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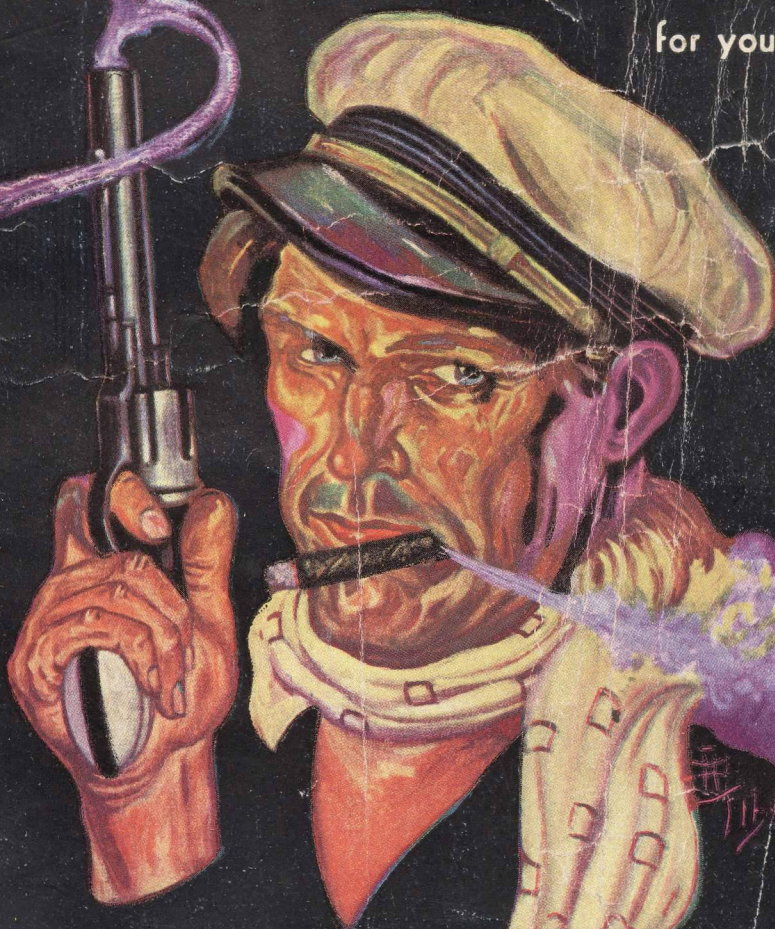
Short Stories

Twice A Month

September 25th

25c

A complete
book condensed
for your enjoyment



Stop Shooting at Me
DONALD BARR CHIDSEY



"Look what I brought back from my vacation!"

ANNE was simply floored; Sylvia of all girls, getting a man like that after so many years. Sylvia, the office nuisance. Sylvia, the girl that men forgot just as quickly as they could.

"Isn't he nice?"

Anne had to admit that he was.

"My dear, it was simply whirlwind. We met ... we talked ... we fell in love! Didn't we, Dave?"

Dave grinned sheepishly, "Boy, am I lucky."

"We're going to be married next month," Sylvia rattled on, "and then honeymoon in Bermuda."

"How gorgeous!" said Anne.

Then while the somewhat abashed bridegroom-to-be sauntered out onto the lawn, Sylvia held Anne's ear. Dave was in business for himself ... doing awfully well, too ... they were going to build a home ... he had the nicest disposition ... and, my dear, half a dozen girls had made a play for him at the summer resort. Suddenly she stopped and patted Anne's hand—

"I guess I've got you to thank for this," she said, simply.

"Me? Why, Sylvia?"

"Don't you remember the spat we had? You lost your temper and told me about my breath.

Told me to get Listerine or get off the earth."

"But, Sylvia"

"No buts. Honestly, if you hadn't said what you did I'd probably still be a wall-flower instead of the luckiest girl in the world. That dig of yours changed my entire life."

HOW ABOUT YOU?

There are a million people that might well take a hint from Sylvia's case—people who are fastidious about everything but their breath and who continue to offend *without even knowing it*. Perhaps you are one of them.

No one is exempt from halitosis (bad breath). It may be present today and absent tomorrow, due to subtle chemical changes in the mouth.

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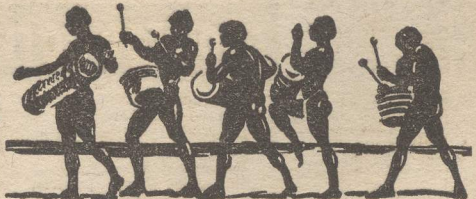
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BIGGEST AND BEST—ACTION



