badger wondered whether Stannard was lying, and he saw that Blizzard felt the same way about it.

But the sheriff hadn't finished. "Furthermore, if a man ever sets eyes on you two wildcats, he'll never forget you. While at the Border on business some time ago, you were pointed out to me by a horse thief who told me a lot about you. For some reason I didn't recognize you when I saw you riding down the street today, but now I know I'm not mistaken."

The little politician had the knack of making his words ring true, but Badger still was more than half convinced that he had been listening to a pack of lies. Any way he looked at it, the situation had his brain in a whirl; so he decided to forget it, and keep a sharp lookout for Red.

Blizzard's mind wasn't in a whirl, but his thoughts were tearing through his head so fast they tromped on one another's heels. Assuring himself that Stannard was one of the smoothest men he had met in a long time, he didn't believe a word the little cuss said. Furthermore, he was confident that King had been posted by someone who knew entirely too much about Badger and him; a decidedly uncomfortable feeling, to say the least. Who this mysterious person might be, and how to smoke him out was the question.

THIS problem occupied Blizzard's mind while the sheriff led them to Grandma Carson's hotel and restaurant a short distance beyond the Canadian; and he was still thinking about it when he ambled in behind his companions, laid his rifle across a vacant chair beside him, and sat down next to Badger at the long table.

They had the room to themselves, and he wished it were otherwise. A man could gather information as well as grub at a crowded table. He took occasion to note that there was a solid wall behind them; but directly across the table, in the opposite side of the room, was an open window. He didn't like the idea, but it was either that or have a window at their backs.

By the time they got their feet under the table and their hats under their chairs, a girl came in from the kitchen with a steaming dish of Irish potato soup.

The sheriff introduced her as Mary Carson, Mrs. Carson's granddaughter. She smiled at the Rangers—particularly Badger—in a way that works no injury to the face of a pretty brunette with lively eyes and a generous mouth with happy corners.

After placing the dish on the table before him, Mary returned to the kitchen. The big devil watched her all the way to the door, then he reached for the soup.

And when she returned with a great platter of fried chicken, he opened a conversation. Blizzard listened with amusement, although his jovial pardner's remarks were virtually repetitions of things he had heard the rascal say to many other girls in widely scattered places. Somehow or other, Badger managed to give the impression that he ate only because she brought him the food, while in fact eating like a horse.

In addition to the distraction provided by Mary and her admirer, there was a red-and-white checked oiled cloth so heavily burdened with tempting victuals as temporarily to attract the interest of a hungry man away from more important matters; not to mention a sociable sheriff who talked a blue streak.

So Blizzard momentarily forgot his problem.

But his watchful eyes never strayed very far away from that open window.

Having diligently worked on the soup, he drifted a parcel of fried chicken over the rim of the platter onto his plate, and sent a long arm out to gather a bowl of creamy gravy. Then he blended the gravy with the chicken, and told Badger to shove the sweet potatoes along. He managed to do a little thinking about the situation while blending the sweet potatoes with the chicken and gravy, and gazing reflectively at a mountain of fluffy mashed spuds with butter overflowing the crater at its summit.

That window ought to be shut. Had no screen and was letting in a lot of bugs.

No two ways about it, thought Blizzard, there was someone in Whirlwind who knew Badger and him—certainly as Buffalo and Pelican, and possibly as Rangers. And he'd gamble that person sicked Carlos onto them. No telling who it was. Might be this foxy little sheriff, or that spooky looking Professor, or—

His glance darted to the window. Dog or cat or somethin' a-rustin' the weeds out there. During a lull in the conversation, he heard it but couldn't see it.

He figured he could make room on his plate for the spuds. Funny how much a fella could corral on his plate when he was good and hungry. Even found an empty patch where he could drop a spoonful of wild plum preserves.

Black as hell outside. A man was a damned fool to sit smack in front of an open window in strange country.

WHEN she wasn't bringing in more food, Mary ranged pretty close to the table. Before long, she and King got into a hot discussion of mutual shortcomings. Badger happily poured oil on the fire at every opportunity. Blizzard ate in silence, thinking that his pardner never worried much about anything—mysterious persons, or open windows, or nothin'.

Holding a chicken bone in midair, he solemnly inspected it with the air of a

man proud of work well done. The bone was on a line with the window. He looked past it, and—

He literally hurled his body against Badger!

They crashed to the floor together. From the middle of a tangle of arms and legs and chairs and dishes, plus chicken and gravy and hot coffee, burst a string of mighty curses. Badger had cut loose in earnest. Mary and Stannard stared in amazement at the two Rangers. Grandma came out of the kitchen on the run.

Blizzard got up almost immediately, but Badger needed more time to unsnarl himself.

"What the—hallelujah got into you?" he bellowed. "Jest look at me! Ain't I a mess?"

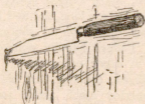
"Shore! You allus been," snapped Blizzard. "Looky yander."

Directly back of his chair, a knife was driven into the boards!

Grandma and Mary burst into excited speech, but King Stannard behaved as though he considered attempted assassinations no cause for excitement. Blizzard concluded that this little politician was more of a man than appearances indicated.

Badger growled, "It wa'n't comin' in my direction. Why in blazes did you fall on me all spraddled out?"

Blizzard watched the sheriff, and curtly answered, "I seen the steel and a black arm go up for the throw. That's all. Didn't know who the skunk was aimin' at. Might've been you."



"You knowed durned well it was you," rumbled Badger. "They ain't nobody out to stick me, and everybody knows you got it comin'."

Blizzard said nothing, busily examining the knife without removing it from the wall. The others gathered around him. Stannard reached for the weapon, but the Ranger stopped him.

"Hold on a minute."

Whipping out his own knife, he put a nick in the razor edge of the other blade showing the exact depth it drove into the wood. Then he jerked it out and balanced it studiously in the palm of his hand.

"Mmmm-m-m. Fine steel. Ain't a workin' knife. Hefts 'bout like mine. Reckon I better try somethin'."

The others watched and listened attentively. He flipped the blade into the floor a number of times, and snapped it across the table into the opposite wall.

His throwing motion was so expertly timed as to appear effortless, but the steel flickered through the air with tremendous speed and force.

Recovering the knife he observed, "Balanced mighty nigh the same as mine. Reckon I sorta got the feel of it." He turned to Mary. "Could you gimme a piece of paper—say 'bout six inches square, please ma'am?"

She went after the paper.

LOOKING neither right nor left, speaking to no one, Ta-nah silently stalked through the front door and on to the kitchen with a tray of dishes. She returned behind Mary, and went out with the same noiseless stride and aloof bearing.

Blizzard took the paper.

"Who's that there squaw?" he demanded sharply.

"That's Ta-nah," answered the girl. "She's Miss Constance's woman. Miss Constance had her supper sent over to-night."

He went to the wall and found the place where the knife struck. Then he took a pin from the lapel of his vest and

fastened the paper so as to cover the board around the gash.

Swinging about and starting for the door, he told them, "Wish you-all would jest stay here and keep away from that there winder. I ain't none too sartin with a strange pig-sticker like this'n."

Badger watched him disappear, then turned to the others with a proud grin. "Ain't that there lazy-lookin' cuss the fastest critter you ever seen when he gets a-goin'?" The way he tumbled out'n his cheer onto me would've made triple-distilled chain lightnin' look plumb slow."

The others agreed. Mary spoke up, "What's he going to do now?"

"The Lawd only knows," manfully lied Badger. "You jest cain't never tell what he's fixin' to do. But I'll betcha a stack of blues that befo' long he knows the brands and marks and color of the polecat that throwed the knife." He shrugged and added with a sour grin, "Course the old reprobate won't never let on."

Stannard looked thoughtful. "I'm afraid he's going to a lot of trouble for nothing. Whoever did the throwing is a mile from here by now."

Badger flared up. "Mebbe you jest waller in the shade and switch at flies when some fella tries to knife you, but me and him is a heap different. We go git the coyote, regardless!"

Instantly King was all smiles again. "That's the very thing to do, and I'll help you all I can."

As he went through the door, Blizzard admitted to himself that he was glad it happened. Maybe he'd learn something from this knife throwing.

He could trail like an Apache, for he had learned to read sign in the days when—as old timers said—"A man's hair is tied to his brains." But when his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, they met with disappointment. The empty ground outside was stony hard and covered by a tangle of knee-high weeds and

grass, some of which were dead and brittle—the remainder being more or less green. The green stuff that was mashed down but not broken, was slowly coming back to its normal position. He quickly gave up hope of finding clearly defined footprints; but with the aid of matches, he did succeed in tracing the passage of someone from the sidewalk to a point opposite the window. From there the party evidently sprang to the wall near the window, crept under it, and continued on close to the building until he reached its corner at the sidewalk. The nearest store was some distance away from that side of the hotel, so the prowler might easily escape observation while going through these maneuvers.

NEAR the sidewalk grew a comparatively high patch of weeds and grass that was crushed, suggesting that the would-be assassin might have crouched there. For a few moments the Ranger puzzled over it, then cursed softly and returned to the place from which the knife was thrown.

Blizzard's remarkable length of arm and the powerful snap he could impart with his steely fingers and wrist, enabled him to throw a knife with more force than that attained by any man against whom he had ever competed. He was about to make this test for purposes of comparison. If the knife struck the square of paper, it would drive into wood of approximately the same texture as it did when thrown by the unknown knifer; so by comparing the depths it penetrated, he could draw conclusions regarding the physique of the thrower. He knew that none other than someone who considered himself expert would hope to deliver a vital wound at that distance.

Standing with feet spread and the weapon in his right hand, he estimated the distance to the paper on the wall. His arm whipped up across his chest, bringing his hand above his left shoulder, and

he made a back-handed throw through the window. The knife was no more than a writhing, glittering streak of steel.

It nailed the target to the board.

When he returned to the dining room, Stannard and the women were staring at the knife and shaking their heads.

"I've seen knife throwing in my day, but never anything like this," enthusiastically declared the sheriff. "Twenty-five feet if it's an inch."

Badger winked at Grandma and Mary. "Only fair-to-middlin', I'd say. Didn't ketch more'n a inch of the paper. Oughta done a heap better, figgerin' the time he puts in a-practicin'."

Intent upon what he was doing, Blizzard ignored his talkative partner. He again marked the blade and pulled it out of the heavy pine board. A glance showed that it had penetrated almost twice as far as it did before.

Turning to King, he spoke with his usual lazy drawl. "Sheriff, I'd ruther you didn't put yo'self out to round up the cuss that tried to git me. But you got a right to know what I done figgered out about him. He had on a black, or leastwise a powerful dark shirt without no stripes or checks. His arms is long, but not as long as mine. He's tall, but shorter'n me. He ain't as stout as you'd calc'late a man of his size oughta be, jedgin' by how hard the knife hit. He's sly as a lobo, and slippery as a Injun."

He thought for a moment, then concluded dryly, "Reckon they ain't more'n a hundred men 'round here that them things will fit."

King laughed. "Yes, Whirlwind County breeds tall men and sells lots of shirts in solid colors."

"Sartinly!" concurred Badger. "Don't you go to no bother, Stannard. While me and him is a-scoutin' 'round for a pair of jobs, we can sorta keep a eye peeled. It'll give him somethin' to think about."

A hearty voice came rolling in from

the porch. "Howdy folks! Can a hongry man git a mouthful?"

Jake Rupper lounged in the doorway, one hand preening his mustache. His lanky body seemed to fill the opening from top to bottom, leaving plenty of space on either side.

Somehow Blizzard got the swift impression that the man had been listening.

"Come in and set!" said Grandma, her tight lips biting off the words and her sharp, blue eyes snapping. "We'll feed a hongry man any time, day or night."

Apparently Jake's keen little eyes saw no one but Mary. He smiled at her in a way that evidently was meant to be devastating. She took one look at him. She turned on her heel and went to the kitchen.

The snap gave away to a twinkle in Grandma's eyes.

King Stannard promptly made the introduction in his grand style. "Gentlemen, this is Mister Jake Rupper, one of our prominent citizens and business men. He owns the C Bar N, a cow ranch that perhaps ranks second to none in Texas."

BLIZZARD made a note of the fact that the sheriff didn't take trouble to tell Jake who they were.

Rupper shook hands cordially, calling them by their right names, and they adjourned to the table. The newcomer coiled down on a chair across from the Rangers and started a lively conversation.

Everybody fell to eating. Nothing was said about the knife-throwing incident. Presently Mary came in with the coffee pot. With the assurance of a man who knew he was good, Jake met her with a flurry of more or less familiar badinage. She replied curtly and caustically, and thereafter attentively waited upon Badger to the exclusion of everyone else—particularly Jake.

Blizzard grinned into his plate.

Badger expanded noticeably, and Rupper didn't seem to mind.

As the meal wore on to a conclusion, Blizzard had to admit that the fellow's rollicking good nature made it hard to dislike him, regardless of his dandified dress and the faint odor of perfume which the Ranger's keen nose detected. Since the man was obviously somebody on this range, he figured it might be a good idea to cultivate his acquaintance; and he wasn't at all displeased to see that Badger and Jake were getting along beautifully. In fact—Rupper said he could use a couple of good hands at top wages, and Badger promised to ride down and look over the C Bar N.

Blizzard wanted to find out more about Ta-nah and her mistress. During a momentary lull in the conversation, he inquired carelessly, "Is that there Miss Constance crippled or somethin' so she has to send her squaw out for grub?"

"Not at all," replied Stannard. "I suppose she was too busy to get away from the Wild Rose."

"Does she always eat here?"

It was Jake who answered. "Mostly she eats at home. She's got her a house of her own and a colo'd gal to do the cookin', but it's purty well filled up right now."

"Company, huh?"

"Hardly that," drawled Jake with a grin. "I'd call 'em feeders. A ox of a Dutchman and his woman and fo' young'uns."

"Sorta fattenin' 'em up for beef, is she?" soberly wondered Badger. "Beef must be all-fired scarce 'round here. I ain't never eat no Dutch meat, but meat is meat so I reckon it'd be fit to chaw."

Everybody laughed. For the fourth time, Mary filled Badger's coffee cup.

RUPPER continued. "Yes sah, fellas—that there Miss Constance is allus doin' somethin' for somebody. The durned fool Dutchman thought he could make a livin' on these here prairies with a plow and a hoe, so he traipses 'way out here a-totin'

his folks along. You know what a fust-rate cow country does to fellas with seci crazy ideas. Anyhow—Old Mother Nature up and warped it to the pore cuss good and proper, and his woman took down with somethin', and they was in a dickens of a pickle. So Connie—that's Miss Constance—she hears about it and sends a bunch of the boys out to where they was a-nestin', and moved 'em into town. And what does she do but up and git out'n her own house so's to make room for the Dutchman and his sick woman and them hongry-lookin' chillun. The young'uns has a starvin' dawg, and she even makes shore it's took keer of."

"I'll swan!" ejaculated Badger. "What is she figgerin' to do with 'em?"

"Ship 'em back East where they belong," replied Jake. "Miss Constance allows that soon as ever the woman can hit the trail, she'll send the whole kaboodle to the railroad and put 'em on the keers with they bellies full, and clothes on they backs and money in they pockets."

"Never heard the beat of it," declared Badger. "It's shore surprisin' doin's for a woman in her business."

"Wouldn't say that it is," drawled Blizzard, and immediately he became the center of attention. "Some sinners jest dotes on punishin' theyselves for they own shortcomin's, and we all seen folks a-makin' up to one fella for the dirt they done to another'n—sorta easin' they consciences, I reckon."

He paused to inspect the end of his cigarette. Smoke curled out of his long nose. "I allow men is like trail herds. You can't never tell what they're a-fixin' to do next—specially wimmin'."

Mary made a face at him. She filled his coffee cup.

As a matter of principle Badger took issue with Blizzard at every opportunity. "Maybeso, but I'm here to tell you somethin'," he bristled. "If a woman that feeds hongry Dutch chillun and such-like is a sinner, and if hell is chock full of

sinner like the parson says—then I'm a-pintin' my hoss' snout in that direction from now on!"

"Wouldn't be at all surprised," drawled Blizzard.

The sheriff and Jake grinned. Mary laughed aloud.

BADGER started a retort, then suddenly stopped to listen. A happy smile broke over his face. Somebody let out a wild yell that others echoed up and down the street. A six-shooter barked joyfully. The irregular pounding of a horse's hooves, the slap and creak of leather, snorts, grunts, shouts, laughter, and a long yell that was jarred and shaken at its source, announced as clearly as words that a bronc had bogged its head and a rider was treating the boys to a show—whether good or bad depending upon the calibers of horse and man.

The broad Ranger got up. He settled his belts on his hips, and with an easy, unconscious movement briefly touched the handles of his guns. "The fellas is a-commencin' to bust loose," he chuckled with boyish enthusiasm. "Which reminds me—I'm on my way to get me another drink of that there Canadian likker. Is anybody comin' along?"

Jake got eagerly to his feet.

King Stannard arose with a shrug.

Mary's happy features suddenly betrayed a secret fear. She aimlessly lifted the coffee pot from the table, and set it down again.

Blizzard arose slowly, watching every-



body, saying nothing, and thinking rapidly. He was satisfied they'd find Carlos at the Canadian. Acting their parts as

badmen, they dare not try to avoid him; so another clash was inevitable. It was their job, a risk they had to take, and he hoped it would throw light on the situation.

He looked thoughtfully at Mary. There was a warning for Badger in her troubled face. She knew something. He wished he could have a talk with her before they went to the Canadian, but he didn't know how to work it.

Damn Jake and the sheriff!

He engaged a room for Badger and himself, remarking that more'n likely they'd roll in sometime before morning.

She tried to smile.

Stannard jerked his head toward Badger and remarked soberly, "If he don't stop hunting trouble, I expect you'll have the bed all to yourself."

Badger grunted scornfully. He swaggered out with Jake at his heels. The others followed, Blizzard slouching along in the rear—rifle under his arm.

RATTLESNAKE RUNNELS and Pinto Hawkins were in the middle of a hot argument on the porch of the Canadian. The three men ahead of Blizzard stopped to listen. After a cautious glance around, he slipped away unnoticed in the darkness. Running lightly and swiftly on his toes, he went along the west wall of the building and around behind it, halting by a door in the east wall at the rear of the room. By shifting his position while keeping out of the light, he contrived to see most of the interior.

The place was heavy with smoke that hung in glowering masses, or moved slowly and sinuously in undulating streams toward the tops of open doors and windows. Through it drifted night-flying insects, light from the reflector lamps flickering on their wings as they floated or swooped about them.

And in the smoke moved or lounged men of all descriptions—men who scented bloodshed from afar, and gathered at the

Canadian to watch Carlos make another kill. Among them were cowards who craved the thrill of a performance in which they themselves wouldn't dare to take part. There were fearless men with bloody aspirations of their own, who came to study the methods of the combatants with a view to improving their individual technique. And there were the majority—frontiersmen, dwellers in isolated spots, frequenters of the solitudes—who regarded such episodes as high points in the life they lived, affording material to be embroidered in tales and told in lonely camps, in far-flung bunk-houses, and on desolate trails where topics of interest were frequently as scarce as firewood on the plains.

And there stood the Professor—tall, gaunt, and saturnine—his face almost the color of the smoke that curled around it.

The bar was lined with men, and three bartenders worked at top speed. Another in white apron, served whiskey to five men at a poker table against the opposite wall. The swamper leaned on a broom near by, and his watery eyes followed the glasses with pitiful craving. Without glancing up, one of the players sipped his drink and handed him the balance. The frail old fellow eagerly stood erect, and his slender hand shook when he took the liquor. He bowed with a semblance of ease that suggested a time when he wasn't a swamper.

At a faro layout by the wall to the left of the door, a cowhand cursed, pulled his Colt from its holster, and handed it to the lookout.

"Twenty dollars," muttered the dealer, sliding him a stack of checks.

Another elbowed his way out of the crowd surrounding the roulette table in the center of the floor. His bitter laugh crackled in striking contrast to the merry click of the ball.

"My pony and riggin' was a-ridin' the red, and that damned wheel done set me afoot."

TWO men fell to scuffling at the end of the bar nearest the door. One was cautiously intoxicated, and the other was belligerently drunk. The latter awkwardly pointed with his right arm while struggling to release his left.

"Lemme go, I tell you!" he roared. "That there battered-up jasper ain't beavin' no ways sociable. Got a table and bottle all to hisself. Unloose me—damn it!"

His companion hung on desperately. "Shh-h-h Johnny—you blasted fool. He's pizen as hell!"

The man at the table was Carlos!

Blizzard glanced quickly from him to the street entrance. Badger was still on the porch. Light fell across his broad back.

"Damned idjit!" muttered Blizzard.

He turned his attention to Carlos. The gunman's face bore little resemblance to that of the handsome young fellow who crawled Badger a short time back. A welt extended from the black sideburn before his ear, like a streak of crimson warpaint across his swarthy cheek. His nose was swollen and shapeless. Puffed and twisted grotesquely, his lips showed ragged tears where his teeth drove through them. No longer large and clear, his eyes were sunken in pouches of bruised and discolored flesh.

Blizzard swept the crowd with a hasty glance. A tough gang—no doubt about it; but they were leaving Carlos strictly alone. And yet, there were men in that saloon who would hooraw Old Satan if they saw him with two black eyes and a busted nose.

So Carlos must be bad.

For a moment the tall Ranger was a prey to doubt. Had they underestimated the fellow? Had they treated too lightly his local reputation for being unbeatable? He knew that every gunfighter sooner or later met his match, often an unknown just starting up the bloody trail to fame. And he wondered whether this would be

the first and last time when Badger was the slow man.

Blizzard's hand closed on the grip of his rifle, and his thumb found the hammer. Cartridge in the chamber. Maybe he'd better rampse in there and take the fight away from Badger. Carlos *did* look bad. Wasn't shooting off his face, or prancing around. Damn him! Why didn't he behave like most of 'em, and talk loud to make himself brave? He just sat there with his elbows on the table and his eyes on the door—cold as an iceberg—just sitting there, waiting. And Badger took such damned fool chances.

"He shore does," mused the Ranger. "Reckon I'd better go in and—"

Carlos' fingers tightened on his glass. Blizzard shot a glance at the door. Flinging a laughing remark at someone, Badger was coming in!

Blizzard jerked his eyes back to the gunman, and moved closer to the door.

WITH calm deliberation, Carlos pulled his hat lower over his face. Holding a lighted cigarette in his left, the fingers of his right hand beat a slow tattoo on the table. Directly overhead a giant moth whirled through the smoke with insane frenzy and dashed against a lamp chimney with suicidal determination. It fell to the table and its gossamer wings trembled feebly. Carlos deliberately pressed the glowing end of his cigarette against it, watched it scorch and flutter and die, and arose leisurely.

The crowd had waited for this!

A space was quickly cleared between the door through which Badger came laughing, and the table at which Carlos stood motionless. Elbowing and shoving and cursing quietly, men drew back to the walls on either side or sought whatever protection the bar and various tables afforded.

Slightly to one side, stood the Professor. Intent upon getting a clear view, a man halted in front of him. He coughed

softly. The man glanced over his shoulder and quickly stepped aside, muttering words of apology.

Heedless of danger, the swamper shuffled over to the deserted poker table almost in front of Carlos, squinted slyly around, and gulped the remnants of two abandoned drinks. Carlos shot out an arm and viciously flung him aside. Hunching his shoulders and covering his face with his arms like a frightened child, he staggered back, tripped over a chair, and went down.

Several men chuckled, and a drunk laughed outright.

Badger rumbled an oath. The swamper was nothing to him; but, like many strong men, the weak had his sympathy. Carlos' cruelty was a spark that touched off his anger. Instantly he changed from a rollicking good fellow to a savage fighting man, ruthless in spirit and short in words. His big hands clenched on his hips. His black eyes lost their mirth, and glared wickedly from beneath their heavy brows. Rage brought splotches of red to his temples and cheeks.

Blizzard knew it was too late to interfere. But—when Carlos started to walk slowly forward, the tall Ranger cursed silently and fought down an urge to cock his Winchester. Badger was the most accurate fast man with a gun he'd ever seen, so the greater the range the better his chances. But no! The damned fool would let Carlos choose his distance, probably so close it would be a question of speed alone. Shore them youngsters couldn't hit nothin' when the other fella had a gun, but he'd oughta know they was sometimes fast as hell on the draw.

Blizzard counted the steps. One—two—three.

The blasted fool! Broad as a tail-gate. Mighty nigh a yard of blue-and-white checked, shirt a-showin' where his vest hung open over his belly. Nobody could miss him at that distance.

Four—five—six.

Damn him! Didn't he see that Carlos' face was so battered up it wouldn't tell him nothin'? He couldn't git no idee when the Mex was startin' his draw.

Ten feet apart—no more!

Badger grinned. Carlos stopped, hands brushing the handles of his guns. A man coughed. Another groaned. Another chuckled nervously. A fellow at Blizzard's elbow, a mere boy, gritted his teeth like a man in pain. Above their heads, a lamp spluttered and flickered. A moth fried in its flame.

A DEAFENING roar. Two billows of smoke—one swallowing Carlos from head to hips, another surging against the floor and mushrooming around his boots. No more to be seen. Their hands moved too fast.

Carlos swung around, and coughed, and collapsed to the floor.

The crowd sighed. Its prophesies were not fulfilled, but its patience was rewarded. It saw a man die.

Half crouched, Badger sent a comprehensive glance about him, shrugged, and holstered his gun.

Blizzard's glance darted from face to face, searching for evidence of anger or disappointment. He discovered only wonder and disbelief, until he reached the Professor.

The Professor looked thoughtful.

Stunned by the speed with which the killing took place and amazed at its result, the crowd was slow to get in motion. The little swamper was first to leave his place. Shuffling along wearily as he did when going about his daily duties, he crossed the floor with a bucket of ashes in one hand and a stove shovel in the other. He set them down at the dead man's head. Carlos was shot through the heart, and a pool of blood was spreading. Laying hold of an out-flung hand, the feeble swamper pulled and jerked until he had hauled the body aside a yard.

Then he shovelled ashes onto the blood.

And slouched away without a second glance at the dead man.

Still holding the bucket and shovel—he looked diffidently at Badger and spoke in a timid, almost pleading voice, "Sir, I—I should be greatly honored if—if you'd let me buy you a drink!"

Some men cursed, and others laughed.

Badger grinned like a friendly boy. He swaggered over and threw an arm across the little man's bony shoulders, and led him toward the bar. "Shore you can buy me a drink! Then I'll buy," he rumbled loud enough for everyone to hear. "Ain't never seen the day when I wouldn't drink with a square gent."