Short

TWICE A MONTH

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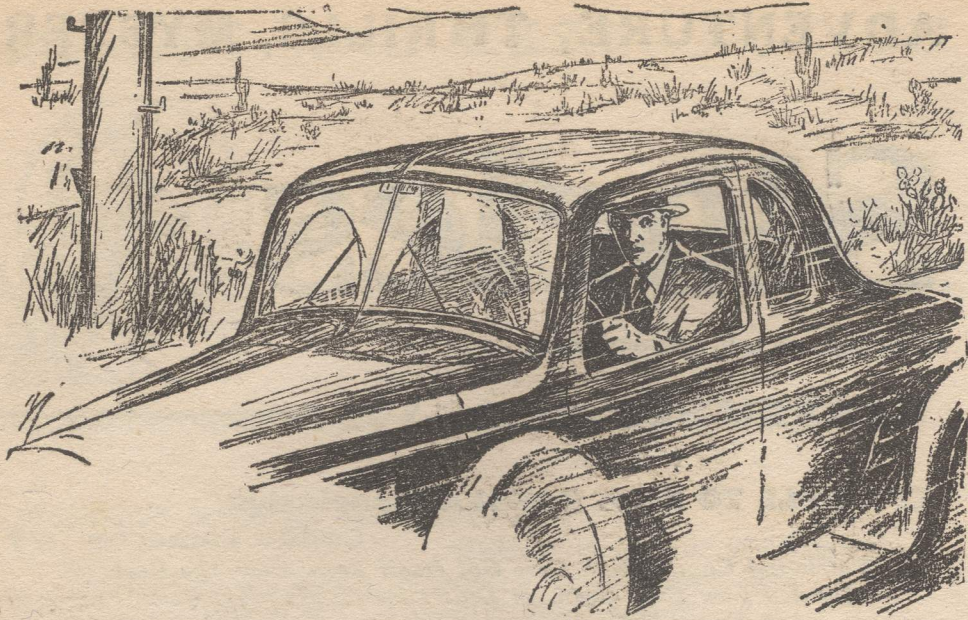
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FEDERAL MAN

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

Author of "Heading South," "Nobody's Ghost," etc.

MOTORCYCLE OFFICER BURNHAM stepped out of the Arizona Restaurant and pulled on his gloves.

As he was about to mount his machine and make his customary morning patrol to Rideout, a young fellow waved to him from across the street. "Hi, Spence! Don't forget our date. You eat with me this time. One o'clock sharp."

"I'll match you to see who pays," said Burnham.

Young Bob Armstrong, clerk in the First National Bank of Plainview, was Burnham's closest friend. Always they had vacationed together, hunting and fishing in the Argus range. As often as they could they lunched together at the Arizona Restaurant. Although Burnham was considerably older than his friend, they

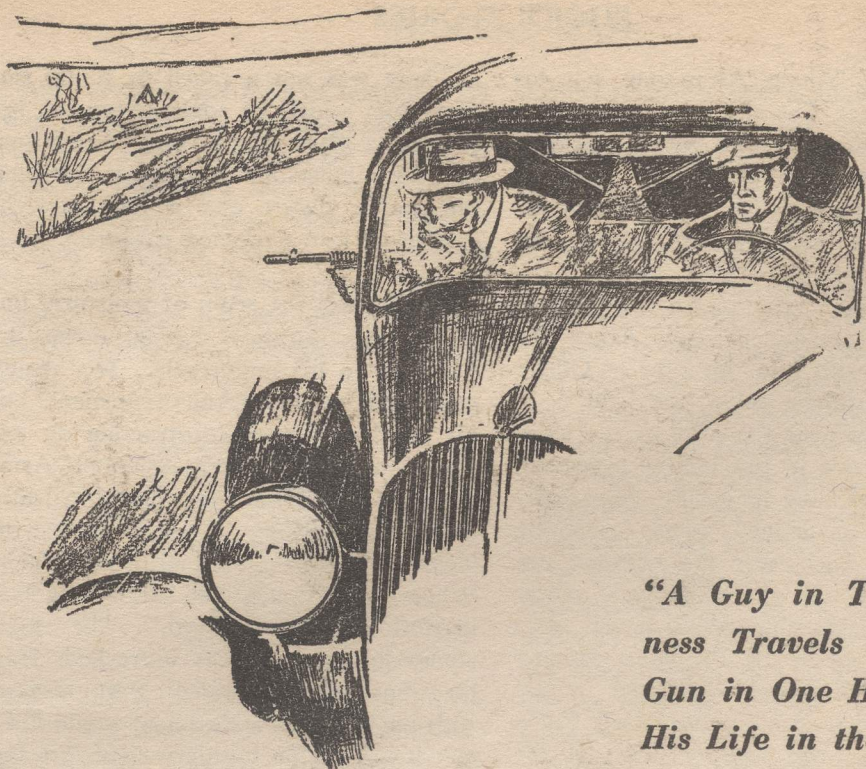
got along famously. Young Armstrong was rather slender, bright faced and active. Burnham was of a solid build, neither short nor tall. His gaze was level and steady. He made a most efficient and reliable officer.

"You just show up," laughed Armstrong. "I'll do the rest." Young Armstrong turned and entered the bank. It was eight o'clock.

At twelve that morning, John Hadley, President of the First National Bank, called young Armstrong into his private office. "Bob, take this satchel to Rideout. Deliver it to John McCullough of the Farmers and Traders. He'll be expecting you."

"Yes, sir."

"Get it to him without delay. But don't drive too fast."



“A Guy in This Business Travels with His Gun in One Hand and His Life in the Other”

The thirty mile stretch between Ride-out and Plainview was flat sandy desert, traversed by the new Arizona state highway, wide and smooth. Young Armstrong's car, a light eight, was fast. A flat gray bank of cloud obscured the desert sky. The distant ranges north and south of the highway were barely visible. The windshield became dulled with mist. "Going to rain, sure as catfish!" muttered young Armstrong. "Got to beat that." He was going to be late for his date with Spence as it was.

Ten miles out from Plainview he ran the speedometer from a pleasant sixty up to seventy. Twenty miles to go. The mist on the windshield now surrounded the busy wiper like gray felt. "The Farmers and Traders must be short of cash," reflected young Armstrong. "I know this bag isn't full of sawdust."

Above the smooth purr of his motor came a distant steady humming. Or was it the overtone of his own motor at seventy? Didn't matter. Anybody that tried to pass him would have to step on it.

The pavement had begun to darken. A skid right now wouldn't be so good. The light eight was a gray streak in the surrounding gray.

From behind came the drone of a heavier car. Young Armstrong's rear vision mirror showed the trembling reflection of a glittering radiator and polished headlight lamps. He glanced at his speedometer. The other car, steadily overtaking him, must be doing eighty or eighty-five. He was tempted to give it a race. But the pavement was wet. And there was the satchel. He couldn't take any extra chances.

Slowing down to sixty he edged to the right hand side of the road to let the other car pass.

SLOWLY it drew nearer. It was almost alongside now. The drone of its exhaust was like the wail of a human voice. Young Armstrong began to feel uncomfortable. He glanced back swiftly. There were two men in the front seat. One of them was leaning out the right

hand side. Young Armstrong felt his heart contract. The man leaning from the oncoming car opened up with a machine-gun. "How did they know?" muttered young Armstrong. He slumped over the wheel. His car swerved, struck the sand, and catapulted into the air.

Half an hour later, on his way back to keep the appointment Bob Armstrong had made with him, Motorcycle Officer Spencer Burnham found the light eight upside down near the edge of the highway. Alongside it, just off the pavement, stood a dark blue limousine. Apparently it had been abandoned. Young Armstrong lay on his back near the wrecked car. One glance told the motorcycle officer that Bob Armstrong would never again chat with him in the Plainview restaurant over coffee and doughnuts. "Just about sawed in two," he muttered. For a moment he stood looking down at the white face, the shattered body. He could hardly believe that this was the boy who, so recently, had laughingly called to him across the street. Burnham got hold of himself. Bob was dead—murdered. How did it happen? What had been the motive? Who had killed him? And why was an abandoned car standing there on the highway?

The officer discovered an empty black satchel near the wrecked car. "Bob wasn't mixed up in anything crooked," reflected Burnham. "Not that boy."

Burnham's notebook showed the dark blue limousine to be stolen. The license plates had been changed. He discovered the original plates under the rear seat. They showed a Missouri registration. He had no record of who had stolen the car, but it would be easy to find out. After patrolling the highway up and down looking for tracks in the sand, the motorcycle officer carried the body of his friend to the stolen car and laid it in the tonneau. "I'll be back, Bob," said Patrolman Burnham, just as if young Armstrong could hear him.

There was not a ranch or filling station from which he could telephone, between the place where young Armstrong had been killed and Plainview. Nothing but empty desert and a long straight stretch of rain darkened pavement.

IGNORING the scum of moisture, Patrolman Burnham buzzed down the highway on his motorcycle. His steady gaze was on the ribbon of cement, but his mind was busy constructing an explanation of the tragedy. Young Armstrong had been machine-gunned to death. There was nothing in the stolen car to identify it save the original license plates. Whoever had killed Bob Armstrong had mysteriously disappeared. The sand alongside the road was untracked. Had the murderer continued west toward Rideout, Patrolman Burnham would have met him. If the murderer had left the pavement even some distance from the scene of the tragedy and headed for the distant hills, Burnham could not have failed to see him on the smooth flat reaches that spread for miles on either side. The officer surmised that the empty satchel had contained a large sum of money.

Patrolman Burnham's watch showed exactly one-fifteen when he reached Plainview. The rain had ceased. He had arrived at the scene of the murder at twelve forty-five. Fifteen minutes spent looking for tracks and examining the stolen car. Fifteen minutes getting to Plainview. The motorcycle officer had his details neatly in shape when he stepped into the First National and asked for Mr. Hadley.

Burnham thrust back his cap and wiped his face. "Bob Armstrong—" The officer's voice caught, then he steadied himself. "—has just been shot to death about fifteen miles west of here. I found his car upside down near the highway. I also found this empty satchel."

The banker's face paled. "Bob? Shot to

death!" Hadley got hold of himself. "He was taking twenty thousand dollars in currency to the Farmers and Traders in Rideout. But not a soul knew it except the cashier and myself. Bob left here at twelve. That was just ten minutes after McCullough of the Farmers and Traders phoned to me for the money. There wasn't time for an outsider to find out about it."



HADLEY sat gazing at the wall, a far away look in his eyes. "Bob's family," he said slowly. "I'll have to tell them. And his girl. They were going to be married next month."