The swamper's knees sagged. He walked like a man in a dream.

Blizzard heard a sharp intake of breath at the door behind him, and turned quickly.

Ta-nah!

CHAPTER V

"SHE-KILLERS IS HELL AND REPEAT!"

THE Indian woman was slithering out of the door. Blizzard caught the scent of the strange perfume he noticed on Jake. It startled him into action. Without knowing exactly why he did it, he grasped her arm none too gently. She majestically stepped back into the room and pulled away from him with a proud, disdainful gesture. Standing erect and forbidding, she met his searching gaze with eyes every bit as fierce as his.

Now that he had the woman on his hands, Blizzard wondered what to do with her. Momentarily at a loss for words, his thoughts raced. That perfume! He had never before smelled anything like it. In common with many of the old plainsmen, he had the nose of a hunting animal and never doubted what it told him. But after all, he reflected, this was nothing to stew about. It merely showed that Jake had been close to this squaw, or maybe Miss Constance—if it was her perfume.

He swept Ta-nah from head to foot with a lightning glance that took in everything. Her moccasins! They suggested a string of ideas that whirled through his brain, and wove wild possibilities that made him clamp his jaws to keep from swearing.

He shot out a long finger, pointing at her feet. "Cherokee!"

Ta-nah looked him squarely in the eye. She answered instantly, "No! Osage."

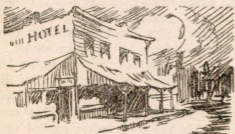
He knew the moccasins of the Plains Indians. A tingle of triumph went coursing through him. He wanted to grin, but kept a stony face instead.

"You lie! Them's Cherokee moccasins," he rasped frigidly.

Her lids drooped the merest fraction, but her bronze face never altered. She replied with a lofty air, "Yes. Cherokee moccasins on feet of daughter of chief."

Blizzard's sardonic calm was reflected in his brittle voice. "How! And daughter of chief packs grub for Cherokee Lou, a harlot. Good!"

His blow hurt. He caught a fleeting glimpse of her secret thoughts, murder, torture, and all manner of savagery. It took an effort to meet that gaze without flinching. Then the mask fell. Her face became as lifeless as before.



"Like all white men, you lie," she said in harsh, guttural tones without inflection. "I watch over lodge of Ma-na-ka, daughter of dead sister."

"And she calls herself Miss Constance," drawled the Ranger.

Ta-nah's chin came up a trifle higher. "She takes name that pleases her."

Blizzard made an instant decision. His look was an insult, and his tone and words a command. "Go tell Cherokee Lou I come soon."

Her hard lips curled noticeably. "Ma-na-ka smells your thoughts before their stink changes to talk. She waits for you and Big Killer."

He scornfully turned his back to her. Striding away, he felt the stabbing impact of her eyes. A chill ran up and down his spine.

News of the fight had drawn the curious from all directions, and the room was packed with men in a festive mood. A good killing was to this wild town, as a good rain to the parched plains. Moreover, Carlos had few friends and many enemies. More than one man breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the gunman go through the door feet first. Of course, Carlos' conqueror might be just as hard to get along with, but on the surface he appeared to be one of their own kind. So they'd celebrate his victory, and buy him drinks, and try to find out more about him without asking direct questions.

Blizzard scanned the crowd for the Professor. Not in sight.

AT LENGTH the tall Ranger succeeded in catching Badger's eye over the heads of the men hemming him in. Then he ambled back to the roulette table and watched the play until he saw his pardner slide through a side door. A moment or two later they met at the rear of the building.

Without a word, he quickly led the way to a storage shed several yards behind the saloon.

There in the darkness he spoke cautiously, but his words were sharp and decisive. "Things is a damned sight wuss'n I thought we'd find 'em, and I see plenty dust up the trail."

Badger's heart leaped. He caught the ring in Blizzard's voice, and wanted to yell. He read the sign. His lanky pard-

ner had cut a hot trail. He smelled happenings. But he wouldn't let on.

Cocking his head to one side, he fired a question. "Say—what in hell did you find out that's got you in sech a lather?"

Blizzard was deadly serious. "Cain't hardly believe it myself, so I ain't tellin' you nothin' yet. Might put crazy idees in yo' head like I got in mine. But we're a-headin' for the Wild Rose, and we're a-goin' to git a peek at that there Miss Constance woman."

"Bully!" exclaimed Badger. "They ain't nothin' crazy 'bout that idee. It's a joe-dandy. Let's go."

Blizzard laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"Jest calm yo'self, and let this seep into yo' thick skull! When you tangled with Carlos, you up and forgot all I done larned you 'bout gunfittin', but the Good Lawd done saved yo' wuthless life once more. Damned if I know for why."

Badger jerked his arm away and started to speak.

"Hush yo' mouth!" snapped Blizzard. "Now befo' we go any fu'ther, you better recollect that a fella can sometimes take a chance with a he-killer and git away with it, but the fust time he gits a mite frisky with a she-killer—he's a goner! Savvy?"

"Hell! Miss Constance ain't no she-killer. Stop yo' jabberin' and let's us ramble."

Blizzard shrugged his shoulders. Swinging his rifle under his right arm, he set off at a pace that made Badger hurry to keep up. He chose a round-about course to the Wild Rose. After crossing the street where it was comparatively unlighted and at a point some distance from the honkatonk, they approached its rear entrance under cover of the darkness behind other buildings.

Badger was on edge. He didn't know what they were walking into, but he did know it took a lot to fire his cold-blooded

pardner to the point where he would show even a trace of excitement. Nor did he comprehend Blizzard's allusion to a "she-killer"; but Blizzard never went off half-cocked, so he knew there was plenty behind it. Moreover, he was dying to meet this strange girl whose acts of charity were talked about in a country where charity was taken for granted; this mysterious lady of the bad-lands where feminine virtue was a huge joke, who apparently had the respect of men who demanded virtue of their women.

Presently the large building loomed up close at hand. Badger heard music, laughter, and the stamp of dancers' feet; but no yells or boisterous language. The thought struck him that this was a mighty tame crowd for a honkatonk.

BLIZZARD spent no time in reconnoitering. He swung the back door open and Badger followed him in. They blinked in the light of a reception hall with a heavy rug under their feet, a large mirror on the wall at their left, and a stairway with thick, red carpet leading up on their right.

Directly in front of them—smiling as though extending a welcome to old friends—stood a pretty little girl with curly red hair, bold laughing eyes, and a green silk dress that began low on her bust and stopped in the region of her knees.

"Howdy, boys!"

Before his eyes became adjusted to the light, Badger saw just enough to make him say to himself that Old Tecumseh Smith was dead right about "them Wild Rose fillies."

An instant later he was able to see clearly.

Red!

And he felt Blizzard staring solemnly down at him like a damned old buzzard, drawing like a parson at a buryin', "Two million cows and fo'ty thousand calves."

Red looked from one to the other in

frank amazement. "Say—what the devil is the matter with you two pilgrims?"

Like the ornery cuss he was, Blizzard elected to keep silent; so Badger had to do the talking.

He managed to pull himself together enough to say, "They—they ain't nothin' the matter with me, uh-h Miss Red, but this here scaly old allygator has got a tech of sun—been out of his head ever sence mawnin'.

Red laughed. She laughed in the same carefree manner as when she was dressed in decent clothes and astride an honest horse. Obviously she was entirely at ease.

Again Blizzard's thin voice tormented the suffering Badger, "No foolin'. This here town is too wild and woolly for—"

Human flesh could stand no more. The heavy fist that crashed into Blizzard's ribs might have ruined any man who wasn't as tough as hickory. The lanky Ranger's grunt was almost an explosion. Then he grinned.

"Don't pay him no mind, Miss Red," he gasped in a weak voice. "The big cuss is chock full of snakehead."

The girl's eyes danced from one to the other. "So that's why it took you so long to get here. I thought maybe you were coming by way of Fort Griffin."

"Nope," drawled Blizzard. "We hit a free gait and figgered we was a-headin' in the right direction, but we got plumb turned around. Cain't no ways make out these here city trails."

He added as an afterthought, "You been a-settin' up for us?"

Her sharp eyes swept the length of him. "Sure thing! And we've got lots of company tonight, too; good spenders, every last one of 'em. So you've probably cost me ten dollars in percentage. Got ten dollars?"

She held out her hand.

BLIZZARD regarded the hand with solemn admiration. "Right purty leetle paw. Ain't never done no hard

work. Whatever made you calc'late we'd be comin' in the back way?"

Pouting prettily, the girl dropped her arm. She mimicked him. "I didn't cal'-late nothin', 'cause Miss Constance does all the calc'latin' round here. Follow me. She's waiting."

She started up the stairs. Blizzard followed, but Badger hesitated. Coming out of his daze ashamed of his embarrassment, he figured he had to do something to redeem himself. Fingering his mustache, he looked wistfully at the door to the dancehall.

The girl saw him hanging back. She stopped and called over her shoulder, "Too bashful to come upstairs, Little Boy?"

Blizzard snickered. Badger's ears got red. "Huh! Ain't a-skeerd of no upstairs," he growled. "It's that there soul-upliftin' music that's makin' me sorta linger."

He nodded at the door. "Reckon they got a fiddle, and a git-tah, and a 'cordion, and—by dogies!—they got 'em a pi-anny! Makes a fella want to rowel hisself in the flank and pitch and stomp a leetle. What say, Red?"

Her face beamed. She turned back. "Sure, Big Feller! I'd love to show off the gunslinger that made Carlos look like an army man. I know a lot of cats that'll be jealous as hell."

Blizzard grinned dryly. He blocked her passage down the steps. "Come on, you crazy yearlin's."

She obeyed him, but made a face over it. "Ain't you got no imagination?"

"Nary a speck," he admitted.

From the landing at the top of the stairway, Red led them back to the hall and pointed to the door at its end. "Guess you can't get lost from here. Go to that door and take off your hats and knock."

Turning away, she smiled at Badger and said, "So long. I've got to go and see if I can make an honest living. But

don't you forget, Big Feller—me and you are due to pitch and stomp a leetle."

Badger laughed. "I'll tell a man I won't forgit you, Red."

"Right clever gal," he observed as they tramped down the hall. He had a heap of things to say, but figured they'd have to wait.

"Uh-huh. Too damned smart to stay in this dive very long."

Blizzard spoke as though his mind was on something else. Badger looked intently at him. The tall Ranger's jaw was set, his fierce eyes riveted upon the door ahead. Rifle under his arm, he walked like a man trying to amble while eager to run. His restrained excitement was contagious. Badger caught it.

"She-killers is hell and repeat!" he thought.

Loosening his guns in their holsters, he glanced around him. Through the walls on either hand came the murmur of voices, the rattle of chips, and the clink of money. The carpet beneath their feet was soft and heavily padded. The only sound of their passage was the tinkle of their spurs.

Blizzard knocked deliberately.

The door swung open instantly, as if ready and waiting for his signal.

Ta-nah confronted the Rangers—a gaunt, unfriendly figure in the severe black dress which clothed her from throat to ankles. Her bronze face was expressionless.

Blizzard's bearing was defiant. "Where is she?"

SPARKS shot through the inky depths of Ta-nah's eyes. A knot of muscle showed between the thumb and fingers that gripped the door. Long, corded muscles rippled in her tight sleeves. Badger thought of she-killers. He estimated the length of blade that might be hidden between her flat breasts, beneath her corset.

She made of silence an insult.

A warm voice flowed out of the room behind her. "Come in, gentlemen!"

Blizzard took off his hat and stalked past the Indian woman as though she wasn't there. The muzzle of his rifle almost touched her.

Badger dropped his Stetson and stooped to pick it up. Through the door he saw Blizzard halt, square his shoulders, and gaze down exultantly at a woman on a sofa near the wall.

As Badger walked in, she came to her feet. He had a glimpse of the tiniest of brocaded slippers, and silken ankles smaller than his wrists. She moved into the soft light from a crystal candelabra overhead; dainty and yet stately, a vision in wine colored velvet. A large diamond blazed against the olive skin of her throat, and another sparkled on her hand—the only jewelry she wore.

She looked at him and smiled; pleasure, a warm welcome, full red lips and small white teeth, perfect like the rest of her.

He clenched his fists. Into his mind there flashed from the past another scene. This same woman—half crouched, straddling a dead man, spitting like a wildcat at bay, and cussing like a drunken cowhand.

Cherokee Lou!

He rumbled an oath. From the corner of his eye, he caught Blizzard's whimsical look and dry grin. Again he swore.

She laughed; the cheerful note of a meadowlark after a spring shower. And she spoke in that soft, throaty voice which wasn't the least of her attractions. It belonged to the mellow light and rich atmosphere of the room, and to her own beauty.

"Good evening, Badger. Won't you say 'Howdy' to an old friend?"

He didn't mince words. "Friend, hell!"

An impish light danced in her eye. She gave him her hand, and he surprised himself by taking it. Her strange voice

held mirth, good-fellowship, and a certain nonchalant allurements.

"Don't tell me that you're on the prod just because I tried to kill you."

"Good Lawd! Ain't that a-plenty?"

Again he surprised himself by discovering that he still had hold of her hand. He dropped it.

Tilting her exquisite little head, she regarded him humorously. "For some men, yes. For you, no."

Badger seemed to see her through the swirling smoke from Carlos' gun. He still had the smell of blood in his nostrils, and was belligerent when facing a supposed enemy. Besides, there was the shock of finding her here—not to mention Blizzard's irritating grin.

"You're dead wrong," growled the big Ranger. "Jest try to lift my topknot, and I'll fight tooth-and-toenail a mite harder than any fella you ever sot eyes on."

Miss Constance laughed with the utmost self-assurance. Motioning them to plush-upholstered chairs facing the sofa, she sank upon it with an unstudied grace that was a treat to the eyes of men unaccustomed to such elegance.

"Of course you'll fight, and better than anyone I know," she admitted sincerely, glancing quickly from one to the other. "But you Rangers make risking your lives a business, so when someone tries to kill you—you don't take it to heart as much as other men and you forget quicker."

BLIZZARD drawled seriously. "Oh, shore! We jest cain't remember sech doin's. Wish we could."

She gave him a malicious glance and went on talking to Badger.

Having verified his suspicions by proving "Miss Constance" to be Cherokee Lou, whom he had encountered before, Blizzard lost his fiery eagerness. Once more he was himself—drawing, calculating, and utterly impervious to the as-

saults of feminine charms when his duty as an officer of the law was involved.

For half an hour they talked at random, and he was glad of it. He needed time to study the woman. In appearance, language, and actions she had undergone a change for the better, so pronounced as to make him doubt the evidence of his own eyes and ears. She had made herself over, but he knew that the dainty,



soft-spoken, educated girl was Cherokee Lou—a vicious woman capable of almost insane hatred, a very devil of a killer. Yet it seemed impossible for any girl to be so finished an actress. Maybe she wasn't acting.

He cursed the luck that tangled him with a woman.

But he admired brains and cleverness wherever he found them, and gave her no end of credit. Badger wasn't any fool and plenty tough when riled, but she was cooling him off and calming him down with the mastery of an old twister working on a kinky pony.

So Blizzard mentally took off his hat to Cherokee Lou.

Suddenly and without warning, Miss Constance changed the subject. Looking Blizzard squarely in the eye, she declared, "I suppose you think I should be sorry for the things I did when we met before, don't you?"

Realizing that she tried to catch him off guard, he measured his words. "Nope, cain't rightly say that I do. I allow that feelin' sorry or not is a fella's own pussonal business."

She spoke to Blizzard, but smiled at

Badger—a girlish, disarming smile. "Well I am sorry—at least, kind of."

The lanky Ranger eyed her narrowly, but his voice was commonplace. "If it's a fair question, how come?"

Miss Constance settled back against the cushions and lit a cigarette. Indicating a decanter of whiskey and glasses on a carved mahogany stand at Badger's elbow, she said, "Just help yourselves. And please smoke."

He poured three drinks and offered one to her.

She shook her head. "You take mine, Badger. I'm half Indian, and I've seen what it does to the Red Man."

Sitting with knees crossed and an elbow resting upon them, Miss Constance watched the Rangers drink and graciously acknowledged the compliments they paid her fine liquor. While they rolled and lit cigarettes, she gazed thoughtfully at the buffalo robe at their feet.

"You killed my husband," she began in frank, man-to-man fashion, her voice retaining its peculiar richness with no suggestion of self-pity. "Oh yes! I was properly married to Chickasaw," she added with a quick glance at Blizzard.

He nodded solemnly.

The girl continued evenly, "You insulted me, and you hurt my pride by making me afraid of you. That was very bad, because I'm not afraid of men."

Badger chuckled.

She looked impudently at him. "And your sweetheart shot me. So taking everything into consideration, I thought I had plenty of reason to hate you thoroughly."

The girl paused to flick ashes from her cigarette.

"'Pears to me you did," observed Badger with a dry grin. "Leastwise, most folks would've calculated they did."

Blizzard said nothing. A little frown settled between his frosty eyes. The alert, unwavering gaze with which he studied her every move and expression, would

have made another woman uncomfortable.

GLANCING from one to the other with the frank and open expression of one who had nothing to hide, she continued; and in some manner, she clothed her words with a mantle of sincerity that was either genuine or a masterpiece of deception. "Belle Ransom's bullet almost killed me, and while lying in bed I did a lot of thinking. In the end I had to admit that you killed Chickasaw in a fair fight, while doing your duty as peace officers; that you were acting as officers of the law when you treated me rough, so there was nothing personal about it; and finally—Belle Ransom shot me to save her sweetheart's life, which is exactly what I would've done."

She smiled briefly. "The fact that I was about to go racking over the Divide had nothing to do with those conclusions. In religion I'm an Indian, so the Happy Hunting Grounds hold no terrors for me. It was simply my commonsense taking charge of things while I was too weak to make it misbehave."

Miss Constance brought the cigarette to her lips and inhaled deeply. "So that's why I'm pretty nearly sorry."

She sank back against the plush, and her eyes seemed to lengthen while she watched the Rangers through the smoke.

Badger had the uneasy sensation that she was reading his thoughts. He wanted to say something, but couldn't decide what it ought to be; so he poured Blizzard another drink, and appropriated the one she refused.

The lean Ranger inspected his glass with an admiring eye, and spoke up lazily, "Sounds sensible, all right. But me and Badger ain't nothin' to you, so why feel anyways sorry?"

Her face hardened a trifle. "Hell man! Don't you give me credit for enough sense to know that it doesn't pay anyone to buck your game?"

He countered dryly, "A whole slew of fellas with a heap of sense don't nowadays feel thataway 'bout it."

She sat up straight and answered with spirit. "Certainly! And sooner or later you'll get 'em. No sir! I'm damned glad I finally had brains enough to realize that by running this joint and half a dozen others like it, I can make all the money I'll ever need without locking horns with the law. As a business proposition, I'd a lot rather have your friendship than my revenge—if I've got any coming."

Blizzard thoughtfully tasted his whiskey, and allowed, "Somehow or other, I allus figured that a gal jest naturally had to try to git even with a fella that done her dirt. But mebbe you're a mite different."

She made a negative gesture. "Not a bit! If I let my temper go and didn't stop to think, I'd sure try to get even with you."

THE Ranger stroked his jaw with a long hand, and eyed her closely. "Uh-huh. I sorta calc'lated you did when you sicked that there Mex onto us."

Badger choked on his liquor.

Cherokee Lou's eyes opened wide. "I've been waiting for that!" she exclaimed. "When Ta-nah told me you suspected I was here, I knew you'd think I caused Carlos to pick a fight with you."

"Cain't blame me much, can you?"

The girl got up suddenly. With quick, nervous movements she poured a glass of water from a carafe on the stand. She drank, and still holding the glass, turned to meet Blizzard's level gaze.

"No, I can't," she said frankly. "And the hell of it is, it's true!"

"I'll be doggoned!" exploded Badger, wondering what this girl would do or say next. He was ready for anything.

Blizzard's lids narrowed and his lips tightened. He waited for her to continue.

She sat down wearily. "Carlos was here with me when you rode in. I was excited and didn't stop to think, so I

pointed you out to him and told him you were Buffalo and Pelican—two famous outlaws. To make matters worse, I said Buffalo was the fastest man with a gun I'd ever seen. That's what did it. Carlos was jealous of his reputation, and I was a fool not to realize what was bound to happen."

Badger spoke up quickly. "No harm done, Miss. Nobody got a scratch—exceptin' them Mex's."

"Was Carlos a friend of your'n?" sharply inquired Blizzard.

Miss Constance made no effort to avoid his gaze. "No," she replied promptly. "In fact, I was at the point of considering him an enemy."

"Mind sayin' why?"

"Not at all!" she flared. "For the same reason that other men have come to be my enemies. They refuse to believe that when I want another man, I'll work the herd and cut out the one I like best."

Blizzard pulled the lobe of his ear and drawled, "Reckon you handle men like us fellas handles cows."

Miss Constance laughed, and Badger joined in. He watched her throat flutter like a mocking bird's, and thought her laughter every bit as musical as its song. But he was young and sentimental, and she was the prettiest little thing he ever saw, and her whiskey was powerful good.

"Thanks for the compliment, Blizzard," she said presently. "It's a fact. I can handle men."

Nothing egotistical about it. Merely a simple truth, plainly stated.

He changed the subject. "I'm sorta curious to know why you told Carlos we was Buffalo and Pelican, if it's a fair question."

Her expression was suddenly mischievous. "Maybe it was because I think you make better outlaws than Rangers."

Badger laughed heartily. He swore to himself that he wouldn't have believed Cherokee Lou could be such a cute little devil.

Blizzard grinned frostily. "Maybeso. And on the other hand, mebbe you had a purty good reason for not wantin' Carlos to know we was Rangers. Cain't never tell."

The girl laughed lightly. "No sah, you cain't never tell," she mimicked him. "So I'll tell you the truth, but you won't believe me. It was because I wasn't sure whether you were coming here as Rangers, so I played safe and said you were outlaws. I knew that wouldn't interfere with your plans, whatever they are."

"Much obliged," drawled Blizzard skeptically. "Shore wish everybody was as keerful 'bout us Rangers' plans."

She pouted. "Now you're just being ornery! I didn't want to do anything to cause you trouble."

"Figgerin' it'd be pore business?"

Miss Constance shrugged her bare shoulders—right prettily, thought Badger.

"Partly that and partly something else," she declared. "I've been hoping for a chance to make friends with you two devils."

She paused and looked sharply at each of them.

Neither had a word to say. Blizzard thought she seemed a trifle older.

WHEN the girl continued, her voice was as soft as ever; but into it crept an undertone of determination too clear to be overlooked. "Again you're wondering why. All right, I'll tell you. I like men—real men. I can't be bothered with the other kind. It doesn't make a bit of difference to me whether those real men are cowhands or Rangers or outlaws. I get a thrill out of making them like me—fall for me, if you want to call it that. It raises my opinion of myself."

Obviously choosing her words with care, she concluded with a frankness that was complimentary. "You fellows are real men. You're the only men who ever had the brains and guts to give me a lickin'." She smiled whimsically. "I'm good

and I know it, and it takes a damned good man to get the best of me!"

Badger's eyes danced, and he hid a grin with his hand.

"You shore don't mince no words," drawled Blizzard.

"And why shouldn't I be honest about it?" she demanded with a show of feeling. "You understand, because you know women of my type. We'll fight him like the very devil, then love the man who is man enough to trounce us!"

Badger was completely flabbergasted. While talking, she looked at him most of the time, although it was Blizzard who treated her rough upon that former occasion. There was a lure about the woman that for the moment made him forget who she was. Her apparent honesty appealed to his straight-forward nature, got underneath his hide, as he'd describe it. He didn't know what to say. So he poured himself another drink.

Blizzard wanted to cuss. This girl was twice as smart as he thought she'd be, and therefore ten times as dangerous. She was so infernally outspoken and frank about everything, there wasn't a man in a thousand who wouldn't believe her. Damn her! Badger was young. Badger was a good-looking scalawag. Badger was soft-hearted where women were concerned. She had her eye on Badger, and she was a-shakin' out a loop. If he couldn't outfigure her, he saw trouble ahead for Badger.

Cherokee Lou was bad and didn't deny it!

He thought it expedient to change the subject. "I'm sorta wonderin' how much you happen to know 'bout them plans of our'n, if you don't mind sayin'."

Miss Constance smiled in a tantalizing way. He experienced the disagreeable feeling that she knew she had him guessing. "Won't go as far as to say I know anything," she remarked cautiously. "But I've got some mighty strong suspicions, Sergeant Wilson."

Badger jerked erect in his chair. "Whoa-a-up Miss! How'd you come to know he's jest been made a sa'jint?"

The girl had a shrewd light in her eye. "You'd be surprised how much I've learned about you two wildcats."

BLIZZARD was past the stage where he'd be surprised at anything she did or said. So he stuck to the important question. "I allow it ain't 'specially comfartin' to a officer to find out that somebody suspicions what he's calc'latin' to do in a tough country like this'n. But more'n likely you're jest a-lettin' on."

"You wouldn't try to find out, would you, Blizzard?" she murmured with an oblique glance. "But I don't mind telling you. Everybody knows what trouble the Box J has been having, and of course I expected that sooner or later Belle Ransom would send for you. Naturally, I suppose you're here to get to the bottom of that mess."

Blizzard nodded solemnly. Daggone the woman! She talked too damned straight for a girl as pretty as she was. He wanted to believe every word she said, so he knew she was the slickest liar he ever saw. And the little devil was holding good cards. One word from her, and they'd be in a hell of a pickle.

He gruffly told Badger to pour him a big drink.

Miss Constance obviously enjoyed watching his Adam's apple slide up and down. When he emptied the glass and drew a long breath, she remarked cordially, "If I can help you while you're here, just let me know. I've got lots of friends in this country, and very few enemies."

Having done a heap of riding and wound up back of where he started, Blizzard figured he'd better try another trail. He'd play her game for a spell. In his droll manner, he could be just as deceptive as he judged her to be.

"I cale'l late we're a-go'in' to need plenty

help," he drawled, fingering his mustache. "Mebbe you and us could do a leetle swappin', off and on. Is some cus a-pes-terin' you pussional, or somethin'?"

Badger couldn't believe his ears, for he'd swear Blizzard meant what he said.

The girl made no effort to hide her surprise. "That's something I didn't expect!" she exclaimed. "And I'm wonderin' why."

Puckery lines came at the corners of Blizzard's level eyes. He met her calculating look with the beginnings of a grin. "You like real men, and I like real brains; 'specially when I find 'em inside the head of a purty gal, where I'm expectin' to find a heap of nothin' at all."