"I was thinking of that." The motorcycle officer thrust out his hand. "I never was strong on bankers, Mr. Hadley. But I've met one that is human. It was Bob you were thinking about, not the money."

"The money is covered by insurance." Hadley rose and walked to the window. The motorcycle officer took up the desk phone, called police headquarters, and reported the details of his discovery. When Burnham had finished, the banker turned to him. "You fellows will handle your end of it. I'll have a federal officer here within six hours. Give him all the help you can."

The motorcycle officer nodded, took up his cap and left to report to headquarters and find out what he could about the blue limousine.

ABOUT four hundred yards west of where young Armstrong's body had been found, flares flickered in the midnight. A sign detoured traffic to the old dirt road which had been the original

highway. Flares and a similar sign had been placed some four hundred yards east of the wrecked car. The sky was clear, the stars sharp-edged and brilliant. The dark blue limousine still stood where it had been abandoned. A motorcycle officer guarded the west end of the detour, another the east. The stretch of highway in between was empty save for two men who stood near the abandoned limousine. Spencer Burnham was telling Federal Officer Sinclair of his discovery of Armstrong's body and the two cars. "Before you showed up," said Burnham, "Bill Davy and I patrolled from Plainview to Rideout and back again. That was between four and six-thirty. I took one side of the road and Bill the other. We didn't find a track of any kind leaving the highway between Plainview and Rideout."

Sinclair, a middle-aged, slenderly built man with a smooth shaven face, would not have attracted special attention anywhere. "There were two of them," he said quietly, "or more. They didn't leave any fingerprints, but I'm going by what I can see. Armstrong's car turned over several times. He must have been going pretty fast. One man, driving fast enough to overtake him could hardly have handled a machine-gun effectively. It would have been a physical impossibility for a man at the wheel to have fired at a car slightly ahead unless the windshield had been wide open. The windshield on this limousine is of the tip-up type, and it is closed. Evidently the killer fired when slightly behind and to the left of Armstrong's car."

"That's the way I figured it." Sinclair's deduction as to the number of bandits checked up with the news Burnham had received about the blue limousine. It had been stolen in Kansas City by the notorious Rud Gleason and his partner, Heinrich, following an attempted bank robbery in that city. Thereafter, although the police everywhere had been

on the lookout for the criminals, by some means Gleason and Heinrich had managed to slip through the net.

SINCLAIR was pleased with Burnham's display of initiative. "What else did you figure?"

Patrolman Burnham shrugged. "You didn't get here until after dark. While I was waiting I sized up the tire marks of the two cars. The fellow in the limousine didn't set the brakes till he saw Bob's car leave the pavement. Both cars were going fast. The limousine slid—but held straight ahead."

Sinclair smiled. "How long have you been in the service?"

"Five years."

"Let's get in out of the wind," said the federal man. They climbed into the abandoned limousine. Sinclair sat staring between the long headlight rays that swept down the pavement.

Burnham wondered what the federal man was waiting for. "It's kind of tough," said Burnham, "waiting like this. Bob Armstrong was my friend. He was— Oh, hell! What's the use of talking?"

"He's gone. And Gleason and Heinrich—if they're the ones that got him—are plenty far, by now. It's nearly twelve hours since Bob was killed. If there had been any tracks—"

"I expect to find tracks. That's why I'm keeping all cars off this stretch."

"You mean tracks leading from the pavement?"

Sinclair shook his head. Motorcycle Officer Burnham thought Sinclair was a queer one.

"Has there been any traffic on this stretch since you reported to your station?" The federal man's question was not unexpected.

"So far as I know there was one car—a rancher from Rideout. As soon as we got your wire to close this stretch we placed the detour signs and flares."

"Just how did the killers make their getaway?"

Was the federal man kidding? "If I knew," said Burnham, "I wouldn't be here."

"You might. It's just possible I could use you. You know this country. You've lived in Plainview most of your life. Sometimes—" Sinclair paused and sat gazing down the glistening black pavement—"sometimes investigators make the mistake of working too fast. Sounds unreasonable, doesn't it?"

"Didn't know a fella could work too fast in a case like this. Those killers have got a twelve hour start."

"On foot?"

"Dam' if I know."

"In a car?"

"What do you think?"

"If I told you now, you'd feel that you were wasting your time. Most probably you'd lose your edge. Just now you're whetted fine to get the men that killed your friend."

"I'll keep that way! But I don't see what I could do even if you turned up the best kind of a clue. I've got to stick on my beat, and those fellas are probably a couple of hundred miles from here by now."

"Yes. Probably farther than that."

"Well, they didn't make their getaway in a car. That's certain."

"I don't think they did."

SINCLAIR was sitting behind the wheel of the stolen car. Starting the motor, he backed the car and placed it so the headlights shot directly down the middle of the pavement. Stepping out, he gestured to Burnham. Spencer Burnham let his gaze follow the shafts of light. Irregularities in the pavement, small bumps and hollows invisible by day, showed up in magnified proportions in the beams of a headlight. The smooth and level highway before him now looked like a pond ruffled by a light breeze.

"Notice anything?" queried Sinclair.

"Not a thing, except the tracks where the car from Rideout came through."

"Look toward the side of the road."

Burnham stared, squinted, changed his position. Presently he straightened up. "By gravy, Sinclair! But it's a single track—and twice as broad as an automobile tire. Whatever made it had been in the sand, somewhere."

"Try the other side of the pavement."

"Another wide track just like the first."

"You've got it."

"Got it? Hell, those are single tracks. No automobile would leave a trail like that."

"Let's go back into the car. This wind is pretty keen."

Sinclair backed the limousine to the side of the road, switched off the motor and the headlights and turned up his coat collar. Burnham leaned back, muffled in his heavy leather coat. Several minutes later Burnham thought he heard Sinclair mutter something about "those tracks being parallel." But when he questioned the federal man, he received no answer.

Dawn showed a wide, level-floored valley of damp, grayish sand. To the north ran a range of serrated brown hills.

To the south loomed a bigger range, smooth contoured and green. East and west the highway dwindled to a thin black edge shimmering in the sun. The detour sign flares flickered palely in the morning light. Burnham shrugged himself awake. Already Sinclair was up and walking round the wrecked light eight.

The wide apart tracks they had noted during the night were now easily distinguishable. By stooping and sighting close to the pavement, their direction was plainly apparent. Sinclair took a small steel tapeline from his pocket. He handed the end to Burnham. Together they measured the distance between the tracks. By concentrating they were able to follow the tracks almost up to the detour sign

at the west end of the stretch, where they ceased.

A few minutes later the two officers, driving the stolen limousine, were on their way back to Plainview. In spite of an uncomfortable night Sinclair felt more or less up and coming. For a time it had looked as though they were up against an impossible task—that of discovering how the killers had managed to get away in that open, desert region and leave no tracks. Sinclair now seemed willing to talk. "Don't give me too much credit," he said as they drove into town. "It was just by accident I happened to spot those tracks in the headlight. Often enough a chance accident turns up a real clue. I don't know yet just how they made their getaway. But I have been eliminating all the ordinary methods of running from a crime. The automobile possibility went first. It took me some time to decide that they hadn't left on foot. That they could have left any other way seems improbable and ridiculous, especially out here in this desert country."

BURNHAM didn't seem at all optimistic of the chances of landing the killers. Sinclair was more hopeful.

"With the newspapers broadcasting the story, and every man that wears a star out after the reward?" said Burnham.

"I'll see that the newspapers won't broadcast my part of it. Of course the story of the murder and robbery is out already. Burnham, if I'll get you a job—it will be temporary of course—and arrange for your release from your present work, say for two months, will you take it?"

Motorcycle Officer Burnham was in no haste to reply. He had a wife and family. He had lived in the district practically all his life. As for the proffered job, he thought he knew what it was. But he could not see why the federal man had chosen him. He recalled their conversation during the night. "You're whetted

pretty fine to get the man that killed your friend," Sinclair had said. Perhaps that was the reason the federal man wanted him. Perhaps there were other reasons. Finally Burnham made up his mind. "If it's getting the men that killed Bob, I'll take the job."

"That's the job, Burnham."

Spencer Burnham stopped the car at the station. "I don't know a dam' thing about what you turned up last night," he declared.

"Good work!" said Sinclair. "Keep it up."

One of the first things Sinclair had done was to look for fingerprints on the stolen car. Such as he found were blurred and useless to him. The criminals, he surmised, had been too wise to leave any. Nowadays crooks often wore gloves. Nevertheless he wired headquarters that he was pretty sure the bandits were Gleason and Heinrich. Over the police network descriptions were sent out, covering the robbery and murder, repeating the detailed description of Gleason and Heinrich that had been frequently broadcast during the months since they first became hunted men. East and West, federal officers and local police were on the lookout for the killers. Trains were watched. Automobiles were stopped and checked, questioned and released. No definite information was turned in. It looked as if Gleason and Heinrich had again made a clean getaway.

In the privacy of Hadley's office, which, at the invitation of the banker, Sinclair had made his headquarters, the federal man got long distance and arranged with Burnham's chief that the motorcycle officer be given two months' leave of absence. Then Sinclair called up his own division headquarters and had Burnham registered as a special officer. Hadley was called into conference. Sinclair told the banker of Burnham's new status as a federal agent. Then, with apparent irrelevance, "Burnham tells me the

country between here and Rideout is flat and sandy—grayish brown sand. Is there any red clay country in this valley?"

The banker frowned. "Red clay? Better ask Burnham. He knows this section better than I do."

Burnham pondered for a moment. "There are some red clay flats the other side of the Argus range. That's the range north of the highway."

"How far?"

"About ten or twelve miles."

"Can we get there by automobile?"

"We could. But it's a long way around. We could make it quicker with horses."

When they left the banker's office, Sinclair registered at the local hotel, his address a post office box number in Kansas City. He stowed his few personal belongings in his room and after a bath and a shave, went out and bought a pair of overalls and a heavy sweater. He was having breakfast when Burnham showed up with the horses.

As they rode across the flat, sandy reaches north of Plainview, Burnham referred to the bandits who had killed young Armstrong, "Those birds must have had it timed to the dot."