He thought that hit her weakness.



She beamed with pride and burst out triumphantly, "Hear that, Badger? Considering where it came from, it's one of the finest compliments I ever had paid to me. When Sergeant Wilson tells me I've got brains, I believe it myself."

Glancing slyly at Blizzard, she added, "They say he has the keenest mind in the Ranger force."

"Gruumph!" rumbled Badger. "Somebody done lied 'bout him somethin' scandalous."

Blizzard ignored Badger and riveted his attention upon the girl. He wanted her to talk, and knew she wasn't afraid to do it; so he urged her on. "Maybe the fellas that's a-trompin' on yo' toes—if any of 'em is—will turn out to be the jaspers we gotta round up. Cain't tell."

Miss Constance appeared to give the matter some serious consideration. Clasp-

ing her hands behind her head, she stared thoughtfully at the ceiling. Presently she said, "I don't know. But there's a chance that one of my enemies is mixed up in the Box J trouble."

SHE hesitated for a moment. Blizzard figured she was cooking up a nice lie; but for the life of him, he didn't know what made him think it.

Cherokee Lou continued, "If I were in your boots, the first man I'd suspect would be Jake Rupper."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Badger. "Why, Jake fed with us tonight and I figured he was a right clever fella."

Her face was serious. "I know he did. Ta-nah told me. Don't trust him out of your sight."

"He said some mighty nice things 'bout you."

"Naturally he did," she remarked scornfully. "Jake's as smooth as they come. But, if he thought he wouldn't get caught, he'd cut my throat in a minute."

Blizzard eyed her hard. He remembered the perfume on Jake. It was hers, all right. At that instant he would've given his shirt to know what was going on behind her low, broad forehead.

"Rupper shore is a slippery lookin' cuss," he observed. "But you cain't hang a fella jest 'cause he looks like he had it comin'."

She nodded, and said nothing.

Incapable of the tricky maneuvers that Blizzard frequently employed, Badger invariably drove straight at the heart of any problem that bothered him. "Whatever makes you suspicion Jake, if it's a fair question, Miss?"

Cherokee Lou exercised the prerogatives of a girl with brains, and took the offensive with the kind of a smile that would pull the teeth of any man's impertinent question. "Badger, you should know better than to ask a woman 'why'? If she doesn't know, she'll hide her ignorance by answering 'Because'; and if

she knows but doesn't want to tell you, she'll give you the same reply every time."

Badger subsided.

Blizzard concluded they had better get out of there. From the moment he met her, he had tried to act as she would naturally expect him to behave—showing the right amount of hostility and all that. Above everything, he didn't want her to get the idea she was under suspicion, and the slightest slip on their part would put the smart little devil on guard.

Uncoiling from his chair, he drawled, "Reckon we better pull our freight. Had a right nice visit, ma'm, and don't you forgit to holler fust time you need a leetle help."

Miss Constance quickly got to her feet. Stepping close to Blizzard, she placed a hand on his arm. Her bright eyes searched his solemn face. "Guess I figured you wrong. You can be nice, can't you Blizzard?"

"Not frequent," growled Badger.

Blizzard's face matched the red in the bandanna around his neck. "W-wouldn't be surprised if it's yo' likker a-workin' on me, ma'm," he stammered. "T'ain't natural."

She laughed. "I don't believe it!"

GIVING Blizzard's arm a squeeze, she glanced at Badger. "I'm not going to let you fellows get away from me so easily," she said with a friendly smile; then her face grew serious. "What I'm going to do now will help you a lot, but it's sure to make you a dangerous enemy. Are you game?"

Blizzard hitched his weight from one leg to the other. "We shore need help."

Badger's eyes twinkled. "Me—I jest dote on enemies. Who is this'n?"

"Jake Rupper."

"How come?"

"Follow me."

Ta-nah materialized out of nothing and opened the door.

Without looking back, Cherokee Lou and Badger went down the hall chattering and laughing. She had her arm through his.

Blizzard tarried at the door. He stood rigidly erect a yard in front of Ta-nah. His lean face was as cold and unmoved as hers. With deliberation, he drew a knife from the inside pocket of his vest and handed it to her—hilt foremost.

"A squaw's knife!" he said.

She took the weapon. Harsh, guttural words came rasping through her hard lips. "Good knife! Never miss twice."

Blizzard swung his rifle under his arm, and turned his back to her. In long strides, he overtook Cherokee Lou and Badger at the stairway and followed them down to the parlor entrance. The music had just stopped. A flurry of laughter, mixed voices, the clump of heels, and the clatter of glasses came through the door.

With a hand on the knob, the girl turned and gave the Rangers a challenging look. "Jake's bad medicine. Want to change your minds?"

Blizzard pulled a sober face. "I'm a-shakin' in my boots, but Old Curiosity done throwed me. Lead on."

CHAPTER VI

"JEST A-PILIN' UP TROUBLE FOR BADGER."

MISS CONSTANCE opened the door. Noise in the large room fell to a murmur. Under soft lights, the Rangers found themselves the subject of interested and inquiring stares from all sorts of men, and women of but one sort. The revellers were seated at small tables, placed so as to leave part of the floor clear for dancing. Colored girls in starched white dresses and lace caps, moved about the room with bottles, trays, glasses, and toothy smiles. On the walls hung several excellent paintings of white girls who made no effort to conceal their natural charms, appeared happy in their wicked

surroundings, and smiled welcomes to the guests.

"Howdy, Folks!" Miss Constance called out airily.

Plainly she was popular. They greeted her hilariously but not boisterously. Several men flourished glasses or bottles, inviting her to drink; but without exception, they called her "Miss."

Nodding and smiling to right and left, she asked them to be quiet. They obeyed instantly. With a Ranger towering on either side, she slipped her arms through theirs. Blizzard was on fire. His feet didn't feel right, and he couldn't find a place for his hands. Thoroughly at ease and enjoying himself hugely, Badger twisted his mustache and grinned at the world in general. That is, he grinned until he caught sight of a man standing alone—the Professor.

With arms folded, he stood utterly motionless near the front door. In that subdued light he looked taller, gaunter, and more lifeless than ever. His face might have been carved from some bluish stone, and his eyes polished balls of ebony set deep within the shadows of his brows.

He gazed with unflinching interest at Badger, as though the big Ranger was a problem that had to be solved.

Blizzard instantly sensed a change in Cherokee Lou. In some subtle manner, she appeared to radiate the spirit of the men of that time and region—a laughing, open-handed, rollicking good fellow.

She even altered her language the proper amount exactly. "Ladies and Gents, I want you-all to meet some old friends of mine. Right now they're calling themselves Badger and Blizzard, but the last time I saw 'em, they were somebody else. And so was I, as far as they're concerned, because they knew me by my Indian name." She glanced slyly up at Blizzard. "I'm having a hard time convincing them I'm the little squaw they used to know."

The tall Ranger squirmed and wished he was plumb away from there.

She laughed lightly, then continued, "I'll never forget how they busted into the reservation with half a dozen Deputy United States Marshals on their tails. That was right after I came home from Indian school. They holed up in my mother's lodge for more than a month, and I helped cook their grub. How these fellows can eat!"

That brought a burst of laughter. She glanced proudly from one to the other. "A while back, they did me a mighty good turn and I'm not forgetting it. So from now until noon tomorrow, the house is theirs. Ladies and gents, their money isn't any good!"

She waved a hand at the pale fellow who slouched in a bored attitude at the piano, "Professor, give us a waltz!"

Badger hastily removed his spurs and hung them on the wall under his hat.

Cherokee Lou slid into his arms, and they swung into the dance. This was his idea of a grand time. He got a whiff of her perfume, and swore that his head was a-floatin' in the clouds. Alcohol tore through his veins at a high lope, and his heart was a-jumpin' crooked. Music went in his ears, and settled in his feet. So he waltzed like he did everything else—high, wide, and handsome.

To make things just right, he didn't have to worry about his partner's fancy slippers; they seemed never to touch the floor anyhow. Ahead of her time as far as the decorous waltz was concerned, she let her body slink close to his and laid her cheek on his breast. Right there and then his old heart sunfished, swapped ends, and did a back-fall. Surely she heard the wild exuberance that tossed and rumbled in his chest, a-fixin' to bust out. He was dying to sound the long yell, and afraid to do it.

Her dainty little face was roguish and full of hell. Her large, fiery eyes caught his and shot sparks of deviltry. She

pinched a fold of the leathery skin on his neck. His mustache brushed her forehead, and she laughed gleefully.

"Tear up the scenery, Big Feller! I'm a-ridin' loose, so if you throw yourself I'll light on my feet."

Cherokee Lou knew her men!

TWO small hands caught Blizzard's arm. He glanced down into Red's upturned face. "Come on, High Pockets!" she cried. "I'm near sighted and I can't see the top of you, and my legs are so short, I'll have to take six steps to your one—but I'll betcha we can cover more ground than they're covering. Let's go!"

Beneath the humor in her voice, he detected chagrin. It gave him an idea.

He grinned wryly down at her. "You're a nervy gal, but I cain't cut 'er. What I mean, Red, nothin' shorter'n a graft can dance with me and live to eat another breakfast. Let's set and I'll buy."

She giggled and led him to a vacant table.

When the colored girl came, Red said off-hand, "Two bottles of wine, Susie—the best."

Blizzard gave the grinning waitress a sharp look. She didn't move.

"Red, I been up the trail more'n once," he drawled. "When I'm a-settin' in this game, dollar drinks is my limit."

He twisted the drooping ends of his mustache, and glanced up at the colored girl. "Two bottles of beer, Susie—the best."

Red shook her head at the waitress and laughed at Blizzard. "You don't look it, Mossyhorns, but your memory ain't none too good."

"How come?"

"You already forgot what Madam said."

"What's that?"

"Right now, you own this joint and all the drinks and girls in it."

"Humph!" he sniffed to show his scorn.

Red thrust her pretty face as close to his as the table would permit. She spoke confidentially, "You betcha! And she'll cut your throat if you don't take her at her word."

Throat slitting and Cherokee Lou went together right nicely, thought Blizzard.

He cleared his throat solemnly. "Susie, trot in the wine."

The wine came promptly. While depositing her percentage check in her stocking, Red followed Badger and his partner with an expression that indicated she had a temper of well developed proportions. "Damn him! He'll be too snooty to see me when she turns him loose."

"Maybe she won't never onloose him," soberly observed Blizzard. "Cain't tell."

Red favored him with an eloquent look. "I'll admit he's the kind of a root-in', tootin', son-of-a-gun that a girl likes, but High Pockets—you don't know that woman!"

"Nope, allow I don't," mused the Ranger, watching the dancers. "But ever since I knowed him, far and wide, the gals has fit over the wuthless cuss."

Her chin went up a notch. "And I've seen 'em fight like hell over a cigarette butt."

He took time to admire Cherokee Lou's technique when she playfully pulled Badger's ear as they galloped past. "I wouldn't be surprised if Miss Constance could put up a right smart fight for a fella if she was a-mind to."

"She's never had to fight for anything," scornfully replied the girl, going on with engaging frankness, "Does he like red heads?"

"They's his pussional weakness," solemnly avowed Blizzard.

ELBOWS on the table, Red cradled her chin in the cup of her hands and talked on with a far-away look in her eye. "The only way a girl can get anywhere in this God-forsaken country is to

catch herself a fancy gunslinger like him. She'll spend the balance of her days getting him out of trouble and they won't live long, but with her brains and his guns they'll make a name for themselves. And what more does any damned fool want?"

Blizzard nodded grimly. From the side of his eye he watched her laying plans, building air castles, dreaming dreams; a honkatonk girl's dreams of grandeur—a short and turbulent life, a violent death, and a name for herself!

Having known other ambitious girls like Red, he had recognized the symptoms when she first met Badger. No use preaching to her. So he'd use her if he could.

"Pears to me that Miss Constance has made a name for herself without no gunfighter to help her," he observed casually. "Reckon it can be done all right."

Red's face hardened momentarily. Her glance darted to the Professor and away again. At the point of speaking, she bit her lip and said nothing.



Blizzard thoughtfully emptied his glass. The girl kept silent, and he made no effort to lead her on; a job for Badger.

From time to time, Blizzard stole a glance at the Professor. He shortly discovered that the gunman's large, luminous eyes followed Cherokee Lou and her partner continually. Certainly not one of her coquettish tricks would escape that steady gaze.

"Jest a-pilin' up trouble for Badger,"

he reflected grimly. "And mebbe for her ownself to boot."

The Ranger also kept an eye open for Jake Rupper. He hoped the dandy would show up before they left; wanted to find out whether Cherokee Lou knew what she was talking about. And he didn't have long to wait.

Through the front door opening into the barroom, came Jake—swaggering as if he owned the place. He swept off his hat with a flourish. Light glistened on his greased and plastered hair. Posing for a moment with a hand at his mustache, he returned laughing replies to the greetings that came from all sides. Girls clustered around him. He treated them with a lofty, condescending air, appearing to grow even taller while basking in their admiration. A sharp-faced brunette pulled his head down and whispered in his ear.

He snapped erect, and his beady eyes darted from couple to couple on the dance floor. His unusual height enabled him to look over the heads of others, so he probably caught sight of Badger and the girl in a far corner. For the briefest instant, Blizzard saw murder in Jake's long, cruel face. A moment later he was again a witty, conceited sport—the idol of the bad lands.

Cherokee Lou was right. Another enemy, a bad one.

The music stopped. Miss Constance and Badger dropped into chairs at Blizzard's table. Jake arrived almost immediately.

"How's everybody?" he sang out cordially. He took a chair without an invitation. "Badger, you shore was a-cuttin' capers."

Badger's good-natured face flushed with boyish pleasure. He glanced proudly at Cherokee Lou. "Jest couldn't help myself, Jake," he panted. "Done wore my self plumb down to the hocks a-tryin' to keep up with my pardner. Like settin' out to ketch a butterfly in a norther."

"More likely a bumblebee," Miss Constance declared breathlessly. "What a dance! It was lots of fun, and we'll do it again sometime."

Rupper cut in. "You're steppin' the next one with me, ain't you Connie?"

THE girl inspected her face in a tiny mirror, tucking in a stray hair or two. "Sorry, Jake. I'm tired. No more for me tonight. I'll see if I can get Anton to play for us, then I must go."

Jake's conceit arose to the occasion. He wasn't noticeably depressed by her refusal.

She had no trouble catching the Professor's eye, for his interest was centered upon that table to the exclusion of everything else in the room. He stalked slowly across the floor, and stopped near her with the suggestion of a bow.

"Did you want something, Miss Constance?"

She glanced from him to each of the Rangers in turn. "Anton, I believe you've already met these gentlemen."

He nodded carelessly.

Badger and Blizzard made appropriate remarks.

The girl smiled up at him for an instant, then softly asked, "Will you play for me, Anton? Just once—anything."

A quick flash of pleasure worked a wonder on his somber face. "Of course."

He left at once, walking with a spring in his step.

While waiting for the Professor to return from his room with his violin, Miss Constance chatted gaily with those at the table and others near by. Blizzard studied her, and cast an eye over the room, and listened, and swore he had never seen the beat of it. Except for the way the girls were dressed, the liquor in sight, and a little cussing now and then—this honkatonk crowd wasn't behaving much worse than the folks at a country picnic.

No doubt about it, Cherokee Lou was somebody on this Whirlwind range. She

had him guessing, and he saw at a glance that she had Badger plumb bamboozled already. He looked at her, and he listened to her, and he wished to hell he was back a-workin' stock.

THE Professor came in from the rear with a violin under his arm. Evidently to hear him play was considered something of a treat. Noise subsided rapidly. Waitresses ceased their activities and stood with backs to the wall. Here and there, sober heads quieted those who felt their liquor. Someone passed the word to the barroom. Men came hurrying in to find seats as quickly and quietly as possible. Without exception they removed their hats, and this is no doubt included some who practically lived in their headgear.

Blizzard saw all these things and couldn't help thinking, "Us West Texas men is tough, and I reckon we're savages and heathens jest like the tenderfeet from Back East allow we are when they poke fun at our looks, and clothes, and talk. But by Dogies—jest give us a chance to git a nibble at somethin' good and we shore as hell gobble it up! Wouldn't be surprised if it tastes a heap better to us than it does to them as ain't never had to git along without sech fancy fixin's. Cain't tell."

The Professor raised the violin, closed his sunken eyes, and played. As the first strains arose, the ashen face that nestled against the instrument seemed transformed into the lifeless features of a man who died happy. And to the untrained minds in the audience, the music itself may have seemed to come from another world; weird, unearthly, fantastic music that lent itself to the individual interpretation of every listener—each according to his fancy. Cruel music that tore at the nerves of the timid and left them fearful. Plaintive music that touched the hearts of the charitable. Captivating music that shamelessly whispered seduc-

tive words. And noble music that portrayed grand scenes and described stirring deeds.

At length it faded and died in a passage of ineffable pathos.

The Professor opened his eyes. Instantly they came to rest upon Miss Constance—slightly inquisitive, a little doubtful, and very hopeful. Shouts, hand clapping, stamping, and whistling from the crowd; apparently he didn't hear it. Having played for her alone, to her he looked for his applause.

Blizzard glanced at the girl. Her lips were parted, her eyes moist, and her breast rose and fell rapidly. She stared at the gunman-musician as though hypnotized.

And the Ranger thought, "She loves that there man—when he's a-playin' on his fiddle."

Her emotions had control for an instant only. She nodded and smiled at Anton, and calmly turned to the Rangers.

"You boys go ahead and have a good time," she remarked pleasantly. "Sorry I can't stay and help you. But if you get away without letting me see you again, I'll send a posse after you."

Blizzard returned her quizzical look with good measure, and drawled, "We ain't got a mite of use for posses, Miss, so I reckon mebbe you'll be seein' us a-plenty."

Badger aimed to say something polite, but Blizzard's subtle threat sort of knocked the wind out of him. Cherokee Lou was on her way to the back door before he got his ideas untangled.

Suddenly a commotion started in one of the gambling rooms overhead. There came a mighty yell, chips clattered and coins rattled, and something crashed to the floor with force enough to jar the building. Heavy footsteps thumped rapidly on the thick carpet above, and came blundering down the stairway. The next moment Big Whiskers, the freighter, filled the doorway. He stood with legs spread

and a hand against the jamb on either side to steady his huge bulk. His eyes were bloodshot and blazing with rage. His beard seemed to bristle. He had lost his hat, and his shaggy head weaved like a mad bull's. The man was just drunk enough to be destructive and otherwise dangerous.

MISS CONSTANCE stopped facing him, a few feet away.

Badger and Blizzard got up quickly.

In the act of carefully replacing his violin in its case, the Professor paused and glanced over his shoulder; then he closed the top with a snap and walked leisurely toward the big man.

"Waugh-h-h!" bellowed the freighter with a great oath. "They cleaned me. But I'll git my money's wuth, by God!"

His arm shot out and his thick fingers closed on Cherokee Lou's bare shoulder. He jerked her to him. "Com'ere to yo' pappy, honey!"

Her right hand darted to her bosom, and he caught her wrist in the nick of time.

The Rangers came lunging from their table, knocking over chairs and brushing men and women aside. But the Professor got there ahead of them. He covered the remaining distance in what seemed a step, and with no apparent loss of dignity or composure.

"Stop it!" he commanded without raising his voice.

Big Whiskers swung the girl aside. With surprising agility, he whipped a knife from his belt and launched a vicious upward stab at the slender gunman. Anton swayed his lithe body barely enough to avoid the blade. His spidery arm whipped through the air in a short arc. His Colt slapped the ruffian's temple with a sharp crack, like a barrel stave slapping a rock.

Big Whiskers dropped the knife. His arms hung straight down from his shoulders. He trembled in all his limbs. His

eyeballs rolled upward until only the whites were visible. His knees collapsed slowly, and he wilted to the floor. The perfectly timed blow from a heavy gun barrel had laid his scalp open to the bone.

Cherokee Lou smiled up at the Professor. "On the job as usual," she said softly. "Thank you, Anton."

He inclined his head and holstered his gun.

A noisy crowd quickly gathered about the group at the door. Several voices inquired whether Miss Constance was hurt.

She looked around her. Her eyes danced and she laughed gayly. "Nary a scratch, as Badger Coe would say."

Nodding toward the man at her feet, she told the Professor, "I'm glad you didn't hurt him any worse than you did. He's a good-hearted scamp, even if he is a little rough when he's tight. Take him to the back room and have Doc Furnace stitch him up."

"We ought to stretch him up!" exclaimed Jake Rupper in a chesty voice. Having tried his best and failed to arrive on the scene ahead of the Professor, Jake was nettled.

His suggestion met the hearty approval of the gang. Cries of "String him up!" arose on every hand. Most of the women backed off as best they could, and the men elbowed closer.

The Rangers exchanged eloquent glances. There was the feel of trouble in the air. Badger loosened his guns in their holsters. Blizzard made certain that his Colt and knife were in place, and wished that he hadn't left his rifle in the entrance hall. He knew that Cherokee Lou was too smart to want the man lynched, and he wondered how she'd handle this ticklish situation. He soon found out.

LOOKING defiantly at those who yelled the loudest, particularly Rupper, she declared firmly, "We'll do nothing of the sort! And what's more—An-

ton, I want you to find out whether Big Whiskers has enough money left to keep him going. If he hasn't, I'll stake him."

The Professor nodded.

Jake wore the countenance of a man who felt himself being put in place. And there were other men who showed signs of wishing they were elsewhere. One of them hurried away, muttering that he'd go fetch the Doc.

Blizzard grinned.

"She's smart as a whip and nervy as hell," thought Badger.

Again Miss Constance spoke to the crowd. "If it wasn't for these freighters, we'd go naked and starve and die thirsty out here in the wilderness. So we don't want to put any of 'em out of business."

As if that definitely settled the matter, she turned away and left through an opening in the circle of spectators. At the door, she smiled over her shoulder. "And besides, they're damned good spenders when they've got it to spend," she observed whimsically. "Good night, folks."

Nothing more was said about hanging Big Whiskers. On the contrary, he forthwith became an object of sympathy. As many men as could fasten onto some part of him, assisted in carrying the big fellow to a small room at the rear. Offers of first aid were numerous, all of which indicated the use of liquor in some form.

Hovering near the injured man was a woman with a ponderous bosom and hips to match, and a face unsuited to the rest of her—small and round, with apple cheeks and large, blue eyes of baby innocence.

Although she took up a lot of space and got under foot, Badger noticed that no man audibly objected.

So when Rattlesnake Runnels staggered past with Big Whiskers' plug of eatin' tobacco which had somehow got separated from its owner, the Ranger inquired, "Rattler, who is that there healthy lookin' gal?"

The old cowman tottered to a halt. He solemnly regarded both the girl and the plug, took a hungry bite at the latter, and answered, "Chuck Wagon Sue."

"Huh?"

"Yes, sah, Badger, that there amblin' feather bed is Chuck Wagon Sue."

"Is she the big fella's gal?"

Rattlesnake Runnels examined both sides of the plug. "Yep, one of 'em. Course he's got wimmin scattered here and yander, but she's his favorite Whirlwind gal."

Badger scratched the back of his neck. "Hell of a name for a woman, I'd say."

Rattler rolled an owlsh eye at Sue. "No foolin', and Sue's a hell of a woman in mo' ways than one—all of 'em good."

"Wouldn't be at all surprised," conceded the Ranger. "Reckon they named her Chuck Wagon 'cause it takes mighty nigh a whole wagon sheet to kiver her."

Rattlesnake Runnels chewed away blissfully. He studiously turned the plug in his hand, then shoved it into his hip pocket with the air of a man who had just made a momentous decision and felt no pangs of remorse.

"No, sah, as a fella says—Sue done earned that there name by the sweat of her brow on the field of honah," he declaimed. "It's like this. Up to Mobettie a while back, barkeep that wa'n't nothin' but breath and britches nohow, made the mistake of sorta intimatin' to Sue that she looked to him 'bout like the south end of a chuck wagon a-headin' no'th. That was



bad, 'cause it jest happened that Sue was off her feed and a mite techy. So she up and busted the daggoned saloon to smithereens, and what I mean—she done rocked

that there windy barman to sleep with his own bungstarter!"

The lanky old twister teetered back on his heels. "Yes, sah, as I was fixin' to say—they ain't nobody got a better right than Sue to pack that there Chuck Wagon brand."

Badger laughingly admitted there wasn't any room for argument on that score.

HE and Rattler stopped at the door to the small room. From there they watched the others spread Big Whiskers out on a buffalo robe on the floor, since there wasn't anything else long enough to hold him. Sue took a cushion from a rocking chair and placed it under his head with all the tenderness of a mother putting a child in its cradle.

Badger glanced up at his tall companion. "Her size and shape, regardless—she is a motherly sort of a gal, ain't she?"

Old Rattler looked on with solemn approval while Sue wiped blood from Big Whiskers' eye with her own handkerchief. "Motherly as hell!" he declared. "And likewise, she's a chuck wagon plumb through and through."

"Reckon I don't quite ketch on."

The hard-bitten old boss of the Crazy R tugged at his mustache and drawled, "Well sah—hungry fellas go to Sue for grub jest like she was a chuck wagon. If she's got a dollah, they git it. And if she ain't, Sue waltzes 'em across the street to the Chink's. Soon as ever Old John Chinec gits sight of her, he starts right in to slicin' bacon and a-crackin' aigs wuss'n if Satan was on his tail a-bellerin' for grub. Fact is, John has been plumb charitable ever sence the time Sue mighty nigh strangled him with his own pigtail when he allowed he wouldn't feed a hungry friend of her'n 'cause the pore cuss didn't have nary a cent."

Badger laughed. He swore he'd have to get acquainted with Chuck Wagon Sue.

Through the crowd that now drifted about the room as though nothing had happened, he caught sight of Blizzard with Red hanging to his arm. Evidently she was introducing the tall Ranger around, much to his embarrassment.

"Betcha that there Red gal is right charitable, too," remarked Badger. "Behaves like she was."

Old Rattler pursed his lips and pondered the matter. "Mmmm-huh! Some folks says that she'll chase a dollah through hell so damned fast Old Baldy won't never scorch a tail feather."

The Ranger chuckled, and the cowman added cautiously, "But mind you—I ain't never been through hell with Red and a dollah, so I cain't say for shore."

Just then a wiry little man with a white beard and long, white hair, came bustling through the front door carrying a weathered and battered medicine case. A black cigar aggressively thrust itself out of his beard, and a black Stetson rode well over on one side of his white head. His Prince Albert coat reached almost to the tops of his high-heeled boots.