"That's what bothers me. The fingers of the plot dovetail too nicely. No one knew that young Armstrong was taking the money to Rideout except Mr. Hadley and the cashier. And they didn't know the money was to go until ten minutes before Armstrong left. According to Hadley, the boy stepped into his car with the satchel and drove through town without a stop. Hadley admitted that he watched Armstrong's car until it was out of town. No, Mr. Hadley didn't suspect anything. But it looked as if it might rain. He was uneasy."

"The blue limousine," said Burnham, "was parked in the alley back of the bank. I checked up the pattern of the tire treads. The alley runs parallel to the main street through town, then turns

and slants into the highway just beyond the city limits. In the old days it was the original main street. I followed the tire marks of the blue car up to the highway. The killers must have lit out right after Bob left."

"Queer that no one seemed to remember having seen the blue car in town. You pretty near forgot it yourself, didn't you?"

"Not exactly. But I'll admit I shelved it until I got a line on what you were after."

They rode on. The Argus range loomed nearer. The hot sun glittered on ridge and pinnacle. Sinclair glanced at his companion. "If that limousine was parked in the alley back of the bank, that gives us still another reason to believe that it was Gleason and Heinrich. Rud and his pal are bank bandits. Checks pretty well, eh?"

Burnham's lips tightened. "And they say Gleason is about the toughest killer in the country."

"He's all of that. And he's hell with a machine-gun. If you go up against him, don't forget that."

"I'll be thinking of Bob."

"This is the way it looks to me," declared the federal man. "Gleason and Heinrich planned to hold up the First National Bank of Plainview at noon. Luck—if you can call it that—was with them. They saw young Armstrong come out of the bank with the black satchel, saw him tune up and buzz down the highway. They played a hunch."

Burnham shook his head. So far the federal man's theory seemed sound. But how did the killers get away without leaving so much as a tire track or a footprint?

Rounding the end of the Argus range about two hours later, Sinclair and Burnham pulled up their horses. Several miles north and as many east and west spread a great flat of glistening red—a desert sink, often under water in the rainy sea-

son. The rain of the previous day had been light. The sink was now all but dry. The clay surface was beginning to cake and separate in patches. Sections of the crust had begun to curl at the edges.

"We'll ride it," said Sinclair. "You take the east end."

Burnham began to circle the sink. Sinclair rode a few yards west, then reined in. He sat his horse, staring out across the lake. So intent was Burnham looking for tracks that he paid no attention to Sinclair until the latter halloed to him from a ridge far up in the foothills. Using a pair of field glasses, Sinclair was signalling. He seemed to be pointing to a spot out toward the middle of the lake. Burnham took a long diagonal. Finally he dismounted and waved. The federal man rode out to him.

Burnham was gazing at three tracks in the red clay. The two outside tracks, far apart, had gouged the surface like the wheels of some immense automobile. The middle track was shallower and not so even.

The distance between the outer tracks tallied with the distance between the tracks they had discovered on the pavement. Sinclair put a sample of the red clay in an envelope. He took a photograph of the tracks with a small pocket camera. Already Burnham had noted the blurred footprints on the crusted clay. These Sinclair carefully measured.



The smooth surface of the sink showed that a plane had touched, lifted, and taxied south, finally stopping near the middle of the dry lake.

"Neat landing," said Sinclair. "That pilot knew his business."

Near the northern edge of the dry lake, midway between the point where the tracks began and where they ceased, Sinclair stopped. He prowled about, picking up some tiny objects. With a pocket compass the federal man lined north. The tracks of the plane ran east by south.

Burnham shook his head. "The plane was headed almost due east when it took off. The spot where Bob was killed is due south from here, across the range."

"Let's eat," said Sinclair.

IT WAS not until they were halfway back to Plainview that the federal man made any comment. "If the tracks," he said abruptly, "had headed straight for the range, or as you said, south, it would have knocked my theory flat. From his position behind the range the man who flew the plane could not have known that his confederates were following Armstrong's car on the highway. Let's advance a supposition. Armstrong's killers had planned to rob the First National at noon, yesterday. Their confederate, in a plane, was to have picked them up somewhere west of town, where they would abandon the stolen car. Naturally the plane would be kept out of sight until then. And there couldn't have been a better place to hide than behind the Argus hills. No roads, no habitations—empty country."

"That would look as if the man in the plane knew this country."

"I think he did. That eliminates more possibilities."

The horses plodded on, their ears set toward the distant town.

"The man in the plane," continued Sinclair, "landed on the dry lake ahead of his schedule. Naturally he didn't intend to show up near Plainview until his pals had pulled the job. It was pretty hot yesterday, before the sky clouded over. While waiting he became thirsty. About

twelve he took off, heading for Plainview.

"In order to cross the range he had to make an altitude of at least four thousand feet. He saw young Armstrong's car speeding west. He saw another car set out from town and follow it. Instead of keeping on toward Plainview he circled and followed the two cars. When he saw Armstrong's car leave the pavement and turn over, he just about knew what had happened. He made a clean landing on the pavement, picked up his pals and disappeared."

"That's smooth, all right. But how did you know the flier was thirsty when he was waiting out there on the sink?"

"I picked up three beer bottle caps. The caps are new."