EVIDENTLY Doc was popular. Men and women greeted him with familiarity, and many friendly jibes were tossed his way. Keeping a severe face, he snapped crusty answers and tramped on to the rear; but his sharp blue eyes held a pleasant twinkle.

Standing by the door to the small room, Rattlesnake Runnels squared his shoulders and saluted with solemn dignity. "Doctah—how are you-all this fine, Texas evenin', sah?"

The brusque little man paused long enough to sweep the old twister's lanky frame with a caustic eye. "So it ain't you that got busted? Too bad! I been hopin' it was."

He brushed past Badger and the cowman without another word.

The men around Big Whiskers got out

of his way, but Chuck Wagon Sue kept her seat on the floor at the wounded man's head.

Doc barked at her. "Get out from under foot, Sue, befo' I tromp on you!"

Although twice his size, she moved aside in a hurry.

The doctor pulled off his gloves and deftly made a quick examination, from time to time snorting into his whiskers.

Sue watched every move he made. In a moment she inquired fearfully, "Doc, is he going to die?"

An irritating question to an over-worked frontier practitioner to whom anything less than a mortal wound was a mere scratch.

Doctor Furnace glared at her. "Die, hell!" he growled. "Why, woman, he ain't even hurt."

While opening his case, he continued, "I've always said that the only way to kill men like him is to rip 'em apart and scatter 'em a-plenty. Even then, if it's light of the moon and you don't plant 'em quick, the pieces are shore to crawl back together again and the cuss will be ornerier than ever."

Most of the men laughed. The Professor smiled with his eyes.

"Doc, fix him up proper," he said quietly. "Miss Constance pays the bill."

"Don't you reckon I knew that already?" snarled Doc. "You rannies never pay yo' doctah bills. If it wasn't for her, I'd starve."

With an eye on the wound, he chewed viciously on his cigar. "This fella's hide is so damned tough, betcha I bust every needle I got. Wish I'd fetched an awl and some whang leather."

Chuck Wagon viewed the doctor's preparations with a critical eye. Presently she demanded, "Ain't you going to do nothing to bring him to?"

Doc shook his head. "Nope. Ain't got time. Slivers Sanders just hit town all in a lather, and I'm a-ridin' to his place fifty miles down the valley. Slivers

swears his old lady is due to drop twins befo' sunup."

Big Whiskers dozed peacefully through it all, until Doc was putting on the finishing touches by pinning the bandage. Then he jerked his head and groaned, and Doc jabbed a safety-pin into his thumb and cussed.

"Damn the big bugger! Wish I'd fetched an ax."

Nevertheless, he carefully inspected the bandage—adjusting it here and there—and profanely warned Sue not to let the freighter leave town until the injury had received further treatment.

Before the doctor reached the door, Big Whiskers rolled over and painfully lifted himself to all-fours. There he stopped, shaking his head like a wounded bear and mumbling a string of curses that steadily grew stronger and more coherent.

Doc Furnace looked back and snorted. "Can't kill 'em. Ought to hobble the cuss, 'cause he's shore to rip his bandages off befo' mawnin'. Sue, roll him into his blankets with a quart of good liquor, then trust that the Good Lawd puts him to sleep."

EVERYBODY tramped out, leaving Chuck Wagon alone with her freighter. Badger hoped she put him to bed right away. He wanted to talk the situation over with Blizzard before again meeting this big fellow who knew "Buffalo." So many things had happened in such a short space of time, Badger had no idea where they stood or what they ought to do next. Moreover, Cherokee Lou had left his mind in something of a fog.

So he swaggered across to the table at which Red and his pardner were finishing their wine. The music was starting up; but at the moment, he felt that he never again wanted to dance with anyone other than Cherokee Lou.

"Howdy, Big Stranger," said the girl

tartly. "Now that Miss Constance has dropped you like a wormy apple, maybe you'll remember what you promised me."

Badger laughed and grabbed her arm. "Shore thing, Red! Let's go."

Blizzard gave his friend a steady look, and drawled, "For a wonder, you got the right idee. Play the red. I calc'late it's a shore winner."

The girl smiled sweetly. Before he could do anything about it, she planted a kiss on the high bridge of his nose. Badger roared. Blizzard almost fell off his chair, dodging after it was too late. He turned a shade of red that made his ears look larger and his nose longer, and got to his feet awkwardly.

"Goin' to take a peek at the hosses," he stammered. Gazing reproachfully at Red, he continued to Badger, "Take keer, or this here side-windin' gal is shore to hang yo' hide on the fence."

Blizzard had no intention of visiting their horses. He went on a hunt for the sheriff, and found him in the Canadian.

Stannard was leaning on the end bar, stroking Josephus and talking to one of the bartenders. The Ranger watched a stud game until the bartender got busy, then he ambled over to the pudgy little sheriff.

"Right smart play tonight, 'pears to me," he began. "Is this yo' reg'lar Saturday night crowd?"

King's round face beamed in the friendliest manner. "Just about. Of course, the shooting we had makes the boys sort of hang around to talk it over."

"Uh-huh," agreed Blizzard, leaning his rifle against the bar beside him. "And I wouldn't be at all surprised if we had another'n befo' long."

The sheriff's hand paused in the middle of Josephus' back. "What's that?"

"Yep. More gunplay and mebbe a leetle knifin' to boot. Cain't tell for shore."

King stared intently up into the tall Ranger's solemn face. "Are you and that

wild hyena pardner of yours getting ready to start another rumpus?"

Blizzard contrived to look slightly injured. "Not us! Me and him never do start nothin'."

"Then what are you driving at?"

Thoughtfully scraping his long jaw, Blizzard gazed off down the room; but he watched King from the corner of his eye. "I calc'late they'll be a woman, or wimmin at the bottom of it. Most generally is."

"What women and what man?"

"Cain't never be daid shore 'bout wimmin," drawled the lanky Ranger, "but I'll gamble on who is the man."

"I'm listening," snapped the sheriff.

Blizzard's keen eyes searched Stannard's face. He spoke sharply. "It's Jake Rupper. Any objections?"

King Stannard was a poker player with a reputation. But he now confronted a man who had elevated the game of reading the other fellow's emotions to something approaching an exact science, whether he be across a table or at the heel of a gun.

The sheriff didn't want Jake wiped out!

HE DROPPED his eyes to the large diamond that sparkled on his chubby hand. And his eyes followed the diamond while the hand moved slowly over the cat's fur from ears to tail.

"Rupper isn't a bad fellow," he declared in words that obviously were selected with care. "I haven't any idea what it's all about, but as long as the boys do their killing fair and square, open and aboveboard, I never horn in."

"Calc'lated you wouldn't," said Blizzard with a drawl.

"Of course you understand," continued King without glancing up, "I can't be responsible for what Fatty does. You fellows have just about ruined him in Whirlwind. He'll never live it down. And he's stubborn, so you're bound to

have more trouble with him regardless of what anyone may do to stop it."

Blizzard snorted.

The sheriff gave him a sidelong glance and added, "But if you expect trouble with Jake, and if you've got any folks, it might be a good idea to tell me where they get their mail."

King thoughtfully scratched Josephus between the ears, and the cat purred like a cat without a worry in the world. The Ranger envied the beast. He had plenty of worries, and this oily little sheriff was one of them.

A word picked up here and there in the Wild Rose together with what he had learned from Red, indicated that Stannard was interested in politics to the exclusion of everything else. However, from experience Blizzard had learned that politics made an excellent cloak beneath which to hide a multitude of more infamous iniquities.

THE Ranger figured this little sport was as deceiving as Panhandle weather sign, so he suggested that they sit in a game of draw. He held to the theory that, influenced by the temptations, vicissitudes, and delights of poker, any man would occasionally let you catch a glimpse of the stuff he had in him.

Accordingly, some time later, Blizzard raked in a large pot and grinned across the table at Stannard.

King stepped out of character and swore with surprising ferocity. "Never saw the beat of it! Here I go and draw one card and ride a bob-tail plumb to the clouds, and you jog along raising me with nothing but a pair of queens. Hell man! What made you think those queens were any good?"

Blizzard expertly stacked his checks. Presently he allowed dryly, "They's so damned onsartin and deceivin', I won't bet a white chip on the ladies unless I calc'late they's some funny business a-goin' on. Then I back 'em to the limit,

'cause they cain't be beat at funny business."

Which showed what he had on his mind.

He wondered where Badger was and what he had learned, if anything. Ought to go find the ornery cuss. Might have to snake him out of quicksand or somethin'. But this was a stiff game, he was four hundred odd ahead, and his poker kept them in spending money.

Moreover, this was an interesting game. Blizzard figured he had learned a heap of things. In the first place, he'd swear that the nice, soft little sheriff had iron in his blood and cussedness in his heart.

And in the second place, he knew for a fact that the breed killer from The Nations had been trying his damndest to pick a quarrel with him ever since he sat down. As a matter of principle, he was perfectly willing to quarrel, provided it didn't interfere with his job. But this was once when he figured he couldn't afford to fight just for the fun of the thing. So he sidestepped and hedged and took a-plenty in the interest of peace. Although he recognized his swarthy tormenter from descriptions that had reached the Rangers, the fellow couldn't know him and Blizzard smelled a rat. There was somebody or something behind it all. But killing the breed wouldn't throw light on the situation, so he picked up his cards.

Sitting at his left, a Panhandle horse thief had dealt him four little spades and a diamond. Under the gun, the breed killer made a small bet and the next three men saw him. Blizzard almost neglected to raise before the draw on his four little spades, because from somewhere down the street rolled a mighty bellow that sounded like a bull a-talkin' fight. And it told him that Badger's boots were a-poundin' dirt and kickin' holes in the air; so he boosted it the limit and everybody dropped out.

The cards fluttered down again.

Through the front door came the violent rattle of spurs, laughter, the snapping of fingers, and the rhythmic thump of boots, announcing that a heavy man was doing a double-shuffle on the porch. And the next moment Badger swaggered in, arm-in-arm with Jake Rupper!

They were escorted by several other exuberant spirits who no doubt had been making the rounds with them, proud to be seen accompanying Jake—the underworld's most popular man, and Badger—who had salivated Whirlwind's most vicious killer.

Blizzard glanced from the door to the sheriff.

King laughed. "Which goes to prove that you're a hell of a trouble prophet."

The Ranger mournfully shook his head. "Nope. Proves I was daid right. Jest you hold yo' hosses."

The newcomers were in a festive mood—noisy, and more or less unsteady on their pins. Blizzard took another good look and held back a grin. He knew Badger wasn't drunk. Badger never got drunk, but he could do a larrupin' good job of pretending to be. And Blizzard would gamble that Jake was every bit as sober as Badger; so each of the celebrators was doing his level best to fool the other.

Hat on the extreme back of his head, boots stepping high and wide and coming down hard, Badger weaved an uncertain course for the poker table, howling greetings to men he didn't know.

He fetched Blizzard a terrific wallop between the shoulder blades, crushed his Stetson down over his ears, and roared, "Perk up, Old Hoss Face! Our days of

ridin' with our chins on our shoulders a-dodgin' the law, is over and plumb forgot. We done refawmed and snared us some jobs."

Blizzard jerked off his hat and reshaped it. As soon as he got his breath he growled, "Git away from me, you big drunk, befo' you snare yo'self ten inches of steel!"

Everybody laughed. Badger went on eloquently, "Yes, sah, gents! Me and him is a-goin' to nussin' cows for the C bar N. And what I mean—this is a great day for Whirlwind County. She's done gethered herself a pair of high-rollin' sinners for to fight her battles, drink her likker, and love her wimmin!"

"And to—hup!—dec'rate her liveoaks—hic!—if this keeps up!" muttered Rattlesnake Runnels, who was trying to snooze on a chair tilted against the wall.

Blizzard tossed in his cards and stacked his chips before the banker. "I'm a-cashin' in. Gotta git this here crazy elephant into his blankets befo' somebody butchers him for his tushes, or jest to stop his bellerin'."

After a nicely calculated amount of argument, verbal threats, and physical exertion had been expended by each of them, Badger suffered his pardner to lead him away.

As they set an uncertain course toward the hotel, Blizzard inquired softly but anxiously, "Find out anything?"

"Plenty! That there Red gal—"

"Be keerful! Every last thing from hitchin' racks to stars in this here Whirlwind country has got ears. We'll make our talk when we're plumb away from town."

(Part III in the Next SHORT STORIES)



MERELY McHENRY

By HUGH B. CAVE

Author of "The White Claw," etc.

"YOUR main trouble here," Degman declared sullenly, "is too much leniency. I'm going to change all that."

Jim McHenry, who measured six feet four and had spent the past six months in Borneo's darkest jungles, lowered his magazine, stared at the new supervisor, and said nothing. Joel Tomas said in a whining voice, "It's not easy to make the Dyaks sweat blood, Degman. They won't stand for it."

"Then I'll show you how to make them!"

Degman had arrived at sundown in a Dyak prahu, after traveling four days and

nights from Samarinda. The great brains in Samarinda had sent him to take complete charge of lumbering operations in the Kampong Lao-kana. He was a chunky, mole-faced fellow whose whites drooped off him like dirty, dripping candle-wax.

"I'll have a look around," he snapped.

He went out alone. The office building was a wooden shack with corrugated iron roof, at the extreme southern end of the kampong. At the other end, under the jungle, the native huts huddled together on nipa stilts.

There was a cold mist in the air, and a fire blazed in the Dyak village. The natives were gathered around it, drinking

and singing. The singing ceased when Degman approached.

He should have known better. Most of the natives were Long-Glits, recruited from Long-Iram, down river. Long-Glits are reserved and moody and like to be left alone.

A big *gutshi* of *tuak* stood by the fire. Degman dipped a finger into it, tasted the stuff and promptly kicked the jug over. "There'll be no more drinking around here!" he snarled. "You understand?"

A chap named Motuli, slight of build but surly and ill-tempered when aroused, stood up with a jerk. "Tuan Tomas," Motuli said, "let us drink when we want to."

"I'm your boss now," Degman snapped. "Not Tomas." And he made the grave mistake of walking away without explaining things in detail.

He hiked along the river shore and followed the trail into the jungle. He was a bit nervous about doing that, but wanted to see some of the piers where the rattan and bamboo were piled.

The trail was a snake-path, overgrown with sparse lallang grass. A tarratjan bird was screeching nearby.

There were two loading docks and Degman found both of them, and both were piled high with bound bundles of trimmed rattan awaiting dugout shipment down river.

He inspected them thoroughly, then came to attention, stood listening.

With a revolver clenched in his fist, he whirled, bellowed harshly: "Come out of there! Come out or I'll drill you!"

The reeds parted and Motuli, the Dyak, shuffled sullenly into the open.

"Don't like to have your drink taken away, eh?" Degman snarled. "Drop that knife!"

Motuli let the parang fall from his fingers. Then Degman placed his gun on the ground, peeled off his coat and said grimly, "I'm going to teach you a lesson."

It was an unmerciful lesson. Degman

could fight and fight scientifically. When he put his coat on again, the Dyak was lying unconscious in the trail, his face and nut-brown body covered with blood. He had been wearing a breech-clout, but Degman's stabbing hands had torn it loose.

Degman picked up the fellow's parang and the breech-clout and returned to the kampong. The natives were still grouped around their fire. He went over to them and tossed Motuli's breech-clout and parang into the flames. And, as if that weren't insult enough, he turned and walked back to the white men's shack without uttering a word.

It's a matter of record that you can't, in Borneo, get away with that sort of thing.

IN THE morning, the Dyak village was deserted and both loading piers were stripped clean of lumber.

"The devils!" Degman raved. "When I get my hands on them—!"

Jim McHenry stopped staring at him and looked away in disgust. "Mister," McHenry drawled, "did you ever get your hands on a hamadryad?"

Degman left that afternoon. Left alone in a dugout, to paddle himself down river to the nearest village, where he would get natives to transport him the rest of the way to Long-Iram. In Long-Iram there'd be Malays who would come to Lao-kana and do the work of the vanished Dyaks.

"Damned fool!" Joel Tomas muttered.

Jim McHenry stared after the boat and said nothing. It took a queer kind of courage, McHenry knew, to face the jungle alone like that. Before many hours had gone by, the sun would sweat the water out of Degman's chunky body, and at night he'd be driven mad by the mosquitoes.

"He'll come back," McHenry grunted.

The prahu vanished down stream. McHenry and Joel Tomas returned to the shack. McHenry had been reading his magazine for quite some time when a

hullo from outside brought both men to attention.

McHenry went to the door. The kampong was a blur of deepening shadows. Something was moving at the far end of it, and McHenry saw the gleam of white drill and the red end of a cigarette.

"Hello!" he called.

The fellow was an undersized white man, and behind him fidgeted a line of shivering Dyaks who had dropped their burdens of chop boxes and tent supplies to the ground. McHenry and Tomas and the white man went inside.

"Lor', but it's cold in the jungle these nights!" the fellow said.

"Been travelling much?" McHenry asked.

"Tradin'. My name's Wighton. Henry Edward Wighton from Kuching and Bandjermasin. If you got no objections, I'll order the men to put up the tents."

"You can use the Dyak huts," Jim McHenry suggested. "They're empty."

Henry Edward Wighton scuffed to the door and said something to his men. Returning, he accepted with evident relish a proffered glass of whiskey.

"It's a queer season," he said. "Here I been trampin' around for two weeks and I ain't had a bit of luck. I been up on the Merasi—where I got these Saputans of mine—and I been through Penihing territory and some of the Iban kampongs, and not a thing to show for it."

Tomas said, "You ain't been hard luck-in' it any more than us. For all we know, there's a pack of Dyak devils out in the jungle right now, just waitin' to get a slice of us."

"Uh? What for?"

Tomas helped himself to a drink and poured out his story. McHenry went back to his magazine. An hour later, when Wighton said he had to make sure his Dyaks were fixed for the night, Tomas went with him. Both he and Wighton were drunk.

"We got to stick together, us two,"

Tomas said, as they stumbled across the kampong. "That McHenry, he ain't so-ciable. He's young and he keeps too much to himself. You and me, we got to hang together."

TWENTY-FOUR hours later, when Degman returned from Long-Iram with a gang of grumbling Malays, the situation at Lao-kana was peculiar. Joel Tomas and Wighton were as thick as a pair of love-birds and decidedly in their cups.

Degman sized things up and cornered Tomas. "Who is this Wighton, anyway?" he demanded.

"He's a great guy," Tomas declared. "I ain't met a man like him in a long time."

"You tell him," Degman growled, "he's



got to clear his natives out of the Dyak village. I've got to quarter the Malays."

"Sure."

"And the drinking's got to stop. I won't have it!"

Tomas blinked his bleary eyes. "No?" he said. "Well, you can go to hell! You can go rot!"

Degman hit him and knocked him down, then picked him up and shook him. "Get in the shack and stay there!" Degman bellowed. Then he went to see Wighton.

Wighton ordered his Dyaks to set up a camp, and he himself moved into it. Joel Tomas packed up bag and baggage and moved in with him.

Jim McHenry, young and bronzed and apparently indifferent, watched the whole thing but said not a word.

Next morning Degman's Malays began the back-breaking labor of cutting rattan and bamboo, and Degman worked them savagely to make up for lost time. Even when the sun reached the top of the clock, he gave them no rest. By nightfall they were exhausted.

Degman was surly, worn out. He stood in the shack doorway looking across at the shadowed outlines of Wighton's camp, and he cursed. All day long there had been no sign of either Wighton or Joel Tomas.

Degman glanced at McHenry, who was reading a magazine. Then he stormed out of the shack and went straight to Wighton's cluster of tents, where the natives were sitting around paddi pots, chattering and preparing a smudge to drive away the mosquitoes.

Degman strode into the central tent.

Wighton was sprawled out on a cot, his drill coat crumpled under his head, his shirt open. Joel Tomas sat on the floor with a half full bottle of whiskey between his knees. He was drunk.

"I'll give it to you straight, Tomas," Degman snapped. "Either you work tomorrow or get out of here."

Tomas laughed drunkenly and tipped the bottle to his mouth. He wasn't interested. Degman strode past him, shook the trader awake. "And I want to talk to you, too," he snarled. "What brought you here in the first place?"

"I just happened along, that's all," Wighton said. "And Joel here says to me, 'Henry, you stick around. It's awful damned lonesome around here,' he says."

"All right. So long as you hang around here, you work with us!"

"Hell, I'm a trader!"

"It's not you I want; it's your natives."

"You can have 'em and welcome," Wighton said thickly, "but you'll have to pay 'em."

Degman, satisfied, walked out of the tent and approached the group of Saputans. They made a place for him and he squated on the ground, nodded pleasantly, dipped a hand into the paddi bowl.

He failed to hide a grimace as he swallowed the stuff, but his gesture of friendship achieved its purpose. Before ten minutes had passed, the Saputans were smoking his cigarettes, laughing at his jokes.

When he stood up, half an hour later, it was arranged that they were to work for him—in a separate gang, of course, and not alongside the Malays.

Degman strode back to the shanty and told Jim McHenry what he had accomplished. McHenry looked at him, nodded quietly, and went on reading.

THE next day, three gangs worked in the jungle. Degman bossed one; another was in charge of Joel Tomas; the third worked under Jim McHenry. Nightfall found a good days' cut of fattan piled on the landing docks.

But when Degman made the rounds the next morning, he came back to camp with a crimson face. The valuable piles of rattan had again vanished during the hours of darkness!

"It's Motuli doing it!" Degman snarled. "He and his Dyak devils are hiding in the jungle, watching us! I've a good mind to take the Malays and go after them!"

"Waste of time," McHenry shrugged. "In a jungle setto, a handful of Dyaks would make mincemeat of a whole Malay army. Besides, you wouldn't find Motuli's natives. Not a chance."

"They can't get away with it!" Degman yelled. Veins were standing out in blotched lines on his neck. "I'll report it to Long-Iram and get soldiers from the garrison! I'll—"

The rest wasn't pretty. McHenry put down his magazine and said quietly, "Aw, dry up." And that, of course, gave Degman a chance to direct his futile rage at

something tangible. He let McHenry have it.

"You shut your damned face!" he belted. "If I want to do something, I won't be asking your advice!"

McHenry stood up. "You better quiet down with that talk," he said softly. "I don't like you anyhow."

"And I don't like you! You're a—"

McHenry shifted his weight to the ball of one foot and broke the words off with a pistoning fist. Degman reeled into the wall, stunned and astounded. He flattened there for an instant, then catapulted forward with a lurid oath. His knee shot up to grind into McHenry's belt.

Jim McHenry took the knee in both hands, lifted it neck-high and hurled Degman into the wall. He would have thrown a sack of flour the same way. Then he walked over, picked up the unconscious heap and dropped it on a bunk.

DEGMAN awoke with a hammering headache and sat stiffly on the edge of the bunk, pushing back his hair with one hand while he stared at McHenry. McHenry was reading a magazine.

Degman said nothing. All the next day he maintained a grim, ominous silence, and after evening chop, when he and McHenry were alone again in the shanty, he busied himself with his weekly report. McHenry hiked over to Wighton's camp.

It had rained all day, and the kampong was a sea of mud, but McHenry went slowly, staring ahead of him. Before he reached the cluster of tents, a figure moved out of the shadows and came toward him. The figure was Joel Tomas.

"You're late," Tomas grunted.

"I know. Where's Wighton?"

"Drunk."

McHenry nodded, said quietly, "Let's go." With Tomas at his heels, he hiked into the jungle trail that led to the up-river landings.

It was hard going. The path was slippery, full of treacherous roots and sunken

mud holes. Somewhere ahead, too close for comfort, a *maias* screamed. But McHenry knew the pitfalls and went slowly. Only this morning, while walking this same trail, one of the Malays had stepped on a coiled black-and-cream colored krait and gibbered a thousand thanks to his personal gods for the fortunate protection of his dilapidated knee-boots.

You had to expect those things.

Between the first and second landings McHenry slacked back and talked in a whisper. "We're in time, all right," he said; and Tomas nodded. Tomas grunted with relief when the second landing loomed in view over the steaming reeds on the river bank. The landing was piled high with the day's cut of rattan.

McHenry left the path, strode cautiously into a sea of soaked grass and dropped down. Tomas joined him. From there, they could watch the dock without being seen.

"Smoke?" McHenry held out a cigarette.

"Safe, is it?"

"If you shield the glow. They won't see the smoke in this dark."

Tomas smoked. "We'll pay for this," he mumbled. "Pneumonia, at least." An hour crawled by, and he shifted position, labored to rub the circulation back into his legs. McHenry remained motionless, but was numb from the hips down and ached like a decayed tooth.

"They've got to come some time," he said.

Tomas rolled over, struck a nest of white ants and began to mutter through clenched teeth as he beat them off.

"They're coming!" McHenry snapped. "Quiet!"

Something was moving along the trail toward the dock. McHenry lifted himself warily on hands and knees, balanced himself on the flat of one hand and pushed the reeds aside.

"One of Wighton's Dyaks," he whispered.

Tomas nodded grimly. The native was creeping along the trail, putting his naked feet down as if he were stepping on snakes. His head twisted from right to left like a cobra's hood, and his sharp eyes were alert for an ambush.

He turned, signalled. In a moment half a dozen companions were beside him.

The white men lay still and watched, while Wighton's Saputans advanced to the landing. A whispered consultation ensued among the natives. They gathered up one of the rattan stacks and faded into the jungle with it. Only McHenry's sharp eyes noted that one of the men dropped suddenly into the deep grass at the side of the float.

As Tomas made a move to rise, McHenry's outthrust arm went across his chest and crushed him down again. "Watch!" McHenry whispered. "Sit tight!"

The reeds barely moved where the lone Saputan had dropped out of sight. But they moved toward the river, and there was a slight splash as the fellow slipped into the stream.

McHenry shuddered, thinking of crocs.

The black water rippled close to the landing. A groping hand caught the edge of the float.

"What holds that dock up?" McHenry whispered.

"Couple of upright nipa logs," Tomas grunted.

"Nailed?"

"Roped."

"I thought so. Watch it."

The float went down slowly, as the native dragged it under. The river swirled over the top of it, lipping around the piles of rattan. In a moment the remaining bundles of rattan, securely bound and ready for shipment, slid off the submerged pier and were carried to midstream by the current.

When the last bundle had floated clear, the pier gurgled level again—empty. The native crawled out of the river.

"Clever," McHenry muttered. "Just in case we *were* on guard, we were supposed to follow that first stack into the jungle, while this monkey made off with the rest. Follow him. I want to see where they pick the stuff up."

Tomas nodded, slipped away. McHenry hung back a moment, then rose in a half crouch and ran to the landing.

Attempting to follow the drifting rattan by striding along the shore would be an act of madness. The shore was a maze of creepers and roots. There would be mud-bottomed pools, alive with snakes. A single slash from a two-foot krait and all the rattan in Borneo would be no good to him.

But the landing pier, good as a raft, would hold him. He worked it loose, sprawled down on it and with a flat stick in each hand, worked it into the current.

The buckle of his leather belt dug into him and he removed it, gun holster and all, and laid it in front of him. In a little while he made out the half submerged hulk of the nearest stack of rattan.

HE HELD the raft back then, by dipping the improvised paddles into the river and bearing down hard. Before long, the kampong slid past on his left, dark and silent; and after that he lost track of time in his efforts to keep the raft under control.

An hour must have passed. The drizzle became a thick mist that chilled him and put a throbbing ache in his stomach muscles. And then something splashed in the darkness ahead.

He had to work fast. The last pile of drifting timber was but a hundred feet in front of him. He swung the raft sideways, turned it toward shore. Straining every muscle, he worked the clumsy craft into shallow water and climbed out, knee-deep in mud, and stood still, straining his eyes to make out an object down-stream.

A prahu, with men kneeling in it, was

creeping out into the current to collect the drifting rattan.

McHenry waded through the grass and found a narrow trail that followed the river. He had picked up his gun-belt on the raft, strapped it around him now and made sure the Luger was loose in its holster. In a moment he heard voices—Dyak voices—and stopped again to make sure of his direction.

An instant later he reached the edge of a tiny clearing and saw the whole of what was going on.

Wighton's Saputans were gathered there, including the handful who had been up at the landing a while ago. Two prahus were dragging the rattan into the reeds, and the natives were hauling it to high land.

McHenry kept his eyes open, but made no move to interfere.

In ten minutes the job was finished. The prahus were drawn up, made fast. The bundles of rattan were lifted to naked shoulders, and in single file the Saputans snaked into the jungle, along a trail that was almost no trail at all.

McHenry followed, hoping they would not go far. It wasn't good to be drenched and shivering like this.

He needed a hot tub, a stomach full of hot coffee.

The trail wound through a black, treacherous maze and suddenly broadened into a clearing of knee-deep grass and bushes. The stacks of rattan were thrown down. The natives began to jabber among themselves and rub their legs viciously.

McHenry dropped to hands and knees and wormed through the grass. He could hear the voices distinctly. The name "Tuan Wighton" brought a sullen scowl to his lips. Near enough to make his move, he telescoped erect, the Luger levelled in his fist.

The Saputans' eyes went wide. They failed to recognize him at first, and one of them took a quick step forward, said, "Tuan, we have—" Then the fellow stif-

ened, reached abruptly for the carved parang hid in his breech-clout.

McHenry gave him a bullet square in the leg.

After that, the rest of them stood very still.

"Pick up that stuff," McHenry ordered grimly, "and stack it!"

They obeyed him. The Dyak on the ground was moaning. That sound alone drove any thought of treachery from their minds.

McHENRY watched them with eyes that did not flicker. It wasn't safe to bat an eyelash. He knew it. Because he was so intent on the natives, he failed to hear the approach of the person behind



him until Joel Tomas' voice said suddenly, "So you got 'em workin' for you now! Good!"

McHenry nodded, after recovering from his start. Tomas stepped up beside him and stood there looking on.

"The one I trailed," he shrugged, "went back to the kampong, so I came down here lookin' for you."

"Where's Degman?"

"In the shack, I reckon. No light when I came by."

McHenry nodded with satisfaction. "I had to shoot one of these boys," he said. "See if he's badly hurt."

Tomas moved away. He took two steps, then brought up stiffly. Another voice, not McHenry's but emanating from the murk behind Jim McHenry, jerked him around.

"Just wait a minute!" the voice snarled.

McHenry drew a quick breath, whirled, and found himself staring into a gun muzzle. The scowling face above the muzzle belonged to Matt Degman.

"So that's it!" Degman snapped. "Hiring Wighton's Dyaks to steal the stuff. I might have known! Drop that gun!"

McHenry dropped it. His lanky frame tensed for a leap, but he controlled himself and dug deep into his reserve to bring out a dry drawl. "You think so?"

"Before I'm through," Degman rasped, "you'll know what I think! Listen—" he spat at the natives without forgetting his guard on McHenry and Tomas—"get to hell out of here, the lot of you! Beat it! If I catch you around the kampong again I'll turn the gang of you over to the soldiers at Long-Iram."

Wighton's Saputans didn't stop to argue. They were glad enough to hike. If Degman ever turned them over to the garrison, it meant the penal colony at Soerabaia for every man of them, and they knew it.

"Now," Degman snarled at McHenry and Tomas, "we're going back."

"Through the jungle?"

"Through the jungle."

McHenry was chilled as much as he wanted to be. The thought of hiking back to the kampong put a furrow in his broad forehead.

"It's easier by water," he grumbled, and pointed to the river trail.

Degman's lips curled, but he let McHenry lead the way and motioned Tomas to follow. Trailing them, he picked up McHenry's gun and pocketed it. Not a word was spoken until they reached the river, and then Degman kneeed one of the prahus into shallow water and said, "Get in!"

He himself sat in the stern. "Now paddle!"

McHenry, in the bow, dipped a paddle into the water. Tomas, in the waist, growled something under his breath and followed suit. The prahu slid into mid-

stream and began its slow, arduous journey against the current.

"So you think we hired Wighton's natives, do you?" Tomas growled.

"I know what I think."

"You thick-skulled idiot! What would *we* want with the timber?"

"Shut up, Joel," McHenry said quietly.

Tomas subsided. A glance to the rear showed McHenry that Degman was sitting tense and alert, the revolver balanced in his hand. A little while after that, the kampong came in sight, a grayish, steaming blur on the right bank.

"What happens now?" McHenry said indifferently, poising his paddle over the water as Tomas swung the prahu's nose inshore.

"You'll see."

"Does it include a chance for a hot rub-down?"

"It includes a trip to Long-Iram!"

"Hell," McHenry mumbled. "You do feel bad."

He held the paddle in one hand, wiped the mist from his face with the other. The movement brought him half around, and his eyes met Joel Tomas', and flashed a message. Degman didn't see; he was leaning forward, shouting a name. "Wighton! Hey, Wighton!"

A FIGURE appeared in the entrance to Wighton's tent, and answered the yell.

"Come down to the landing!" Degman bellowed.

Wighton sloshed through the kampong mud and stood waiting on the shore. "Go on, paddle!" Degman snarled.

Tomas paddled. McHenry dug his stick into the water, too, and leaned on it. Degman grinned as the distance to shore narrowed.

All at once McHenry heaved. His paddle was buried deep in the river. He twisted it under the boat and put all his weight on it.

Degman cursed, lost balance, clawed at

the air. Joel Tomas laughed. The prahu lunged down on one side, dipped half full of water, and went over with a splash as McHenry fell across the end of it.

Degman floundered in water that stank of rotten vegetation. Struggling for a footing he found none, began to gurgle. A pair of arms twisted under him and dragged him down.

He sucked in a breath, most of it foul water. He didn't have the gun any more. His bare hands clawed and clutched at the man beside him.

But his assailant was at home in the water. Degman went limp, craving air. He breathed, and it was all water, no air at all. He doubled up with cramps and was unconscious when the same hands that had held him down hoisted him up again and threw him across the upturned prahu.

Joel Tomas made sure that the limp body wouldn't slide off, then turned and peered toward shore.

Wighton was standing there, levelling a gun at him.

"Come ashore," the trader threatened, "or I'll shoot!"

It was an idle threat. More than likely Wighton couldn't even see Joel Tomas' head in that moving black water. And the prahu was protection enough against any chance bullet. So Tomas grinned.

But the grin faded when he realized he would have to go ashore sometime. He might swim to the opposite bank, but was all in and cold, shivering. Where was McHenry? Dead? Drowned?

"Come ashore, I tell you!" Wighton commanded shrilly. "I'll—"

He fired, and the bullet chipped the boat close to Tomas' head. Joel grunted and went under.

"I'll give you ten seconds—"

Joel thought hard, then called out, "How do I know you won't plug me when I start swimmin'?"

"I will if you start for the other bank!"

Tomas groaned. The trader had keener

sight than he had suspected. And the threat had ceased to be a bluff.

"All right," Tomas said. "I'm comin'."

He glanced at Degman to make sure the unconscious man's head was not dangling in the water. Then he kicked himself clear of the boat and began to swim. Wighton leaned forward to watch him.

Half way in, Tomas saw something that made his eyes widen. He swam more slowly. Behind Wighton, something moved in the grass. The trader was bending over, watching Tomas. He swung about with a gasping suck of breath, and met a clenched fist that sent him staggering.

All the strength in Jim McHenry's lanky frame was behind that fist. Wighton slid in the mud, sagged to his knees. McHenry was standing over him when Joel Tomas clambered out of the river.

"Good work," Tomas said. "I didn't know you could swim under water like that."

"Neither did Wighton," McHenry grunted. "We've got to get him to the shack and pull Degman off the prahu."

"Then what?"

"Send one of the Malays to Long-Iram to bring some government men."

DEGMAN was violently ill when he regained consciousness. There was no fight left in him. He was as dirty white as the sweat-stained blanket underneath him, and meekly swallowed the broth Jim McHenry handed him.

Wighton was different, cursing, raving, swearing to turn the tables. But he was trussed up and helpless, and when McHenry said to him, "You close that mouth of yours, mister, or I'll stick something in it," Wighton stopped yammering.

Two hours after daylight a government prahu with a sambir mat in its belly and an atap shelter in the waist nosed against the kampong landing and disgorged two immaculate government inspectors from the garrison. The inspectors found Mc-

Henry reading a magazine, while Joel Tomas made out a report for the company officials in Samarinda.

They asked questions. McHenry put down his magazine.

"Just as soon as Degman kicked over that *gutshi* of *tuak*," McHenry said, "I guessed what he was up to. Degman wasn't so thick he would do a thing like that without reason. He wanted to get those hard working Long-Glits out of here; make them desert."

"Why?"

"There's a rival lumber company been trying to take over this kampong for over a year. I figured Degman was probably working for them."

Joel Tomas nodded.

"So," said McHenry calmly, "we played Degman's own game. He was trying to ruin us. First he scared away the Long-Glits and then dragged in a bunch of lazy Malays. Going to kill the production but kill it slowly, see? So he could bluff the company into keeping him here until he smashed the place. So we faked a theft of the first rattan shipment; hid the stuff in the jungle. A little of that would soon lose Degman his job as supervisor."

Again Joel Tomas nodded confirmation.

"The next day," McHenry said, "Wighton blew in. We were set to steal the rattan that night, too, but someone beat us to it. We suspected Wighton, so Tomas played drunk and hung around him. Last

night we put on the finishing touches. You've met this Wighton fellow before, eh?"

"So often," declared one of the inspectors, "and under so many different names that we're not sure what name is really his own. He's a bad actor, makes his living by stirring up trouble among the natives and then selling them contraband arms and ammunition. We've spent months trying to trap him. As for Degman—"

"The company," McHenry said, "will take care of Degman. Just take him to Long-Iram and hold him there."

The government men gave McHenry a significant glance and went back to their prahu, taking Wighton and Degman with them. McHenry went down to the landing to see them off. They shook hands with him.

One of them said, "Does Tomas know what you are, Jim?"

"No," said McHenry, smiling. "He thinks I actually work for the company."

"He doesn't know you're an inspector, and that you've been on the trail of Henry Wighton for the past six months? He doesn't know you made Lao-kana your headquarters because Wighton was reported to be working this district?"

"No," McHenry said, and grinned. "He thinks I'm a lazy lout who does nothing but read magazines. What he doesn't know won't hurt him."



A Bad Night for Patrolman Kelly Along the Waterfront— and the Pier Gang On the Job

SOUTH STREET SAGA

By T. O. DEMPSEY

*Author of "Welcome—on the Mat,"
"Sullivan Ignores the Cracks," etc.*

PATROLMAN STEPHEN KELLY stood in the pouring rain under the lamp post, at the corner of South and Dover, and grinned defiance at the weather. He hung his night-stick on his badge, and thrust his big hands deep into the pockets of his raincoat. It was about the worst spot on his beat. A chill wind swept down from the open garbage pier, a block away; each blast carrying with it a fresh sheet of water from the Brooklyn Bridge overhead. He was not there from choice. It was the spot where, in another minute or so, he was supposed to meet the sergeant.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, breathlessly, as enough water to fill a firebucket slapped him across the face. "Molly an' me coulda saved dough on our honeymoon by comin' here, instead a goin' to Niagara Falls!"

Under cover of that blinding gust of windswept rain, a small shadowy figure slipped into the darkness of the sheltered doorway on the corner. Kelly missed the rat-like movement. There was nothing, in any case, of interest to him in that particular building. It had been abandoned long ago, by the Rope Company that had last occupied it, in favor of more space and lower taxes out on Long Island.

He stood there, under the black arch of the night, and eyed gloomily the dim



rows of lights strung in the darkness above him—his cheerful defiance fading under the buffeting of the weather. With a certain amount of bitterness in his mind, he went over what his friends had told him about this job when they had persuaded him to surrender the shelter and regular hours of a delivery truck in favor of the day and night shifts, and all-weather exposure of the Police Department.

"Sure, it's a cinch!" he quoted his advisers, sourly.

An elevated train rumbled across the bridge overhead, and sent down a slanting cascade that almost swept him off his feet. It was a grim, jesting confirmation of his muttered remark. He regained his balance, and turned a grinning face upwards in answer to the blast. A harsh voice suddenly claimed his attention.

"Is it countin' the lights on the bridge, y'are; or mebbe 'tis thinkin' the pier gang that got away with that truck load of cigarettes from 21, last week, might be playin' hide-an'-go-seek up there?"

The patrol car, in which the sergeant had taken refuge from the weather, slid silently out of the pitch darkness of the deserted Fish Market. It was just like Sergeant Monaghan, to sneak up on him that way. Ignoring the grin on the face of the patrolman who was driving, he saluted the speaker amiably. He didn't allow the reference to the load of cigarettes stolen off the railroad pier across the way to arouse him. That was last week's headache, and he'd be damned if he was going to spend the rest of his life worrying about it! What if a threat of a sixty-day suspension did still hang over his head? T'hell with it!

"Hello, Sergeant," he said mildly, "what's news?"

"Ho, ho!" the sergeant laughed disagreeably. Although the patrol car kept him dry, and more or less warm, this particular weather always affected his rheumatism, and his temper. "Ho, ho! So you're one of the lads likes news, are you—one of the boys likes to duck in a hallway with a newspaper in your hand, an' one of them dam cigaroots stuck in y'r gob, eh? 'Tis small wonder I'm in dutch all the time, with the kind of lade-daws I got under me!"

"A W, Sergeant, lay off, willya," Kelly protested evenly. He knew, as they all did, that the old Irishman's bark was

worse than his bite. "You ain't got nothin' on me! You never got me 'off post', or 'in premises' since I got the job. You know, I called the House that I was goin' for me coffee—which is allowed by regulations—the night that job was pulled! How was I to guess they had the watchman tied up like a bale of hay, an' the truck all loaded, an' were waitin' for my back to be turned, to up with the gate, an' away with 'em?"

"You have more alibis than a dog has fleas," the sergeant growled; but in a milder tone. "Well, listen to what I'm tellin' you now. There's a lighter pulled in to the pier, this afternoon, with a freight car loaded with cigars an' cigarettes on it. So keep your eyes open, me lad! An' another thing! The watchman's been callin' in about them bums sleepin' on the platform. Chase 'em to hell out of there. S'long, I've got to go hunt up the rest of the South Street star-gazers."

"Wait a minute, Sergeant!" Kelly trotted alongside the moving car.

"What's the matter with you now? Oh, sure I know! You just got a message your wife is goin' to have twins, an' you want to knock off for the night, eh? The weather's got you? Can't th-ake it, eh?"

Kelly's wet, and weather-beaten face flushed. He was only six months married, and it was a sacred subject.

"You got me wrong, Sergeant." He forced a grin. "It ain't anything like that. I guess I can take it as good as the next. It's about them poor bums. They ain't got nowhere else to sleep, an' it's kinda sheltered there, under the platform shed? Besides—" he lowered his voice—"some of 'em is Corkonians, Sergeant."

He knew that the sergeant was a County Cork man, and framed his appeal accordingly. He quickly found out it was the wrong approach.

"Well, blast y' for an upstart!" the sergeant responded, rising in his seat with anger. "There never was a Corkonian yet let himself go on the bum. Chase

them out of there, an' make it snappy! Bad luck to your ignorance, anyway." He turned to the driver. "Get me out of here, Dan, before I lose me temper an' tell this narrow-back omadhaun somethin'."

The car surged ahead into the darkness, spraying the patrolman with a wave of dirty water as it went. He stood there a moment, gazing after it. Then he turned slowly, and crossed the street to the pier.

There were seven derelicts stretched out on newspapers, and sheets of pasteboard, on the hard and cold cement of the railroad receiving platform. Kelly marvelled how they escaped pneumonia in the draft that came from beneath the corrugated doors behind them. They were a miserable-looking gathering, and he tried to be as gentle as he could in arousing them. He prodded them with his night-stick, as mildly as it could be done; until, with sunken eyes blinking wearily, they sat up.

ONE old fellow, whose distress had never quite overcome his sense of humor, protested faintly. "Faith an' a fine hotel this is—wakin' the guests up in the middle of the night! You'd better have me bill ready for me in the mornin'. I'll be checkin' out of here."

Kelly did not laugh. This part of his job gave him little pleasure.

"Come on fellers," he ordered, "you gotta scam outa here. Ever since that pier was robbed, they've been worryin' about anyone hangin' around at night. I'm sorry as hell; but what can I do?"

The old fellow helped him rouse the others.

"Everybody up, boys," he urged them good humoredly. "The East River is afire! Everybody up!"

Huddled in a hunched and shivering group, they stood, and watched the patrolman with tired and hopeless eyes—until he waved them into the night with

a mildly threatening motion of his night-stick.

Disconsolately shrugging their shoulders, they drifted unwillingly from beneath the only shelter they knew—their broken shoes admitting water with each step. A sick and disgusted feeling filled Kelly's throat as he watched them go. Six years of patrol duty had not worn a callous on the soft heart of the patrolman.

"Dammit, it ain't human to drive them poor beggars out into the rain, a night like this!" He flung aside his raincoat, and dove his hand into his pants pocket. He counted the money there, by the feel of it—two dollar bills, folded together, a quarter, two dimes, and a nickel. "Hey! Come back here, you guys."



With the same lack of spirit with which they had obeyed his command to move on, they returned—shuffling their wet feet, and drawing their ragged coats around them, in a vain effort to keep warm.

"Come along with me," Kelly ordered them. They fell in silently behind him, as he buttoned his raincoat, and hurried across the wide street, to where the bright lights of an all-night lunch-wagon gleamed invitingly, and over the door of which hung a large neon sign: EAT.

Under the rather startled gaze of the lone counterman, he led them through the sliding door, and directed them to the round stools that lined the counter.

"Hello," he greeted the burly red-headed counterman. "Say, you're a new man here, ain't ya? Well, listen! Dig up a plate of stew, an' a mug of coffee for

each of these men. See that the coffee's good an' hot! I'm payin'."

"Ain't got no stew—not this hour o' the night," the man growled, eyeing his customers contemptuously.

"What have you got?" Kelly demanded, his eyebrows drawing closer together.

"Steaks, chops—ham an' eggs—"

KELLY turned to his shabby guests. "How would steak an' french-fried be, fellas?"

They nodded. Words were hard to find. Only the old fellow spoke.

"Tis a kind heart you have, Officer. God bless you, an' save you from all danger an' a sudden death!"

Kelly scarcely heard the blessing. He was making rapid mental calculations. Steak—30 cents: coffee—5 cents. Seven times thirty-five—two dollars and forty-five cents. That left him exactly one nickel for carfare, and nothing for his own coffee and sinkers later on. Ah, well, to hell with it! Tomorrow was pay-day anyway.

He glanced at his wrist watch—2.40 A.M. The men could stall over their meal until the rain stopped, or daylight came. He laid the two bills, the quarter, and the two dimes on the counter.

"Seven steaks, an' coffee—an' everything that goes with it," he ordered cheerfully. "Step on it, fella! These men are hungry!"

The counterman picked up a frying pan reluctantly.

"They gotta wait 'till the stuff's cooked," he muttered sullenly, and added, in a lower voice. "Ga'dam buncha bums!"

He was suddenly backed up against the hot gas-stove—Kelly's big hand crumpling the front of his clean shirt in a damp and heavy grip, and the officer's two eyes blazing upon him. The cop dropped his night-stick, and shook a threatening fist under the frightened man's nose.

"You don't seem to get the idea, fella,"

he growled. "These men are my guests. I want the same respect for them as I'd expect for meself—do y'understand? The stuff is paid for, an' they're gonna get proper service, or I'll know the reason why. Do y'get me?"

The counterman, whose face had whitened, nodded meekly. "I was on'y kiddin', officer. I didn't mean nothin'. Lemme go, an' I'll give 'em a feed that'll make their mouths water."

"That's more like it," said Kelly, and released his grip. "Another thing," he added grimly, "these men have bum teeth, an' they may take quite a while to chew their steaks." He turned and winked at the seven ragged men. "I want no rush-in'. Leave 'em hang around until they are ready to go—even if it takes until mornin'. If you have any kick comin', keep it for your boss, tomorrow. He's white—an' a friend of mine." He stooped, and picked up his night-stick. "I gotta be goin' back to work. S'long, fellas." He slid the door open, and stepped out into the rain.

"Hey, wise guy, hey!" A well-known voice hailed him, out of the darkness of the deserted gas-station outside. "What's the big idea? I thought you said you never went off post durin' your shift, eh?" It was the sergeant. "Faith, an' what's the use of talkin', anyway! Here I am—beggin' an' payin' you to keep your eye on Pier 21; an' the minute me back is turned, 'tis into a lunch-wagon you're duckin'!"

The patrol car stood by the curb, and the old sergeant, with fire in his eyes, leaned out into the downpour. Kelly felt a shiver run up his cold spine. He was in for it now.

"Aw, Sergeant, listen. I was only tryin' to dig up a bite, an' a dry spot for these men you made me chase away from the pier!"

"So that's it, eh? Are you sure t'wasn't grabbin' a bite an' a dry spot for yourself you were at the same time? Now

don't be handin' me that line, me boyo! What you're paid 'for is takin' care of the public's property around here--not worryin' about the bums in the neighborhood! 'Tis writin' you up for this I'll be, as sure as me name's Tim Monaghan!"

"Tim Monaghan!" The echo came from the open door behind the patrolman. The little old man with the sense of humor stood there staring at them, openmouthed. "Say, Tim, the boy is tellin' you the truth! 'Tis praisin' instead of blamin' him, you ought to be. 'Tis a kind heart he has under that blue coat of his."

The sergeant frowned, and reddened. "Things is comin' to a fine pass when I got to take familiarity an' orders from the South Street—"

"Wait a minute, Tim," the old man interrupted. "Will you be denyin' I saved your life at the battle of the Tugela River? 'Tis a short memory you have, indeed! D'you mind the time we were together at the relief of Ladysmith, an' I stole a pair o' socks apiece—the first change o' hosiery aither of us had in seven months? Have ye forgotten the time we were guardin' the railroad outside Colenso, in the veldt; an' we copped the barrel of whiskey off the supply train? Remember buryin' it in the sand? 'Tis well aged in the last thirty-six years; if it's still there. 'Twas a small drop of it we got—an' us shifted out o' the place early the next mornin'."

THE old sergeant was eyeing the speaker with amazement. "Mother o' Moses! If it ain't me old side-kick, Pete O'Toole—buck private in the rear rank—an' me not layin' an eye on the man in thirty-odd year!" The sergeant sounded excited. "'Twas in the Boer War we were together—two divil-may-care Corkonians!" He climbed heavily out of the patrol car.

Kelly couldn't resist a temptation. "I

thought you said there never was a Corkonian—"

The sergeant turned on him indignantly.

"'Twould be a good idea if you'd do the city a favor an' go patrol your beat, me lad! Be thankful that a good word from an old Munster Fusileer has saved you from a writin' up in me book. Don't be thinkin' aither, that Pete here is one of the shenangos from around South Street. 'Tis long ago I promised to get him a job as watchman on one o' the piers—isn't that right, Pete?—an' he's only been hangin' around waitin' for it!"

That was a very odd statement—considering that the sergeant had just declared that he had not seen his old friend in thirty-odd years—but Kelly wisely held his peace, and turned on his heel. Excited scraps of reminiscence followed him between the gusts of cold rain: "Indeed, an' I do remember! . . . An' the yellow-haired Boer gal—what was her name? . . . Gretchel. That's right! 'Tis a good memory ye have! . . . Arragh, sure! The same Maggie Breen is out in this country now—a grandmother, with eleven childer of her own! . . . Pat? Sure, wasn't he a reservist—called up in '14! Yes, indeed! Killed at the battle of Vimy Ridge. Poor fella! . . . True enough for you! The Boer War was only a skirmish, compared with that wan! . . . Sure, I seen her. She's married to some foreigner—a dago, I think. He works for Ford—out in Detroit. . . . That's right! . . . No? . . . Oh, you mean Pete Hamill? . . . Yes?"

Kelly gathered his raincoat about him, and shivered as he paced the deserted river-front. He passed Pier 21, and found nothing to disturb him there. He forged ahead towards Fulton Street, his head low against the wind. There, he spotted the lights of a big truck going north on Water Street, two blocks away. He noticed that, despite the weather, the driver was taking it easy. He watched

the big wagon out of sight behind the warehouses. Then he turned back the way he had come. He was due to ring in at Front and Roosevelt. He wondered if the sergeant was still up around the lunch wagon—still in restored good humor? When the weather was bad, the old sergeant was a bitter pill. Damn this job, anyway! It was nothing but a slow way of freezing to death—with plenty of abuse, and various other headaches to help along!

He passed the lunch-wagon on the way to the call-box. The sergeant had disappeared; but the seven men were still in there—making the most of their opportunity.