"He kept the bottles in the plane, eh?"

Sinclair handed one of the bottle caps to Burnham. "Know anything about this brand of beer?"

"I know the beer. But it isn't sold in Arizona."

"The man in the plane may have bought the beer anywhere. Chances are he had a supply of it in the plane when he started out on the trip—beer and food."

"How about the man in the plane being able to identify the blue limousine?" said Burnham. "He must have been up four or five thousand feet. He had to fly that high to get above the range."

"Naturally he couldn't identify the car at that distance. Unless," Sinclair paused, "there was some distinguishing mark on it."

"I looked the car over pretty carefully."

"Top and everything?"

"Top — and everything." Burnham reined in his horse. "If I had had any idea that those birds made their getaway in a plane, I'd have known that that big, white blotch of paint on the top of the car was put there for a reason. I thought someone had started to repaint the top,

upset the paint pail and given up the job."

"At first I thought that, too."

Burnham nodded. "Even at four thousand feet that white spot would make a pretty plain bullseye." The cool calculation the bandits had showed, told Burnham what he might expect during the job of landing them. It wouldn't be easy. "You think the flier was alone? I thought it took two men to start a plane—one to spin the propeller and one to operate the spark and gas."

"They are building planes now," said Sinclair, "that one man can start and operate. That narrows the possibilities down still more. If I am not mistaken the plane will be modern, capable of accommodating a pilot and two or three passengers. The distance between the tires of the landing gears isn't standard. The big commercial planes have a wider landing gear than the smaller, privately owned planes, or the army scout planes. The bombers, of course, have a wide landing gear. But I think we can eliminate bombers, scout planes and commercial planes."

"That means about all we have got to go by is the width of the landing gear of a private plane."

"That, and certain tire markings. Just at present I'm looking for the man that picked up the killers."

"If there was a plane circling over the desert about noon, yesterday, it's queer that I didn't see it or hear it."

Sinclair didn't think so. "Judging by our check up Armstrong was about fifteen miles west of Plainview. If he was doing sixty, and probably he was, he made the fifteen miles in fifteen minutes. The bandits must have overtaken Armstrong about fifteen or twenty minutes past twelve.

A plane can travel quite a distance in fifteen minutes. And you didn't arrive until about thirty minutes after the shooting."

Burnham shook his head. "Queer that I didn't hear the plane."

"When you are patrolling the highway your motorcycle makes a lot of noise. Well, it's quite possible that you heard the plane, at a distance. But it didn't register as a plane, simply as a car somewhere."

Sinclair was stopping at the Plainview Hotel. He suggested that Burnham drop around about seven that evening.

PROMPTLY at seven Burnham knocked on Sinclair's door. The federal man gestured to Burnham to take a seat. "A few minutes ago I got a code wire from Headquarters. It may mean a change in our plans. It seems a small plane crashed between Bernardo and the Manzano range, south of Albuquerque, New Mexico, either last night or early yesterday morning. The plane has not been identified. Apparently the pilot and his passengers, if any, were not seriously injured. In any event they abandoned the plane. They have not been seen. Indications are that the fuel tank was empty when the plane crashed. I want to look the plane over before it is tampered with."

Burnham concealed his surprise. "If it's the plane that picked up the killers, then they are afoot in New Mexico packing something like twenty thousand dollars."

"They won't be on foot long. They're not that kind. They've got money—and criminals usually pay high for service. Rud Gleason has a reputation for being fond of his own skin."

"I should think that crash was mighty lucky, for us."

Sinclair glanced at his watch. "I don't know. So long as the man who operated the plane stayed with it, we had a chance of trailing him. Now that the plane is wrecked, and he's abandoned it, our chances of locating him are not so good."

"I was wondering," said Burnham, "if

he is one of the gang, or if Gleason hired him for the job."

"I have wired for a list of all the privately owned planes in the Southwest and their owners. I want to find out where the plane came from, originally."

A few minutes later, while Burnham was sitting on the bed and the federal man was sitting at a small table, writing, someone knocked on the door.

"Come in, Buzz." Sinclair spoke without turning round.

A lean, wiry little man in a blue serge suit and cap stepped into the room.

"This," Sinclair indicated the motorcycle officer, "is Spencer Burnham. He's working with me on this case."

"Spence, to me. Got a real name myself, but the boys at The Works canned it. I'm Buzz."

"Had your supper?"

"Listen, Chief. We got your wire at twelve noon, yesterday. I left The Works at twelve-thirty. Three hamburgers, three coffees, and here we are. Where do I eat?"

Sinclair did some reckoning. "You must have been hitting at least seventy or seventy-five, right along."

"Only when I had to slow down. She's a real bus, even if she has got a few holes in her."

Sinclair sent the little man down to the hotel dining room. "How does Buzz strike you?" he asked Burnham.

"He would have made a high class crook if he had taken the notion."

SINCLAIR smiled. "He would. He's got more nerve to the square inch than any man I ever met. Drove an ambulance in France. An American officer—one of the big shots—heard he had been a race driver over here. Next thing Buzz was driving the officer's car. That was too tame for Buzz. He got transferred to the flying corps. What he can't do with a plane isn't done. Suppose you step over to your home and change to

your street clothes. You might tell your family that you expect to be away for several days, possibly longer."