HE WAS hanging up the phone, and had one hand on the door of the green call-box, when a sound that was startlingly like a pistol shot, came from the direction of Pier 21. As he slammed the box shut he heard a second explosion. He hurried across the deserted gas station. Before he had reached the other side, there came a succession of explosions, and a dark sedan showed up beyond the lunch-wagon — flames spitting from the exhaust. It was a brand-new car, and Kelly was at a loss to figure what could be causing it to back-fire. Brand-new cars didn't usually act that way!

The driver turned left, and shot up onto the gravelled space that the gas-station occupied. He stopped by one of the pumps.

"The dope!" Kelly thought, "Can't he see the place is closed nights?"

He strolled across. A dark, undersized fellow was at the wheel—peering out stupidly.

"You'll get no service here, buddy," Kelly advised him good naturedly. "This joint don't open till eight tomorrow mornin'."

"No?" The fellow's voice was smooth and oily. "Say, d'you know anything

about a car, Officer? This damn piece o' junk's been back-firing all the way up South Street!"

"Maybe you got a wet spark-plug," Kelly suggested. "That might be it."

"This damned oil-can's only a week on the road," the man complained. "I don't see how the plugs could get wet! I didn't have the hood up, all day."

Kelly eyed the fellow in the light that filtered from the windows of the lunch-wagon. There was something suspicious in the way the man avoided his gaze. He came to a decision, and put his big foot on the running-board.

"You don't seem to know much about operating this car, fella," he said. "Who owns it?"

"I do," the man replied quietly.

"Lemme see your license?"

"Sure," the man agreed suavely, and reached into the pocket of the near door. "Here's me owner's card."

The jack that came out in his hand hissed as it swung through the damp air. Kelly was completely off guard, and the loaded butt caught him over the left eye. He staggered backwards; tripped over a water can, and went down in a muddy pool. He was half-conscious as he reached for his gun, and the heavy rain-coat balked him anyway. He looked up at the bridge lights, and they were going round in great circles. He was vaguely aware of the roar of the car's motor, as it sped away. The water from the puddle seeped down his back, and brought him to his senses. By the time he dragged himself to his feet, the sedan was disappearing up Chambers Street.

He put his hand to his face. There was no cut; but a lump the size of an egg had already formed over his eye; and his head ached. He stood a moment, trying to figure the thing out. With a shrug of his broad shoulders, and a discouraged shake of his throbbing head, he gave up. It was beyond him—especially the way he felt.

Even as he stood, in the lee of the lunch-wagon, gingerly fingering the swelling over his eye, the gate of Pier 21 was being lowered behind the big truck he had seen on Water Street. The back-fire had been a slick cover for a shot that blew the lock from a small door that gave entrance to the pier. The second explosion he had heard had been the report of a pistol shot that had been fired point-blank into the chest of the unfortunate watchman.

"No use callin' in, an' reportin' this," Kelly told himself—still fingering the bruise. "I'd only get a horse-laugh for not grabbin' the license number of the car.

Best thing is to forget it, an' keep me eyes open, in case I meet that bird again some place." He was angry, and wriggled unhappily in his wet undergarments.

Ten minutes later he staggered past the pier—his head still reeling—and found the doors tightly closed, and everything apparently quiet around there.

Behind those doors, some distance down the dock, men were rushing cases from a freight car onto a truck.

Gradually, as time passed, the ache in Kelly's head stopped annoying him; but he was still unable to think clearly. At his usual time—four o'clock—he picked up the receiver in the call-box, and notified the desk-sergeant that he was going for his usual cup of coffee. It was a privilege allowed once in eight hours.

He stumbled up the steps of the lunch-wagon before he remembered that he had spent all his money—except one nickel—on the men inside.

"Damn!" he said, and stood there a minute, considering. He had quarreled with the counterman, and could not—with dignity—hang him up. A cup of coffee, and a sandwich, were just what he needed, too! Oh, hell, he'd get along without them! Four more hours until he was relieved. Oh, well, what was the

use? He braced himself, and turned away.

THE patrolman headed slowly back to his beat.

A grating sound—the scraping of metal against metal—startled him out of an unhappy reverie on the tough breaks a cop was up against in life. It came from the direction of Pier 21. Forgetting the lump on his forehead, and the wet shirt that clung to his frozen back, he hurriedly crossed South Street, and headed for the pier. The darkness, and the rain that still beat down unceasingly helped to cover his approach. A hundred feet away, he stood suddenly rooted in his tracks—his eyes staring in wide amazement.

A little at a time, the big door of the pier was rising slowly from the ground—exposing the lighted dock within.

It took him fully five seconds to recover from his surprise. Then everything that had puzzled him became clear. He swiftly mounted the loading platform. Keeping close to the corrugated doors, he edged quietly towards the slowly widening shaft of light.



As the sheet of metal rose into the air, a man stepped out and glanced cautiously around. Kelly—his heart pounding in his ears—flattened himself behind an upright. He knew it was the law that goods were not held to be actually stolen until they left the pier shed. He thought of the lump on his forehead, and decided to allow the thieves to incriminate them-

selves completely before interfering. His hand moved slowly towards the pistol on his hip as the eyes of the look-out turned in his direction; but the rain and darkness proved an effective shield, and the man retreated inside the pier.

The big door stopped rising. There was a moment's pause. The engine of the truck roared, and it shot suddenly out into the street, and turned north.

Kelly leaped down from the platform, his police positive gripped tightly in his hand. A short, fast run—a quick hop—and he was on the running board.

The driver was alone on the front seat—a husky, raw-boned fellow. He slowed down momentarily, and reached for an automatic in a shoulder holster. Kelly shoved his weapon hard into the man's ribs. He was conscious of a mop of dark, tangled hair, and a pair of wild, frightened eyes. Then the automatic pistol exploded almost in his face. The forward movement of the truck saved his life. Though the burning cordite scorched his neck, the slug itself went wild. Before the man could fire a second time, Kelly pulled the trigger of his own .45. The driver screamed in anguish, and doubled up with pain. Then, while Kelly reached for the brake, he rolled out of his seat, and tumbled into the street. The patrolman felt a sickening thump as the rear wheels lurched slowly over the unfortunate wretch. An instant later, the big vehicle rolled to a standstill.

A dark sedan pulled silently alongside as Kelly stepped off the running-board of the truck. Six men aboard the passenger car unloaded together, and rushed Kelly in a mob. Before he could turn, he was down on the ground, under their combined weight. A kick sent his pistol skidding along the wet pavement, underneath the big truck.

"Drill the louse!" a hard voice growled; but a sleek voice, that he recognized, countermanded the order. "No shootin'! Kick his damn head in, an'

we'll dump him in the drink. Nobody'll get wise he didn't get soused up, an' fall in."

IN THAT desperate moment, Kelly thought of his unsuspecting bride sleeping peacefully in her warm bed at home. He could almost see the horror on her face when they awoke her with the news of what had happened to him. The thought added desperation to his struggle, and he managed to wrench one arm free. His knuckles made a crunching sound as they pounded into a lean jaw, and he felt at least one pair of hands relax. He swung upwards with his head; met another chin, and a second pair of hands released their grip. He struggled to his knees, and swung with both fists in the darkness.

All around him men were cursing, kicking, and making savage efforts to keep him down.

A shower of kicks bent his ribs in, and he gasped. He swung again, at the shadow of a head, and connected. Another vicious blow landed in an exposed throat, and a man went down—coughing and swearing. Another violent wrench, and he was free. He dragged himself to his feet, relief surging through him, unmindful of his injuries.

Something crashed down on his head from behind—a pistol butt, probably. He felt his senses reel, and pitched over. A shower of kicks thudded against his head and shoulders. Half-conscious, he felt himself being dragged along the ground. He felt his body bump against the wooden stringpiece. Poor Molly, he thought, and gave up hope. A thousand desperate thoughts wafted through his mind in that last awful moment, as he waited for the long drop into the ice-cold water. He knew that he would not long survive in that chilling and swift flowing stream. He made a last desperate, and vain effort. He felt merciless hands drag him close to the edge of the planking. In

another second it would be all over. He closed his eyes.

Then, from the lunch-wagon, across the street, came a mighty yell—a wild Irish battle-cry. It came defiantly, borne on a blast of rain-swept wind, and startled the ears of the six enraged, murder-bent men.

"Faugh-a-bollagh!"

It was the war-cry of the Munster Fusileers. Faugh-a-bollagh—clear the way!

The gunmen freed their grip on the semi-conscious patrolman, and turned to face this new, unexpected enemy.

STREAMING out of the lunch-wagon—led by the little old man in whom the hardships of life had never succeeded in killing a saving sense of humor—came the tattered army of the down and out. Their leader—sounder of the battle cry—held a bottle of red catsup firmly by the neck.

"It's only a bunch of South Street bums," the silky-voiced leader of the gang of thieves said, and laughed derisively. "They think they're tough because someone blew 'em to a feed. I'll give 'em a dessert that'll make 'em change their tune." He dragged an automatic from his hip-pocket and covered the man who carried the red bottle.

"Scram, you lousy bums!" he growled savagely; but they did not pause. They were inspired by the man who led them. For one impetuous moment, this lost legion of the city streets were men again—men to do, and dare, perhaps ready even to die.

Sheer contempt held the bandit leader's fire. Only when it was too late, he realized his mistake. These men were not the derelicts of the slums. They were the inspired army of an invincible leader. With an amazing burst of speed, for a man of his age, the old fellow closed with the gunman. He swung the catsup bottle in a mighty blow—the light of a

gallant past shining in his aged eyes. The heavy end of the bottle crashed on the mob leader's skull, even as he tightened his finger on the trigger of his more deadly weapon. In another instant he was down. His automatic flew out of his hand, and brushed the knuckles of the patrolman—who was making a desperate effort to come to the assistance of his rescuers.

The old Irishman, too, dropped what was left of his shattered weapon. He clutched his chest with a look on his face that was mixture of surprise and agony.

"Why," he groaned, "'Tis shot I am!" and made a couple of uncertain steps forward, and rolled over on top of his fallen foe.

The remainder of the ragged brigade hesitated as their leader went down, and halted. The other gangsters were reaching for their guns, and the fight looked very uneven. Then, unexpectedly, a hoarse, choked voice spoke up from the rear of the gang of thieves.

"Hands up, you guys! I'll kill the first man who makes a false move!"

It was Patrolman Kelly—wild-eyed and staggering. His face and clothes were streaked with dirt, and his hair hung foolishly over his eyes; but he held the gang leader's automatic firmly in a bloodstained hand.

The five remaining thieves and murderers hesitated, and were lost. One by one, the guns dropped to the wet ground, and their hands went high in the air.

"Some of you fellows pick up them gats," Kelly directed, and several of the ragged men hastened to obey.

"Now keep them rats covered," he ordered, and the destitute men grimly lined up in front of the prisoners, and covered them with their own artillery.

Kelly reached the side of the old man, just as Sergeant Monaghan arrived in the patrol car. The counterman in the lunch wagon had sent in a hurry call. With guns drawn, the burly sergeant and his driver leaped out.

"'Tis the Pier gang—you got 'em!" the sergeant yelled jubilantly. "Good boy, Kelly! I always knew you were the best cop in the precinct."

"Well, you certainly are a good man at keepin' a secret," Kelly retorted. "But say, I got 'em all right; but only for your Corkonian friend here, I wouldn't have been able to hold 'em. If it wasn't for him, I'd be floatin' down the river right now, an' those rats would have got away. If there's any medals goin' for this night's work, he's entitled to 'em, without askin'. Is he hurt bad, Sergeant?"

Monaghan knelt on the wet paving beside his fallen comrade of other days. His voice shook when he finally spoke. "Arragh, is it goin' to die on me, you are, Pete old pal?"

The wounded man opened his eyes, and smiled faintly. "Is that die, you said, Tim? Musha man, what would I want to go die for, an' you after promisin' to get me a job as watchman on the Pier?"

Kelly touched the sergeant lightly on the shoulder, and made a significant gesture towards Pier 21.

"There's a vacancy below, or I'm very much mistaken. I feel pretty certain these rats gave it to the watchman. Better investigate, as soon as we get your friend to the hospital."

PATROLMAN STEPHEN KELLY walked stiffly into his Richmond Hill home. It seemed to him that there wasn't a spot on his carcass that had escaped a bruise. He was grateful for one mercy—his face was unmarked.

It had taken him a full half hour,

with the assistance of a couple of admiring reserves, to clean his uniform sufficiently to be presentable in the subway. The swelling over his eye had disappeared, though his head still ached.

His good looking young wife was busy with a panful of ham and eggs over the stove. She paused to greet him with a dutiful kiss.

"Gee, but you're late, Steve dear!" she said, and he thought, rather grimly, how close he had been to never returning.

"We were kinda busy, darlin'," he said apologetically.

"It rained right through," she said. "Did you have to be out in it all night, Steve dear?"

"Lord, no!" he lied bravely. He clasped his two hands together. "Me an' the sergeant is just like that. He wouldn't dream o' lettin' me go out on patrol in such weather. No, no, not him!"

"What were you doing, dear?" she asked innocently.

He grinned. "Just foolin' around in the back room of the Station House. We were practicin' wrestlin' holds. I got a few bumps."

"You shouldn't do that," she admonished him severely. "You might get hurt, fooling around."

"Not me," he said stoutly.

"I was worried about you, Steve dear," she confided. "I had a nightmare last night. I dreamt you were back driving a truck, and in a terrible accident. I was glad when I woke up, and realized that you weren't on the truck any more; but had a nice safe job on the cops."

"Sure," he agreed heartily. "It's a cinch!"

THE WEST

WHEN IT WAS YOUNG

by Elwell

Billy the Kid, III



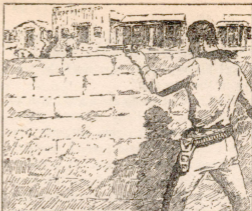
Roberts next pays price. Died gamely behind wall of ranch but took Constable Brewer with him. Billy through force of personality now heads McSween faction,—



July 1878 the Murphyites opened fire on McSween's home. Three blistering days Kid and his followers fought them.



Then started worse killing of siege as men fled burning building. McSween, nerve gone, unarmed, was shot dead. Others dropped in flight. Lastly the Kid



Sheriff Brady and Deputy Hindiman, killed by the Kid on way to open court, April 1, 1878.



Noon of third day came cavalry. Ostensibly neutral, commander made no move when Murphyites fired McSween home.

dashed the thirty foot open space, two six-guns blazing. Killed Deputy Beckwith, slayer of McSween. Wounded two more as twenty guns bellowed at him.



PIRATE TREASURE

A book condensed
for your enjoyment

By HAROLD T. WILKINS

Where are the pirate caches and treasure wrecks still remaining to be found, or fished up from Davy Jones's locker, in the five continents and under the waters of the seven seas—and what are they worth today?

I

JOLLY ROGER'S HEYDAY IN AMERICA

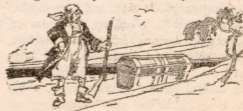
FEW people have any idea of the vast extent of the Caribbean Sea, better known in the history and romance of buried treasure as the Spanish Main, where every self-respecting black or red pirate would, by the honor of his craft, be one day forced to hie him, and break the Jolly Roger and the flaming dart and hour glass at his halyard peaks.

Even today, a steamship, starting out from Key West, skirting its seaboard, and keeping to the inner side of the Antilles, would take no less than forty days to get back to its starting point. The actual circuit of this vast sea is 12,000 miles from Cape Sable round to the Bahamas. At one point, north of Puerto Rico lies the Brownson Deep, where the Caribbean is 4,000 to 5,000 fathoms deep. In the spacious days of the seventeenth and eighteenth and of the first twenty or thirty years of the nineteenth century this was an ideal hunting ground for the cut-and-run corsair and treasure-hunter, or treasure-hiding pirate and buccaneer. The earliest recorded find of buried treasure was made in these regions by the ferocious harrier of Spaniards, Francis Lolois, who set out from Tortuga Island, in the

seventeenth century, on a career of sacking, burning, robbery and murder in which Maracaibo went up in flames, and his buccaneers returned with 260,000 pieces of eight to squander in the stews and taverns of French Tortuga.

THEN, too, both before and after Blake's great victory over the Spanish fleet at Santa Cruz, in 1657, pirates and privateers sailed in to the Carolina harbors, laden to the gunwale with the loot of His Spanish Catholic Majesty's ships.

The pirates were as good as a mint to the Carolinas. An amazing fact of this piratical commerce is that, for many years after the founding of Carolina, most of the currency in circulation consisted of gold and silver pieces brought in by pirates and privateers from their cruises in West Indian waters. In New England, at an earlier period, the same condition of things prevailed. For while Colonial merchants could get cheap pennyworths of pirate goods, they would not buy the rela-



tively honest commodities sold at arbitrarily high prices by merchants of London town.

A queer adventure which befell one of these New England pirates in 1697 is told by Governor Jeremiah Basse in a letter home to William Popple, Secretary to the Board of Trade in London. An English ship, the *Nassau*, met one of these piratical rovers at the Cape of Good Hope. She was heavily loaded with loot, and got the *Nassau* to take aboard chests of money so hefty that six men at the tackles could hardly hoist the chests on to the decks of the *Nassau*. The pirate was afraid the Dutch would make a prize of his ship and her loot. Afterwards, the chests were given back to the pirate at sea, but we hear nothing of what was the reward of the English good Samaritan for this deed. Patriotism was an excellent refuge in this case.

Now enters on the scene Bill Bradish, a native of Cambridge, near Boston, and a very infamous pirate whose prison-breaking exploits earned for him the honor of a letter written by Dutch William from "Our Court at Kensington." One account of Bradish—in a letter from William Stoughton of Boston, to Mr. Secretary Vernon in England, dated April 12, 1696—says that Bradish was a bosun's mate who seized the hake-boat *Adventure* of London, 22 guns and 350 tons, while her captain and officers were ashore on Long Island, at its east end. The pirates, twenty-five in number, made Bradish their captain, as he understood navigation, and sailed for Mauritius, after putting ashore unwilling men, and pressing an equally unwilling surgeon's mate and two youths.

But Colonel J. Winthrop, Governor of Connecticut, writing from New London, in the "colony of Connecticut, New England," on June 8, 1699, says he has heard that several pirates, in September, 1689, ran away with the ship *Adventure* of London, Captain Gullock, commander, when she touched at Pollonis, in the East

Indies. She was bound to Borneo, and the pirates left Captain Gullock and others of the crew ashore, and brought the ship

upon this coast, where they sank her with most of her loading. Ten of this company are in custody here. There was taken with them in money and goods to the value of about £2,000, which is secured here. The rest of their confederates with considerable sums of money and goods are seized at Boston, in the province of Massachusetts. I hope that those here do so far confess the horrid fact of felony, that they are guilty of, as may convict them. Your Honor will put a great favor upon this colony in communicating to me His Majesty's pleasure concerning the said money and goods which was squandered about into many hands, and concealed, which made it difficult to come at.

They shared the plunder at the Cape of Good Hope, says William Stoughton, and weighed out money, some receiving \$1,600 for a share, and the captain having about \$4,000 for his portion. Then they sailed back to Long Island, where Bradish went on shore, and carried most of his jewels and money to a "gentleman on the island." The ship was run by the pirates to Block Island, where the governor of Rhode Island seized two men as they were trying to buy a sloop. The rest of the pirates scattered ashore, landing at farmhouses in the night, buying horses, and dispersing themselves all round the countryside. A hue and cry sprang up, a proclamation went forth, and ten pirates were arrested in the next government, together with £3,000 in money.

Bradish and another pirate, thrown into Boston jail, escaped with the connivance of the jailer, a kinsman of his. The jailer confessed the pirates went out of the prison door, which he found wide open. There were plenty of friends among the

respectable Puritan merchants of Boston. The Earl of Bellomont, that energetic Irish peer whose governorship of New York coincided with the undoing of the luckless Captain Kidd, was hot on the heels of Bradish, and his parcel of pirates. In the presence of the New York and Massachusetts Bay Council, Bellomont opened a bag of jewels left by Bradish with Lieutenant-Colonel Pierson, and saw what all thought were £10,000 worth of jewels, but a Jew present declared the stones counterfeit. As a matter of fact, Bradish wore on his finger a ring with seven small diamonds.

"I seized three men in this town (Boston) coming from Block Island," says Bellomont, writing home to the Crown authorities in London, "where they had concealed some of those pirates' money." Only with the greatest difficulty did Lord Bellomont get the Council to consent to the prosecution and dismissal of the bribed and conniving jailer. A sum of £942.19s.3d., piratical loot, was seized at New York, but though Bellomont tried hard to capture the other pirates, then actually in the city with their wives, they were too well hidden and befriended. The New York sheriff of that day had £2,500 of pirated East Indian goods hidden in his own house.

An express was sent to the Governor of Rhode Island where the pirates had buried treasure, and he dug up £1,000. Colonel Winthrop seized £1,800 and eleven pirates at New London, and fifteen or sixteen pirates with £6,000 at Boston. In all, £10,000 of pirate treasure were known to have fallen into the hands of the authorities.

* * * * *

A question which has excited the imaginations of thousands of treasure seekers, and still inspires expeditions in the twentieth century, may fitly be asked here: *Did Captain William Kidd bury any treasure, and, if so, where is it?*

The popular belief is that one of his chests of gold lies embedded in the sands

somewhere near New York and it persists despite the fact that repeated searches have not unearthed the cache. All yarns have a common point in their agreement that a Negro slave helped him hide the box and was then killed and buried on the top of it.

A fisherman of Great South Bay, Long Island, is said to have dreamt three successive nights that, at a certain spot nearby, Captain Kidd's doubloons lay buried. He got up before daybreak and rowed his boat to the place. Next morning, he was found unconscious across his own doorstep. His boat was never found, but the spade, wet with the sand still clinging to it, was seen in a graveyard nearby. As soon as he came round, our adventurous fisherman said he had no recollection of what happened after he started to dig, or how he returned to his home.

The report of his having buried great treasures of gold and silver, says the *Pirates' Own Book*, which he actually did before his arrest, set the brains of all good people along the coast in a ferment. There were rumors on rumors of great sums of money found here and there sometimes in one part of the country, sometimes in another; of coins with Moorish inscriptions doubtless spoils of his eastern prizes. Some reported the treasure to have been buried in solitary, unsettled places about Plymouth and Cape Cod, but by degrees, various other parts, not only on the eastern coast, but along the shores of the Sound, and even Manhattan and Long Island were gilded by these rumors.

In fact the vigorous measures of Lord Bellomont had spread sudden consternation among the pirates in every part of the provinces; they had secreted their money and jewels in lonely, out-of-the-way places, about the wild shores of the sea coast, and dispersed themselves over the country, but the hand of justice prevented many of them from

ever returning to regain their buried treasures, which remain to this day thus secreted and are irrecoverably lost. This is the cause of those frequent reports of trees and rocks bearing mysterious marks, supposed to indicate the spots where treasure lay hidden; and many have been the ransackings after the pirates' booty. A rocky place on the shores of Long Island, called Kidd's Ledge, has received great attention from the money-diggers, but they have not yet discovered any treasure.

So much for the romantic theories of the *Pirates' Own Book*, and now for a little of the cold water of the analytical school of historians. We will see what Kidd's contemporaries have to say about his buried loot.

Bellomont, to the Council of Trade and Plantations, at Whitehall, London, writing from Boston, on January 5, 1700:

Captain Kidd sent the jailer to me a fortnight ago to acquaint me that if I would let him go to the place where he left the *Quidah Merchant* and to St. Thomas and Curaçao, he would undertake to bring off fifty or three score thousand pounds, which would otherwise be lost: that he would be satisfied to go a prisoner to remove from me any jealousy of his designing to escape. But I sent him word he was the King's prisoner, and I could hearken to no such proposition, but I had the jailer to try if he could prevail with Captain Kidd to discover where his treasure was hid by him. But he said nobody could find it but himself, and would not tell any further.

John Nanfan, Lieutenant-Governor of New York, told Bellomont that Captain Kidd had aboard the *Quidah Merchant* half a million bullion in sterling, and Mr. Emot, a New York lawyer, added that Kidd had left a great ship off Hispaniola,

with £300,000 (\$1,500,000) in goods, in a place where none but he could find it. At Kidd's lodgings were found, hidden in two "seabeds," a bag of gold dust, and ingots, worth £1,000, and a bag of silver, part bullion and pigs of silver. Kidd owned to Bellomont that he buried gold at Gardiner's Island, in New York at the east end of Nassau Island, but a parcel of jewels and treasure (about £4,500, or \$22,500 worth, says Bellomont) was delivered by Kidd to one Gardiner, a New York merchant, and later, seized by orders of Bellomont, who had heard, by chance, that a man had offered £30 for a sloop to convey him to that Island.

The sleuth, Bellomont, vigorously hunted up a house in New York where treasure had been left, and another place, strongly suspected to have been a hiding-place for some of Kidd's treasure. The waistcoat of Kidd, seized by Bellomont, proved to be not sewn with diamond buttons, but with "Bristol stones, set in gold," and "seven of the buttons were wanting when they were brought to me." They were "sparks not right diamonds."

"I believe," says Bellomont, "Kidd thought they were right diamonds by his conveying the waistcoat away in the manner he did."

Captain Kidd's own story was that he left £4,000 in dust and bar gold, and fifty pounds of gold from Madagascar, in a box in the custody of Mr. Gardiner of New York. Yet, in the chest buried at Gardiner's Island, was found neither gold nor silver, but fine fabrics, and the great ship, left off Hispaniola, and reported to contain £300,000 in goods in her holds, was at that time stated to have been seen on fire by a passing trading vessel.

To all seekers after the hidden treasure of Captain Kidd, the advice of the present writer is: Forget it!

LONG ISLAND, that old haunt of buried treasure-hunters loomed very largely in a thrilling story of which Lord

Bellomont was again the hero. One day in May, 1696, Captain Leonard Edgcombe of the frigate *Mocha*, lying at the quays of Bombay, and bound on a round voyage to China, was short-handed, and shipped some extra seamen. He sailed for the East Indies on June 17, and off the coast of Sumatra took an observation which told him the ship lay off Achin, where she remained all night under her mainsails for fear of driving on a lee shore. About three or four in the morning, on June 19, 1696, Thomas Vaughan, a mariner of Worcester, England, was lying in his cabin when he heard the noise of firing, and running on deck was told "the ship was taken."

"By whom are we taken?" said he to some of the seamen on the quarter-deck.

"By the men we shipped at Bombay," he was told, and was ordered to go forward to the forecabin, where he was accompanied by seven other seamen not in the plot. They were warned they would be killed out of hand if they resisted. The mutineers mounted two of the guns on the quarter-deck and trained them on the forecabin. A few hours later, the eight men were summoned into the roundhouse of the ship where the mutineers assured them they were now the masters of the *Mocha* frigate. The eight were then put under the guard of a sentry. On the way to the roundhouse, Vaughan saw a cabin boy who was crying and who said that Captain Edgcombe had been killed and his body thrown overboard. The news frightened Vaughan.

The next thing was that Vaughan and seventeen prisoners were put into a pinnace at six o'clock in the morning, and told by the pirates to make the best of their way ashore, which they did, after sailing for two days and nights with no food or water across a lonely sea. Later on, August 24, 1700, Thomas Vaughan recognized in the prison of Marshalsea, London, a man going under the name of James Kelley, but whose other name was Sampson Marshall, and who was one of

the pirates who ran away with the *Mocha* frigate, as Vaughan told a learned judge who took down his "Information."

The further adventures of the *Mocha*, after Vaughan and the others had been sent ashore, may be briefly told. A notorious pirate, Robert Cullover or Culliford, a mariner of East Looe, Cornwall, England, who, when a prisoner in Newgate jail, London, in 1702, said he had sailed with Captain Kidd, was made the commander of the *Mocha* frigate. The ship had taken him aboard off the coast of Siam, where he had been imprisoned after running away with a ship belonging to the Old East India Company. Cullover joined forces with Richard Sievers, another infamous late seventeenth century pirate, captain of the ship *Soldados*, and they lay in wait for the *Mocha* fleet of the Indian Great Mogul, bound from Arabia to India. A rich booty fell into their hands when they set upon an Indian ship of 700 tons named the *Great Mahomet*. The pirates put her crew ashore, and took out of her the amazing loot of 40,000 pounds of Arabian gold, valued at £16,000; 1,000 ounces of gold, worth £3,000; 250,000 pieces of eight worth £10,000; 3 chests of coral worth £300, and two boxes containing beads and "dragons' blood" worth about £200.

BRADENHAM, Kidd's surgeon, who was with Cullover, said the "purchase" or plunder, was worth £60,000, excluding goods of considerable value also on the *Great Mahomet*. Each of the crew shared £800 a man and the two captains had £1,600 each. At the time of this exploit, which frightened the East India Company into fits lest the Great Indian Mogul Emperor attempt reprisals on them, Kidd was in prison in England, awaiting his trial.

The James Kelley, *alias* Sampson Marshall, *alias* Gillan, recognized by Vaughan in the Marshalsea prison, London, was said by a sea captain, William Cuthbert, a one-time gunner on the

Charles II in the East Indies, to have murdered Captain Edgcombe as he lay asleep. Gillan "turned Moor and was circumcised in the East Indies," added Cuthbert. Other episodes in this bloody-minded pirate's career included pirating against the Spaniards in the Pacific off the South American coast, and he was also known to have been on board Captain Kidd's ship.

Some of the pirates stayed at Madagascar, others, including Bradenham and Gillan, returned to New York, where, in place of Colonel Fletcher, the old governor who had taken gifts and presents of ships from pirates, they found the Earl of Bellomont. A hue and cry was soon out, and Gillan made for Rhode Island. Colonel Peleg Sanford wrote Bellomont from Newport, R. I., that the governor of Rhode Island connived at Gillan's escape, by issuing a search warrant that could not be executed. "There is a general aversion to seize pirates in Rhode Island," says Francis Brinley on the same date (August 10, 1699), from Newport. "The sweetness of gain has drawn many aside. Quakerism is in the ascendant in the Government, and Quakerism and good government are not compatible." "The inhabitants of Rhode Island at all times harbor and abet pirates," reports Edward Randolph to the Commissioners of Trade and Plantations in London. "The Government is in the hands of Quakers."

Gillan fled to Nassau that "great receptacle of Pirates," writes Bellomont to the Commissioners at Whitehall, on October 20, 1699.

Gillan, a notorious pirate, was suffered to escape thither from Rhode Island, and 'tis believed he is still there, notwithstanding a reward of £300 for his apprehension, and, at the same time, £10 a piece for two of Kidd's men that escaped from the town (Boston, Massachusetts) to Nassau Island. The east end of it exceeds Rhode Island. The people have been many of them

pirates themselves, and to be sure are well-affected to the trade. They are so lawless and desperate that I can get no honest man to venture to collect the excise among them, and watch their trade. There are four towns that make it their daily practice to receive ships and sloops with all sorts of merchandise, though they be not allowed ports.

He adds that he intends to quarter a hundred men among them under "discreet officers to teach them their duty to the Government."

II

ASIATIC TREASURE

THE mysterious regions of central Asia and Mongolia, where the drifting sands have covered what were once thriving cities, but are now long-dead haunts of forgotten and unknown civilizations, must have many treasure caches—the work of both man and Nature. Colonel Kosloff, the Russian explorer, and Sir Aurel Stein, in 1924, investigated the dead city of Khara-Khoto, in Mongolia, which certainly flourished in the twelfth century A.D., and is believed to be of much earlier date. The city is now a mass of tottering ruins. The two explorers went into a prayer tower where they found books printed, from block type, and so well-preserved that they might have been printed yesterday. There are said to be eighty cartloads of gold, silver and jewelry buried about the city, and hidden carefully by a ruling prince who feared his city would be captured by the besieging Chinese armies.

Actually, the city was captured, but the Chinese annals say the treasure was never found. The disappearance of the rivers, once watering the valley, caused the city to dwindle in size, until the caravan route left it on one side and mysterious Khara-Khoto rotted in a waterless and wind-eroded desert.

Some time ago, water escaped from an

irrigation canal and cut a ravine through a low-lying cliff, near Khotan, the "Jade City," in Chinese Turkestan. The water revealed bits of shining gold, and the inhabitants at once began a hunt for hidden treasure. So feverishly did they work that they lowered the fields several feet. Nearby, there once stood a city named Yotkan, the capital of the country 1,000 years ago, and it mysteriously vanished, after frequent mention in the Chinese annals.

ACROSS the mountains of the Thian Shan, west of Khotan, is the river Oxus or Amu Daria. An immense amount of buried gold is known to abound in these remote and practically unknown regions of Central Asia. A thrilling story is told of an intrepid British political officer who, single-handed, at midnight, held up a cave of fierce Afghan bandits, and wrested from them a hoard of buried treasure they had stolen from a caravan of Turkestan merchants bound from the regions of Samarkand and the river Oxus, to Peshawar, on the British side of the famous Khyber Pass. The tale goes back to 1877-80, and is woven round a mysterious submerged city on the caravan road across the desert to Samarkand. The caravan chanced to pass by a ferry where people were in the habit of digging for buried treasures.

About 9 A.M., one day in the year 1880, a scared and breathless Moslem servant came running into the camp of Captain F. C. Burton, the British political officer, at Seh Baba, three marches from Kabul, Afghanistan. He said he was the servant of three Moslem merchants from Bokhara, who had been robbed on a journey, from Kabul to Peshawar. The robbers were men of the Khurd Kabul. The Moslem merchants had foolishly wandered ahead of the caravan escort. Down swept the robbers, in the true Afridi style, scooped up the merchants and their treasure, and made for the hills with the speed

of the wind. The merchants' servant managed to escape and ran for Burton's camp. With only two orderlies, Captain Burton set off for the hills, and, at midnight, surprised the bandits by unexpectedly appearing in their camp in the hill-caves.

A ferocious quarrel had taken place over the division of the loot and four of the robbers lay, bathed in their gore, on the stone floor. The treasure, taken out of the leathern pockets of the merchants' saddlebags, lay scattered about the cave. A parley followed. Somehow, Captain Burton persuaded the robbers to hand over the loot; but delay was dangerous, so he hastened away from the hill-caves. A warning reached him that the robbers would try to recover the loot, and he hid all night, and traveled in the daylight, reaching his camp at six the next morning. He at once threatened to lead a force against the robbers, but they brought in another part of the loot, and about three-quarters of what had been stolen from the merchants was recovered.

The gratified merchants generously offered to sell a silver anklet, out of the treasure to Captain Burton! (This anklet is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, London.) Said Waziadin, one of them, to Burton:

I am one of the merchants who was with the caravan, when the Ghilzais of Hisarak and Jagdalak, attacked us and took all our property. The mules were not taken, but the mule bags were cut and carried off. They contained gold and silver ornaments, some cups of gold, a silver idol, and a gold one, also a large ornament resembling an anklet. Most of the things were found at Khandian (Kabadian) which is submerged in the Oxus.

At certain times of the year, when the river dries up, people dig the bed, and among the old ruins on the side of Khandian find valuable gold things. My

companions and myself bought these things, being obliged to carry money, as Abderraman, afterwards Amir of Afghanistan, was at Kunduz, and was taking toll of all travelers and merchants for his army. We were told that the idol and anklet were of the days of Alexander the Great, and that they were found at the same time as the ornaments which I hear were sent to India to the Burra Lord Sahib (Lytton, the Viceroy, who sent them—they were parts of a gold chariot—to Edinburgh Museum, Scotland). The whole value of the treasure was 80,000 rupees (about \$27,000) and, by your influence, we have regained 52,000 rupees: I am willing that you should buy the gold anklet. The silver idol has been burnt, since it was stolen, and some of the silver has been melted down.

THESSE merchants were traders between Khiva and Samarkand and India, and were passing Kabadian when the treasure was offered for sale. They decided to convert a large sum of money into the treasure, and then sew it up in the leather bags. When they reached Rawal Pindi, on the Indian side of the Khyber Pass, the Hindu goldsmiths bought the treasure from the Bokhara merchants. Later on, the Rawal Pindi sharks sold it to General Sir Alexander Cunningham who, in his turn sold the articles to Sir A. W. Franks. These Hindu dealers are known constantly to receive treasure trove of antiquity found in and beyond the frontier of Northwest India. Oftentimes, the dealers cleverly make gold counterfeits. In this instance they sold the faked antiques to Sir A. W. Franks, and retained the originals. Franks grew suspicious, as he detected signs of forgery; but he was forced by the wily fakery to buy the spurious in order to obtain the genuine antiques. This method of dealing is quite characteristic of Hindu dealers in the

bazaars of Rawal Pindi, and elsewhere. They cleverly forged some of the ancient coins, brought by caravans coming through the Khyber Pass.

The treasure of Khandian, on the Oxus, consisted of 1500 coins—pieces of old Persian satraps, tetradrachmas of old Athens, Macedonian coins, 200 gold pieces of the time of Alexander the Great, Carian and Thracian coins, and money of Antiochus and Seleucus Nikator, Alexander's generals, who founded dynasties after his death. They ranged in date from the fifth to the second century B.C., the latest date being 200 B.C.

The late Bacha-i-Saquo, the water-carrier's son who usurped the throne of ex-King Amanullah of Afghanistan, told his escort when he was on the way, in the fall of 1929, to be shot in Kabul by the present King Nadir Shah: "Many loads of golds I buried in my native glens and I took great care, making their hiding-place known only to one other than myself. That man is now safely dead, and nothing on earth shall persuade me to reveal where that treasure lies. Yea, by the beard of the Prophet, there let it lie till the day of doom."

Any enterprising treasure hunter who would like to hunt up this cache should take a ticket for Peshawar, on the British-Indian side of the far-famed Khyber Pass. He should then inquire for the country of the Afridis, and if he can once cross over the "strictly forbidden frontier" on the far side of Khyber, he will doubtless earn the distinction of ensuring for some zealous Afridi sharpshooter an easy way into the Moslem Paradise and the land of houris and perpetual sherbet. The Afridis are said to cherish a fervent and deeply religious belief in this heavenly efficacy of a pot shot with a white man for the target. Having thus placated the afreet who guards Bacha's loot, the treasure seeker will not himself benefit, but some other will or may. For did not the old monks of the Middle Ages of Christendom say:

"The virtues of abnegation and self-disinterestedness are requisite for him who would find treasure that is hidden"?

MODERN INDIA has her caches of buried treasure. Three million pounds sterling, or fifteen million dollars' worth of old jewels were found in August, 1927, in the palace of Kumber, in the Bharatpur State, Central India, while repairs were being made to the old walls of the Durbar Hall, in the Palace. The revenue of the Bharatpur State had been down of late, so the find was timely for the Indian potentate. He appointed a special officer to go through the palace archives to find clues of other hidden treasure, and to arrange for the sales of the jewels. This story was widely circulated in the Indian press, in September, 1927, but was denied in London, by the Maharajah's secretary.

For centuries kings and maharajahs of India have used the earth as a bank, and it is known that many millions of gold, the loot of seventeenth and eighteenth century Mahratta raiders of the plains of Indus, are still hidden in a secret vault of the fortress of Gwalior.

A little way off the caravan road in the Shan States of Burma is a great lake full of floating islands and buried treasure. Much gold and silver, as well as many jewels are said to lie buried in this lake, in which it was a custom to bury half a man's wealth along with his corpse. The corpse was fastened to the bottom of the lake with stakes. Dare-devil villagers, braving the goblins who guard treasure from filching hands, venture out on the lake in the night hours, and rob the treasure.

* * * * *

IT IS not very long ago since a mysterious accident, befalling a British captain of a schooner named the *Nereid*, brought to an abrupt close a voyage from Yokohama, in search of hidden treasure. The ship was at anchor off the coast of

Guam, a small island belonging to Uncle Sam, and lying in the Marianne group, 1600 miles east of Manila, when the captain went ashore to make arrangements for sailing to Yap, in the Carolines.

On his return to the harbor, he got a shock. The schooner had slipped her moorings and vanished! He climbed a cliff, and swept the skyline and the sea in hopes of sighting her sails. Not a trace of her could he make out through his binoculars, and they were good glasses. Aboard the *Nereid* were his mate and two Japanese sailors, who must have run away with the ship. Not a trace of the *Nereid* was ever found. The port authorities were naturally curious about the incident. Except in Chinese waters, these are not the days of pirates on the high seas, and crews do not often run away with their ships. The captain told the officials of Guam a queer story.

Some weeks before, he had sailed out of Yokohama, to search for a treasure buried on an island in the Marianne group in the waters off Guam. The yarn went back to the days of the Peruvian revolution led against the Spaniards by Bolivar, the Liberator, in 1823. The treasure as in the cases of the alleged caches on Cocos Island and Trinidad, the lone cable station in the South Atlantic, off Brazil, had been stolen from Lima, where a number of wealthy folk had combined to charter a brig of 300 tons, on which they placed money and jewelry and a vast amount of monastery plate consigned by the Jesuits and others for safety.

The treasure was shipped to Cadiz in old Spain, and amounted to two millions sterling of doubloons and an immense quantity of silver in ingots and plate. After the treasure had been placed in the hold of the brig, the owners returned to the beach to find the brig gone! An Englishman, who was a lieutenant in the Peruvian navy, had got wind of the intended flight, had gone aboard her at midnight with a chosen band, and had sailed

her out of harbor within hail of a Peruvian man o' war. He steered right across the Pacific and in due time reached the Marianne Islands, where the treasure was buried.

A COURSE was then set for Honolulu, but, on the voyage, quarrels broke out among the crew. The lieutenant, with his two officers and a cabin boy got into a boat and left the ship, after taking the precaution to set her afire. One of the officers was murdered and thrown overboard before the boat reached Honolulu. At that port, the pirates gave out that they were survivors of a shipping disaster.

Just before they had left Lima so hurriedly, the English lieutenant had fallen in love with a Peruvian lady, the wife of a Peruvian officer slain in the Revolution. Before taking further steps about the buried treasure, he decided to send the cabin boy as his emissary to Lima, to persuade the lady to come with him to the Marianne Islands. The cabin boy arrived at Lima, but was arrested and imprisoned, and the lady refused to have anything more to do with the man she called "a detestable pirate."

So the rejected pirate and his two remaining comrades, hired a small fore and aft schooner, the *Swallow*, whose captain was named Thompson, and set sail for the Marianne Islands to raise the buried treasure. Thompson tried hard to get a charter for a specified port or ports, but the lieutenant insisted on a broad charter, including all or any of the Mariannes. One evening, when they were in sight of the islands, the lieutenant, sitting on the lee rail, chatting with his companion, was, it is said, tipped overboard by the latter and disappeared.

The usual alarm was raised, but they never found the lieutenant's body. Thompson, from scraps of conversation he had overheard, suspected the object of the voyage. He now overhauled the dead lieutenant's effects, and found a chart of the

island on which the treasure was hidden, *but with the name omitted*. Soon after, Captain Thompson sighted another brig, with the master of which he was acquainted, and proposed a joint search for and division of the treasure. The surviving pirate was to be given a share of the loot, if he pointed out the spot; otherwise he was to be handed over to the Spanish or Peruvian authorities.

At a concerted time, the surviving pirate was seized by the plotters, who named their terms. They asked him if he would tell them where was the cache? He nodded. The ship was lying close to one of the Marianne Islands. They asked him if that was the island? He again nodded. Then they invited him to take a seat in a boat which had been lowered, and guide them to the treasure. The captive pirate went down below, filled his pockets with lead and iron bolts. He then descended the ladder, pushed off the boat with one foot from the side of the schooner, and dropped feet first into the sea.

As late as 1888, there was alive one of the schooner's crew who, snatching at the suicide's head as he sank, plucked a handful of hair, but could not raise the heavily weighted body. That ended the treasure hunt, and the chart was said to have been handed to the Peruvian authorities.

The British captain, whose ship deserted him at Guam, thought he had a clue to the whereabouts of this immense wealth.

In ports all over the Eastern seas, from Singapore and Manila, to Yokohama and Frisco, you will find today seafarers who are sure they know of caches of immense treasure ashore on lonely beaches and desolate islands, or sunken bullion wrecks in the waters of the South Pacific or off China. They have seen old charts with the imprint of Mr. Billy Bones, master of the *Walrus* of Savannah, who sailed the seas under Captain Flint, or crude sea-stained maps bearing the anchor-his-mark

of Israel Hands, who begged his bread in the streets of Old Wapping, what time poor Captain Kidd hung in chains at Execution Dock. Sometimes these yarns have a foundation of fact. The treasure-seekers are not always unscrupulous adventurers or tattooed whiskey-swallowers.

III

AFRICA SHINING COVES AND CACHIES

ONE day toward the close of the American War of 1812, a British naval captain was looking out of the windows of the old Crown Hotel, at Portsmouth. His glance fell on a respectable-looking foreign seaman, getting on in years, who had been waiting some time across the way. The sailor had a talk with the secretary, and was then shown into the Admiral's presence, where he remained a long time.

Two weeks later, the observant captain, who had just come off a spell of convoy duty, and was looking for a chance to earn money, was sent for by the commander-in-chief, Sir Richard Bickerton, who put papers into his hands, and an open letter from "J. W. Croker, Esquire, Secretary of the Admiralty." The letter read as follows:

Admiralty. January 1813.

The enclosed, which are left open for perusal, will explain to you the purpose of sending the men to Maderia. I believe there is not the least truth in the story, and that the treasure island and all are visionary. But Lord Liverpool and Mr. Vansittart think it worth while to make a trial of the thing, as it can be done without any great inconvenience. Will you, therefore, have the goodness to let the man be sent in the first King's ship touching at Madeira. The packet may be left unsealed that the captain may know the history of the people and the object of the voyage.

The permanent chief of the Admiralty had humored the fantastic whim of his temporary superiors, clearly much against his will, and then washed his hands of the affair and dismissed it from his mind.

Christian Cruise, the name of the foreign seaman whom the captain—we will introduce him to the reader as Captain, later Admiral Hercules Robinson—had seen outside the Admiral's Office at Portsmouth, England, was a Finn sailorman who told a strange story to the British naval authorities, which was so convincing and had so transfixed the imaginations of Lord Liverpool and Lord Bexley as to determine them actually to send a King's ship, the *Prometheus*, to search out a lonely rock in mid-Atlantic!

Here is the romantic yarn: Christian Cruise was lying ill of fever in a hospital at Santa Cruz. In the next bed was a dying Spanish seaman who confessed to Cruise that, in 1804, he was one of the crew of a ship, bound from South America to Cadiz, with a cargo of two million dollars in chests. A few days' sail from Cadiz, the Spanish captain was warned that war had broken out between Great Britain and Spain, and that a squadron of British frigates had taken four Spanish galleons. From Finisterre to Trafalgar, a cordon of British cruisers was drawn in blockade. The captain resolved that the only way out of the dilemma was to put back for the West Indies and run for the north of the Spanish Main, or some neutral island. Easier conceived than executed!

The crew were in a state of mutiny, but agreed to keep the ship out of the track of the cruisers and run for the south of Madeira where they could pick up the trade winds. One day, they found themselves off a cluster of small, uninhabited islands, fifty leagues south of Madeira. The center island, about three miles round, was high and flat, and green at the top, but uninhabited. The captain was knocked on the head and stabbed to death. He was

carried below and the ship hauled in to an anchorage on the South side of the island. They found a snug little bay, in which they brought up and landed chests of dollars. Cutting a deep trench in the white sand, above high water mark, the mutineers buried the treasure and well covered it with soil and sand. Some feet above the chests, they deposited in a box the body of their murdered captain. Then they put out to sea, keeping well to the southward.

THEY planned to make the Spanish Main or a neutral island, run the ship ashore, set her afire, and agree on some plausible story. Then, with some of the money, they would purchase a small vessel, and, under English colors, revisit the island and take off the treasure, in whole or in part. Fate, however, overruled their plans. A heavy gale blew up in West Indian waters, and, in their ignorance of navigation, they ran the ship, the wind blowing hard, on an uninhabited cay, near Tobago, where she went to pieces. Only two of the pirates reached shore, and finally got to St. Thomas, where one died, and the other told Cruise the story of the runaway ship.

Captain Hercules Robinson, of the *Prometheus*, warned the Finn sailorman to keep his story dark. Christian Cruise, he said, would mess with the coxswain on the voyage, and have food but no wages. The Finn said he was quite content to go on that footing. He wanted no reward, if nothing resulted from the quest. On the way out to Madeira, Robinson closely questioned Cruise on the facts of his melodramatic story. Cruise struck him as an honest man, as he had disclaimed any reward unless a discovery was made. The latitude and longitude given indicated the Salvage Islands.

At Madeira, Captain Robinson inquired if anything had ever been found at the Salvages, and was told that, some years before, the taffrail of a foreign ship had

been found and two boxes of dollars. By closer questioning, he learned that a certain José de Lisboa had gone, a poor man, to gather barilla on the islands, and that he returned rich. His linen had become finer and cleaner, buttons had multiplied on his black, velvet jacket, an occasional cigar became perpetual, and labor was exchanged for the eternal strumming of a mandoline.

On a fine morning, Robinson found himself off the Great Salvage Island. It was about a league in circumference, flat at the top, and green with saltwort and alkalescent plants. On hauling round the east point, there was the sandy bay, with the white beach and the little level spot above high water-mark.

"Will this do?" asked Robinson.

"No doubt, sir," answered Christian Cruise, "it must be the place."

Robinson then sent for his officers, told them the yarn, and pledged them to secrecy. The men were to be told they were searching for the body of a murdered sailor, buried above high water-mark. A landing party of fifty or sixty men went ashore, armed with shovels and boarding pikes. They were delighted at the spice of adventure, and the chance of stretching their legs after the cramped shipboard. A reward of \$100 was promised to the man first finding the coffin. Alas, white sand extended for acres round the bay and between the foot of the cliff and high water-mark!

THE men went to the center of the beach above high water-mark, where the breaking of the sea and the drainage through the sand might terminate, and where a man might be most likely to drop a heavy coffin, or chest after staggering up a beach. They dug a deep hole and found broken shells and pebbles. They probed all over the beach, at every likely spot, and dug everywhere it seemed possible a cache might have been made. Captain Robinson clambered up a cliff to the green tableland,

and strolled about, but could see nothing save wheeling gulls, and hear only the shouts of the sailors digging and leap-frogging on the sands for relaxation. He looked right down on to the ship's deck, from the high cliff above the cove. Then Robinson dropped down from crag to crag to the beach, and ordered his men aboard, as night was drawing on and the situation unsafe for the ship. The boats were hoisted in, the anchor weighed, and the *Prometheus* stood out of the bay for Madeira. He reported that he had examined all the Salvage Islands, and that about the situation of the supposed treasure, on the middle of the island of the Little Salvages, a box of silver coins was found by a Portuguese fisherman. "All our researches there and elsewhere were no good. Great surf made landing extremely difficult. I shall, if a continuation of still weather gives a greater facility of landing, again look at the island," he wrote. But forty years were to pass, before Hercules Robinson again visited the island. The Admiralty did not pursue the matter further.

On the next long-deferred visit, Robinson, then an Admiral, came in a private yacht, and not a King's ship. He was one of a party comprising a Mr. Bentinck, owner of a yacht the *Dream*, and a Colonel Murray. They left Cowes, Isle of Wight, on July 12, 1856, when the House of Commons had risen for the recess, and on Sunday, July 27, 1856, were off the Salvages, the wind blowing hard. They hauled round the south point of the little cove, but dared not anchor the yacht, the weather was so wild. Rabbits were seen in plenty, and one or two barilla gatherers had erected crazy huts. Next day, they walked over the beach where Christian Cruise had led them, and Robinson noticed that wind, weather and landslides had changed the place so that few spots were left for digging. At Santa Cruz, as they were lounging about the door of a picturesque inn, in the cool of the evening,

their landlord told them a tale which made them prick up their ears. A ship had been fitted out by a Liverpool company, some years before, to search for treasure on the Salvages. They had heard a garbled yarn of pirates who plundered Indiamen, outward bound, made the crews walk the plank, and then buried money and jewels in the coppers and casks of two ships. The pirates had been chased and sunk by an English man-o'-war, and only one man was saved, who told them where treasure was hidden.

The *John Wesley*, the Liverpool boat searching for the loot, had a hectic time of it at the Salvages. The party dug for three months on Great Salvages and found nothing, or so they said. They went back to Santa Cruz to water, returned to the island, and then came a report that they had found money—about £40,000—which they took to Marseilles.

ONE morning after this [added the landlord] a boat comes here with four starving men who have to be carried up to my house. They say they belong to a ship which fitted out at Liverpool after the return of the *John Wesley*. Whether because the *John Wesley* had found something, and they thought they would find the rest—£2,000,000 sterling was supposed to have been hidden—or, as the *John Wesley* failed, and left the chance to others, they would try, I don't know, but out they came in good earnest, with wooden houses, miners and mining tools, and then they landed with six months' provisions and two boats and set to work.

The ship left them to go to Ichabo for guano, and promised to call back on her return home and take the diggers off with anything they could find. They dug and dug and dug, till their hearts ached, and they got down to the bare rock, but found nothing except a dead body buried under the sand, and a few boards and a copper coin—a penny,

piece of the reign of George III marked with a sort of index on the back, and on the face, the four points of the compass with the letter N. at every point. Well, by this time, they had eaten their six months' provisions in two months, and were hard up, so they launched their boat and found their way here. They had had nothing to eat for several days but a handful of parched peas, and they were regularly done up, and so thin and weak that I tucked up the chief man under my arm, like a child, and carried him up to my house. He was a sharpish hand, the others were uncommon stupid.

He showed me the copper coin, and I offered him a goodish bit of money for it, but said he would not take £100 for it, as he thought it pointed out something, if he could only find out what. The ship, which left them, they called the *Harriet*, Captain Mather or Mathew. The Portuguese Government did not much like their digging, but did not hinder them. When they landed here, they certainly had not found anything, for they did not bring a dollar amongst them. I do not think the *John Wesley* found anything, or they could not keep it so close. . . . I think there is something in it, but dear knows how much!

The consul, Mr. Murray told Robinson that his impression was that both vessels were of the same speculation—that of an adventurous Liverpool man, a Mr. Rae who prevailed upon a Mr. Crowell to send out and search for the Salvages treasure. They dug in the most promising spots and then a British gunboat called to see if their proceedings were all right, and reported they were. The starving men were sent home in an English vessel, and the consul was sure neither party found any money, or, at least, any large sum. They came to Teneriffe without a dollar. The buried skeleton was probably merely a dead Portuguese fisherman.

ON Tuesday, August 5, 1856, the *Dream* and Hercules Robinson approached Great Piton, or Little Salvage Island. As they got near, they saw a little, sandy bay, and close in, rocks on the bottom making landing very difficult. The bay was one-quarter mile round, with a beach of rounded pebbles. Above high water-mark, a flat surface of sand ranged to the base of Nucleus Hill, rising black and grim in the center of the island. Robinson climbed the hill, with a boat's crew, and surveyed the desolate scene. Nine miles away was Little Piton, with a bay like this one, and S. W., W., and N., of Great Piton were angry rocks with broken water. It was impossible to anchor, as the weather was so unsettled. Robinson was inclined to linger to see if the weather cleared, but the other two overruled him. There were four possible places to select from, and he thought it was possible that the Spanish pirated ship had passed Great Salvage and drifted in fine weather on Great Piton.

The galleons were captured in the summer, and the warning off the Spanish coast must have reached the frightened ship in autumn when, with fine weather and light winds, she might have drifted upon Great Salvage or Great Piton. The two millions of dollars of silver would weigh one hundred twenty tons, and would have been contained in 1,200 boxes, and have occupied a pit twenty feet long, ten feet wide and ten feet deep, with an interval between the boxes and the murdered captain. In smooth water, a crew of twenty men, with a long boat carrying two tons, would take sixty trips of one hour each, or three days, to bury the treasure. Hercules Robinson was confident of the veracity of Christian Cruise, but thought the dying Spaniard picturesquely exaggerated the amount of treasure buried, which was probably \$500,000 or \$600,000, the usual "go" for a rich trader.

Two questions arise out of this fascinating problem of the treasure cache of the

Salvages: Has the bird flown, and did the *John Wesley* really lift \$200,000 treasure out of the shining cove of Great Salvage? The consul at Teneriffe was uncertain about the matter. Or, ought not Robinson to have searched Great Piton, S. W. of the Great Salvage Island, "the central island, high, flat and green at the top," according to the seaman's story? The difficulty seems to lie in the absence of a missing clue—frequently the case in buried treasure hunts on land or sea. The beach above high water-mark is clearly found on several islands. One may also wonder whether the copper coin of the reign of George III, contemporary with the burying of the treasure, according to the story of Christian Cruise, with its curious markings on the obverse and reverse, and dug up by the Liverpool searcher on Great Salvage Island is a clue to the cache or, at any rate, another treasure. What the landlord said at Teneriffe would not, of course, be accepted as evidence in a Court of Law, in the absence of the landlord; but, perhaps, one may be pardoned for drawing the reader's notice to the dead body, buried in the sand, and the boards found near the penny of George III. It does not seem probable that this would be the remains of the murdered captain of the Spanish galleon, since in the forty years elapsing from the time of his murder, he would surely have moldered into a skull and crossbones emblazoned with the arms of the rusty cutlass!

The next hunt for the treasure of the Salvage Islands occurred in 1889, when an English barrister and journalist, Mr. H. R. Knight was sailing with an adventurous band to explore the lonely island of Trinidad, off the coast of Brazil. Just as Mr. Knight's yacht, the *Alerte*, was about to sail from Southampton waters an English naval officer told him something of the story of the Admiralty's hunt for the treasure of the Salvages. Mr. Knight's yacht, accordingly called at Great Piton, which he decided was the island of

Cruise's cache. The party landed, found the beach and white sands, and spent four days vainly searching the cove. They unearthed crumbling bones, but were uncertain whether they were those of a human being. The surface had been considerably changed by the action of winds and waves, which had made the old Admiralty charts unreliable.

On Great Salvage Island, a Portuguese padron told Mr. Knight that, some years before 1889, an English milord had come in a steam yacht to hunt the treasure on the Great Salvage Island, as he thought, but exactly where, the Englishman did not know.

Mr. Knight gave up the search and searched the wrong place. The right place, Peru, South America

IV

MODERN AMERICA'S TREASURE HUNTS

NO MORE remarkable story of adventurous treasure-hunting has ever been told than that of a syndicate of hard-headed American business men, not given to romantic speculations, who backed up an old sea-captain in a trip treasure-hunting in the South Seas. He told a hair-raising story which they carefully investigated before putting down their money. According to the old captain's yarn, a gang of pirates—one of many—looted churches and haciendas in Peru about 1821 or 1822, loaded their plunder on the pirate brig *Witch*, commander Captain Shmid, and sailed for Cocos Island. They buried the booty and sailed away under the banner of Jolly Roger.

A terrific storm arose, their ship was wrecked, and only a few men escaped. Among them was Captain Shmid or Schmidt, who was beaten and battered by his hardships and reached home at New Bedford, where he died. Before his death, he told his son the story of the treasure cache.

Some years later, there entered on the

scene a certain James Brown, then aged nineteen, who drifted into the harbor of Kingston, Jamaica. The son of Captain Schmidt was there, fitting out a schooner for a long sea voyage. Brown was given a job on the schooner, and as young Schmidt took a fancy to him, he was let into the secret of the quest of the ship. They sailed for Cocos, where, said Brown, the ten millions of treasure were found buried just as Captain Schmidt had said on his deathbed. The treasure was then loaded on the schooner and taken to another lone and desolate island where it was again buried. They were afraid lest some survivor of Captain Schmidt's old crew might turn up and dig up the cache on Cocos.

Once more the banner of Jolly Roger waved in the trade winds, as the schooner fled southward to attack and plunder Australian gold ships and California clippers bound homeward round the Horn from the goldfields of the 1850's. Three ships were captured by the pirates, who took about ten million gold dollars and pounds of treasure and carried them to the lone island cache. The amount of buried loot now stood at some sixty million dollars, and the secret of the cache was held by about thirty men. Their last prize yielded more than five million dollars, with which they went back to the island. Came a roaring time aboard ship, liquor flowed, blood flowed, boozers collapsed dead or dead drunk on the decks, and, in the shooting, the ship was set afire, and only three men survived. They took the long boat ashore and loaded it with food from a depot on the island, after which they sailed for Australia with some gold dollars, amounting to about \$300,000. On the trip, water ran short, and presently only two men were left, the mad captain and Brown. The mad captain pulled his shooting irons on Brown, but Brown got his shot in first, as he said, in self-defence. Brown eked out an existence with sea biscuits, managed to catch a little rain

water, and at last sighted land. He went ashore on the coast of Australia where he buried all save a bagful of the \$300,000.

In the interior, he said, he got work in a mine, and then, later, bit by bit removed his treasure, after which he went back to New Bedford, U.S.A. Later in life, he engaged in a little privateering in the Spanish-American War, and the United States authorities confiscated his vessel.

THE syndicate, formed at New York numbered a lawyer who catechised Brown about this romantic story, and looked up the files of old-time newspapers contemporary with the events described by Captain Brown. They seemed to confirm what he had said, if not in whole at least in part. At this juncture, there came a man who showed a fistful of coins of Peruvian mintage, prior to 1820, which he alleged he had dug up on the west side of Cocos Island. That clinched the determination of the syndicate, and they put up \$25,000, got a ship, promised Captain Brown a quarter of all the treasure raised, and sailed out of the Golden Gates in the 300-ton schooner *Hermann*.

Aboard was a smelting outfit to melt down all the treasure found. Off Honolulu, the schooner ran into a gale, and Brown, as navigator, decided to beach her. The ship needed repairs, but money seemed to be running short, and old Captain Brown cut "up rough" about the prospects. The ship sailed for Apia, where the American consul was called to help straighten out matters. Brown swore the ship was haunted, and was presently in a raging fever, raved of a savage crew, a ghost-guarded treasure, old messmates long dead and gone, drawn cutlasses and Mr. Billy Bones.

"There is a curse on the gold," he screamed, pointing with all the melodramatic impressiveness of the old sea captain in Shaw's *Heartbreak House*. "Haven't they killed every man who tried to dig it

up? The ghosts!" Brown steadfastly refused to say where was the treasure island, so the schooner had to be put about and the disappointed expeditionary force returned to Frisco and the newspaper reporters. Yet as will be seen, Captain Brown did not die, and unlike the old British soldier he did not fade away; for, seventeen years later, he, or his double, is heard of in New York sending another syndicate off to the Society Islands and the lagoons of waving palms and coral beaches. All hail to old Cap'n Brown of the line of Cap'n Mary Thompson of the brig *Mary Dear!* May he live forevermore, or until such time as he is taken aboard the Flying Dutchman for the never-never land.

A SPORTING syndicate of New Yorkers, including a Wall Street broker and a financier, spent a lot of money in 1924-25, trying to salve the sunken Ward liner, *Merida*, said to contain in her bullion room a treasure of four million dollars in gold, silver and jewels, including the historic Crown Jewels of the Emperor Maximilian, and the world-renowned rubies which the Empress Charlotte saved after Maximilian was shot by the Mexican revolutionaries. This wreck lies in the heart of what was "Rum Row," and an armed guard of thirty-five men kept watch over the divers, to secure the treasure—if they got it—against any attempt by the international gangs of smugglers and hijackers who infested this notorious highway of illicit booze.

The *Merida* was rammed in a dense fog by a collision with the steamship *Admiral Farragut*. She was on her way from Yucatan to New York, when she was cut in two and sunk by the *Farragut*. The American battleship *Iowa* stood by and helped in the work of rescuing the *Merida's* passengers who lost all their baggage, many of them reaching the deck of the *Admiral Farragut* very scantily dressed. The reports of the accident

were rather meagre in the London newspapers of that date, but one gathers there were scenes of the wildest panic when the *Merida* was struck. She sent up rockets: all the boats were lowered, and the officers and crew had great difficulty in preventing the boats from being rushed and swamped. The *Merida* was a fine fast steamer, built at Philadelphia in 1906 and owned by the New York and Cuba mail steamship company. London underwriters at Lloyd's, the famous shipping corporation, lost £177,000 on the insurance of the *Merida's* hull alone, and it is known that the liner was carrying a consignment of fine silver, originally insured in Paris, and worth £40,000 (\$200,000). The *Merida* was said to be lying in ten fathoms of water, fifty-five miles off Cape Charles, Virginia, and as she drew thirty feet or five fathoms, the work of salvage at that date of sinking ought, if these data be correct, to be much easier than it now appears. One woman lost \$1,000 in gold which had been deposited in the ship's safe by the purser Trazivak, and she also lost half a carload of tropical birds which she was importing. The secretary of the Italian Legation in Mexico lost eight trunks containing valuables. There was no loss of life, but the *Merida's* passengers had to leave the sinking ship so hurriedly that they had no time to recover their valuables locked up in the purser's two big safes. In the drowned ship's strong room were about £600,000 in gold and silver (\$3,000,000). Over the spot where the wreck lies, the outflowing waters of the Chesapeake meet the backwash of the Gulf Stream. The eddying of the conflicting currents has silted up the vessel with mud and sand, making it very hard to find the *Merida*.

The plan was to cut a large hole in the hull near the strong room of the wreck, force open the doors with dynamite, and bring the thirty-ton jewel and bullion safe to the surface in wicker baskets taking up one ton each of the weight. The

purser's room, with its two large safes bolted solidly to the walls of the drowned *Merida*, was on the lower or second deck, and two doors beyond was the strong room holding the main part of the bullion. On July 8, 1925, the search began, and two weeks passed in sweeping 750 miles of the ocean bottom with a cable which at last located the wreck in latitude 37° 24', longitude 74° 32'. A storm broke out, raging for five days, and when it blew over Mr. Neilson, an American diver, went down and identified the wreck.

This is not the first attempt to salve the *Merida's* treasure. In 1915, searchers found the wreck, but it lay too deep for their salvors. They buoyed the spot, but this region of the American coast is a battle-ground of the winds, and the buoys soon vanished from their moorings. Three other attempts were made, but all failed. The 1924-25 syndicate, styling themselves the "Sea Hawks," sailed two steamers from New York, under the command of John F. O'Hagan, the famous American diver; Frank Crilley, the American champion naval diver, was also one of the crew of salvors. They had a manifest showing that the *Merida* took to the bottom with her twenty-two tons of gold and silver "matt" (half-refined ore); about \$850,000 worth of bar gold; nine kegs of American \$20 gold pieces, and the contents of the two jewel safes. Cuban rum, mahogany and a considerable quantity of copper were also on board.

Among the *Merida's* passengers, when she sank, were the wife of ex-President Madero of Mexico and her family, whose family jewels in the ship's safe were to be raised to the surface of the sea by a tough steel hawser on board the salvage boat of the "Sea Hawks." "This time," said Mr. O'Hagan, "we shall make the sea give up its loot." The divers' searches showed that the wreck lay on her starboard side, embedded in twelve feet of sand. To reach the strong room, said the *London Daily Chronicle*, "it will be necessary for the

diver to drop into the hallway in front of the dining saloon—this hallway now being a vertical shaft owing to the ship having fallen over on her side. The diver must drop his lines straight through this hallway, forty feet to the purser's quarters, to the door of the strong room. Inside the ship, according to the divers, is a mass of collapsed partitions and wreckage."

If the door of the strong room is intact, it must be dynamited. If it has already collapsed under the deep sea pressure, there is a possibility that the contents of the strong room have been scattered on the drifting sand below, in which case recovery will probably be impossible.

However, Davy Jones laughs at the picklocks of even the most modern sea salvor, for his locker is still unforced. One of those storms which make wreck salvors their sport and plaything arose in the seas off Cape Charles, Virginia, and made naught the strenuous work of many weeks, using the best skill and the latest electrical instruments, including a battery of Westinghouse under-water sea lamps of 1000 watts each. As in the case of the salvage of the liner *Laurentic*, sharks of the man-eating type gave a lot of trouble to the divers engaged on the wreck of the *Merida*, and the divers found that the ship's decks had caved in, filling the hull with a twisted mass of steel wreckage, through which jungle the united efforts of the corps, in two months of incessant toil, brought them no nearer than forty feet to the object of their quest—the drowned *Merida's* strong room.

THE mystery of the treasure alleged to be concealed in a cave of the Santa Clara Mountains of Mexico, has occupied the attention of generations of hidden-treasure hunters. A wonderful story about this cave of Aladdin came from Mexico City in July, 1926. The director of the National Museum in Mexico City

was visited at his offices by an old Indian who offered to lead him to this mysterious cave. The Indian said that he was a charcoal burner and happened to come upon the treasure while seeking shelter from a storm. Entering a long tunnel, which sloped downward, he suddenly found himself in a cave lighted by a ray of light from the roof. The ray, falling on two huge idols, caused them to shine as the sun, and at first terrified him. It was a large cave, went on the Indian, and filled with golden images and armor of gold set with precious stones.

The Indian left the cave and carefully covered the entrance to prevent its rediscovery. He then journeyed to Mexico City to gain the aid of the director of the National Museum. The director could not then join the Indian, and when he sought him out some time later, he found the Indian had since died, as a result of some mysterious malady contracted in the cave of mystery. It is known that the Incas of Peru used secret but very potent poisons to keep inviolate their hiding-places of treasure, and there is nothing inherently impossible, assuming the correctness of the facts as here given, for the Mayas or Aztecs of Mexico to have adopted like measures. At any rate, the director was so impressed by the Indian's air of sincerity that he arranged an expedition to make a thorough search of the Santa Clara Mountains. He commissioned a party of explorers to seek for this cave, and selected as their leader, out of several hundred applicants, Major John Gillespie, who had served during the European war, and who was to receive a share of the treasure if it was found.

According to the Indian's thrilling story, the sun shining down on the objects in the hidden cave, struck out rays of quite dazzling brilliance from two magnificent gems serving as the idols' eyes. All around on the floor of the cave were suits of armor made of gold and studded with precious stones, while numerous gems

scintillated and shone with beautiful colors on the walls of the treasure vault. Possibly, the story of the cache of Santa Clara has lost little in transit or cutting and re-setting by those Cinderellas of the British or American Press, known variously as sub-editors, or desk men. Still, the affair looked a promising one. The director of the National Museum of Mexico believed that the cave is one of several known to have been used by the Aztecs as temples or retreats; but there is the alternative that the Indian lit on a cache made by the Conquistadores when they looted old Mexico. A number of them were annihilated before they could get away with their loot.

As many private expeditions were projected to search for this cave, the Mexican authorities sent a body of troops to guard the official expedition. Two reports reached Mexico City in August, 1926, about the discovery of buried Maya cities. A Reuter correspondent said that a Maya city had been found near the village of Santa Elena, in the state of Chiapas, by a Government scientific expedition, while another city was found on a ranch near Juxtlahucca, in the state of Guerrero. At Juxtlahucca, an elderly ranchman found caves of enormous area on his ranch, and containing petrified human bodies, skulls, cooking pots, pottery and knives and forks. Fifteen great white marble salons, of beauty and grace, and twenty-eight similar salons are said to have been found at spots within the cave. Petrified men and animals were the tenants of this vast cave of marble halls. The owner of the ranch said there was much gold and silver in these cavern halls, but here one may sound a note of warning. Similar finds of Maya remains on the hill of Cerro de Narrio, in the province of Canar, Southern Ecuador, proved to consist of copper-gilt, and the distinguished American archeologist, Dr. Max Uhle, says that this race knew not gold. Always the danger of such finds of "treasure" is

that valuable archeological material of no intrinsic monetary value, but of very great scientific importance, is destroyed by a frenzied horde of gold-seekers who rifle ancestral graves and care not what they ruin in their feverish hunt.

As to treasure, purely and simply, without reference to archeology, one could not gain a more vivid idea of the immense wealth of Mexico after the days of the Conquistadores—when the phase of violence and plunder had passed into that of settlement—than is given in the *Concise History of Spanish America*, published at London, in 1741. The writer preserves anonymity, but he is clearly possessed of first-hand knowledge of his subject. The Spanish King's Exchequer, in Mexico, in the year 1730, received the enormous sum of \$10,000,000 or £2,000,000, representing one-fifth of the value of all the silver taken from the Mexican mines in that year. This sum was paid to the King of Spain, and the total amount of the silver, mined in that one year, was thus five million marks, which, taking the value of the mark at eight ounces of silver at five shillings an ounce, was worth £10,000,000 (English) or about \$30,000,000. What, then, must have been the immense stream of wealth in silver and gold flowing to old Spain in the two centuries elapsing since the ravishing of old Mexico by Cortés and his successor! And, be it remembered, no account is here taken of the golden river flowing to Cadiz and Seville from the other dominions of the Spaniards in South America.

MODERN treasure hunters should note that the richest of all treasure wrecks lies unconquered off Vigo Bay. Among the logs of old-time men-of-war, preserved in the archives of the British Public Record Office, is that of the ship

Monmouth which captured a Vigo galleon with immense treasure on board. The galleon ran on a submerged rock pinnacle, and went to the bottom of the sea off the south end of the isle of Bayona, near Vigo. Several modern expeditions, whose directors have never seen the evidence, have searched the wrong place. The right place, as Dr. Iberti points out, is that marked on modern charts as "Los Castros de Agoiro," to the N. W. of which, about one half a mile distant, lies the wreck of this richest of the galleons in the Spanish Vigo fleet. Silted up with mud and sand deposited by the wash and scour of the tides of more than two hundred years, the timbers of this hulk can be seen in fine weather lying on a rocky bed in clear, limpid water.

Colonel Gowen, who tried to raise this wreck, says: "The sea-bed is covered with rocks. I think that with the help of good divers her treasure may easily be recovered."

There are precedents for success in treasure galleon fishing in this part of the world, as in 1786, when the Spanish galleon, the *San Pedro d'Alcantara*, bound from Lima to old Cadiz with eight million dollars aboard, was stranded at Peniche, off the coast of Estremadura, Portugal, on January 17. The wind was blowing off shore, when the ship struck and 186 of her people were drowned. The loss of the pieces of eight was felt all over Europe, as when the Vigo galleons were sent to the bottom of the bay. Divers raised two million pieces of eight in cases of silver and gold from the wreck, and a young Neapolitan diver, who fished up one and one half millions of the treasure, took salvage of "one half percent." Modern salvors should note that some five to six millions still remain to be salvaged from the hulk of the *San Pedro*.

The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE



H. S. M. KEMP, whose yarns have been appearing frequently in *SHORT STORIES*, is a favorite among readers in Sweden we learned lately from a letter from the editor of *Levande Livet*, the Swedish magazine in which have been appearing several translations of Mr. Kemp's stories from *SHORT STORIES*. This editor wrote from Stockholm, asking Mr. Kemp if he would write a letter for his Swedish audience, and here is what he wrote—having kindly sent it to us as a first stop on its way to Sweden:

To the readers of *Levande Livet*—who also dwell in a land where the snow is deep, where the sun stays up all night and where the pine grow straight and tall—GREETING!

You people of Sweden are no strangers to me. I have met you in the cities, a hardy people, strong-jawed, disconcertingly frank of eye; I have met you on the farms and homesteads of the Dominion; but I think I knew you best in the North. There, either in the wooded section of the country, or up in the Barrens (which is a treeless, wind-blasted desolation), you run your traplines alone, come out to civilization once a year or thereabouts, and you scorn our snowshoes to travel on skis. This seems strange to us and stranger to the natives of the country. To us, the snowshoe is the thing—something that holds a fellow up. But when it comes to fast travel and a minimum of effort, you people certainly get over the ground with your skis. Although ski-clubs flourish in every city of the Dominion, I never learned the knack. But I suppose if I had

to, and I'll make allowance for my forty-five years, I could still cover a good many miles a day on the webs.

The editor tells me my stories of the North are well received in Sweden. They may not be literature, but I try to hew to the line of truth. I lived fifteen years in the North, besides taking more recent and frequent trips into it, and living part-time in the teepees and trapping-shacks of the Crees, trading for Revillons and the Hudson's Bay Company, and trapping on my own, I can appreciate just how much nonsense there has been written about the North. Hence, you will look look in vain in my yarns for man-eating wolves, for husky-dogs that will rend you limb from limb if you look the other way for a moment, and for villainous French halfbreeds awaiting the opportunity to stick a knife into your back. But if you catch something of romance, vast distances and the loneliness that can go with it, and that other something that has been called the "spirit" of the North, I will have succeeded—in part, at any rate—to do the job I set out to do.

H. S. M. Kemp.

Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Moreover, H. S. M. Kemp will have another story of the North in our next issue—"Guardian Angel."

Dog Teams

INCIDENTALLY in the course of his letter Mr. Kemp speaks of husky dogs which are represented in fiction as they never appear in life. The very day his letter reached our office there appeared in the

In the
Next
Issue

Short Stories

For
Sept.
10th

Who could impersonate the Major as well as the Major himself?

THE PERFECT IMPERSONATION

A long novelette of the Major by

L. Patrick Greene



ROBERT E. PINKERTON

"A Ship Is a She"—an adventure in British Columbia waters

H. BEDFORD-JONES

"The Mysterious Disappearance of St. Germaine the Deathless"

CADDO CAMERON, H. S. M. KEMP, CHARLES W. TYLER (A Baldy Sours Yarn), **ALFRED BATSON**—and a digest of a book for fishermen—"Fishing for Bass, Muskalonge, Pike and Panfishes"

New York papers the interesting story of a man and his wife who had come no less than five thousand miles by dog-team—first by sled and then on wheels—from Hazelton, B. C., to New York City. The journey had taken them some fifteen months, and in the course of it their team had grown from six dogs to eleven. These dogs are not huskies or malamutes, of the accepted strain, but are much larger, being a cross between a lobo wolf and a St.

Bernard. They think nothing of drawing a 1,200-pound sled, their owner, Patrick Carroll said, over a well packed trail. For many years Carroll used this breed to carry mail from Hazelton to isolated gold camps, and "it takes a real team to draw a pay load through that country.

Many sled drivers, seeing or hearing of his team, wanted dogs like them, so Carroll gave up his route to breed and train the strain.

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Dear Secretary:

I have always enjoyed **SHORT STORIES** because it contains the stories I like to read. Stories of adventure have always delighted me, especially those of your writers. I have enjoyed every copy and there were quite a few of them.

I would appreciate it greatly if you would be kind enough to enroll me as a member of your club. I am eighteen years of age and have not had any chance for adventure so I should like very much to hear from those who have. I would like to hear from members in Australia, Ireland, and South America.

Yours sincerely,

James Lavin

861 Putnam Avenue,
Brooklyn,
New York

*In spite of all his traveling, Comrade Davies still finds real adventure in **SHORT STORIES**.*

Dear Secretary:

After having read several issues of **SHORT STORIES**, I have decided to write to you in order to ask you for a membership in the Ends of the Earth Club.

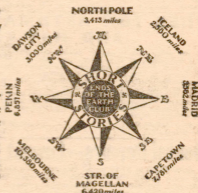
I have crossed the American Continent from North to South and from East to West. The spirit of adventure has called me to all the countries of America, Canada, Mexico, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, Peru, Argentine, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil.

In **SHORT STORIES** I have found the spirit of real adventure, and therefore please consider me one of your best readers.

Yours very truly,

Carlos Davies

Casilla 246, Callao
Peru, South America



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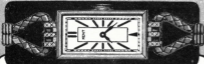
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