"Pulling out tonight?"

"As soon as Buzz gets his supper."

Burnham nodded and left the room. Sinclair's apparently sudden decision was a surprise, yet it was not altogether unexpected. In a job like this ordinary schedules of living went by the board. Compared to a federal man, a patrolman had a cinch. Burnham was thinking of Buzz. Buzz had been driving at high speed for eighteen or nineteen hours. Apparently he had stopped two or three times for coffee and hamburger. It now looked as if he had an all night's drive ahead of him.

Buzz was asleep when the motorcycle officer returned. "All right, Buzz," said Sinclair, as Burnham entered the room.

The little man sat up, blinking. "Show me the road, Chief."

"Burnham knows this country. He'll take the wheel for a while."

Buzz frowned. "Nobody piloted me here from The Works." His frown vanished. "You'll be driving a real bus," he told Burnham.

From nine that evening until three in the morning Spence Burnham sat at the wheel, Sinclair beside him. Curled on the rear seat Buzz slept.

Burnham knew the country. Leaving the state highway at Rice, he turned north.

Hour after hour he held the government car to the winding road and heavy grades of the White Mountains. From Springerville to Socorro was play for him. When he hit the north and south highway leading to Albuquerque, it was daylight. He turned the wheel over to Buzz, and slept on the back seat until they arrived in Belen. After a hasty breakfast and a talk with the constable they headed east, their destination being Brougher's ranch near the foothills of the Manzano range.

AT eleven o'clock that morning they arrived at the scene of the crash. A young fellow in khaki, laced boots and Stetson was guarding the plane, smoking a cigarette. Burnham surmised that he was in the federal service.

The plane stood on its nose in a stretch of pasture land. The right wing had been torn off. Buzz walked round the wreck. "New bus," he said, "and fast. A Beeliner, built in California."

"Did she crack up before she landed?"

Buzz shook his head. "No, Chief. The guy tried for a landing. Notice the tracks? That's where he lit. She hopped and slipped sideways—tore off her wing. Then she stood on her head."

Burnham, who had climbed over the broken wing, was rummaging in the cockpit. He had hoped to find some empty beer bottles. There were none in the cockpit. But he discovered a bottle cap, similar to those Sinclair had picked up on the dry lake. "It's our plane!" he declared, handing the bottle cap to Sinclair.

"Now I thought," Buzz grinned, "it belonged to those other crooks."

A search for fingerprints in the wrecked plane failed to reveal any. Burnham was disappointed, but Sinclair was quietly pleased. "The very fact there aren't any fingerprints shows that the men who used the plane had some reason for wanting to hide them."

"Still think it's Gleason and Heinrich?"

"More than ever now."

Sinclair did not say why he thought so, beyond the fact of the theft of the blue limousine, but Burnham was beginning to feel that intuition played at least half as large a part in the skill of a federal detective as facts did. And something that he could not have given a definite name to was telling him that Gleason and Heinrich were the men he wanted to meet. It seemed to him that would be the only way he could ever erase from his mind the picture of Bob Armstrong, bullet-riddled, on the highway.

Inquiry developed that the plane had crashed about three o'clock the previous morning. Brougner, the rancher, had been awakened by the barking of his dogs. Thinking that some stock had got loose, he took a lantern and explored the pasture. After discovering the wreck he searched about in the immediate vicinity, expecting to find the mangled bodies of the pilot and passengers.

"Bodies?" said Sinclair. "What makes you think there was more than one man in the plane?"



Burnham and Buzz glanced at one another. "Well," said Brougner, "one of them aeroplanes don't go flyin' around by itself. So somebody must have flew it. That would account for one man. The other two—"

"Two?" Sinclair shrugged.

"I didn't see 'em. Didn't see none of 'em. After smellin' around the machine, the dogs took off toward the hills, ki-yi-in' like they was after a coyote. It was too dark for me to do any trackin'. But as soon as daylight showed, I set out to look around. Two of the dogs had come back. But old Dan, he hadn't showed up. Yonder near the foothills I picked up the tracks of three men. Wasted pretty nigh three hours followin' them tracks. Lost 'em in the malpais on top of the ridge. But I found Dan. He had a bullet hole plumb through him. I picked him up and fetched him back home."

Sinclair stepped aside and talked with the young fellow in khaki. Then he came back to Brougner's porch, "We're federal

agents, Mr. Brougher. We're after the men you tracked this morning. If you can arrange it I should like to make your house our headquarters for a day or two. Can you get us a couple of saddle horses?"

"I'll do that. And you're welcome to stay here as long as you like, if you can put up with my cookin'. I'm batchin', just at present. All I ask is, if you ketch them fellas you'll give me first crack at 'em. If I knew which one of 'em killed Dan, I'd put two holes through him—one for good measure."

"You can do better than that, Mr. Brougher. You can help us land those men by keeping all you know about this business to yourself. Been any newspaper men here?"

"One. He come from Albuquerque. He got to askin' me questions like I was on the witness stand. I run him off the ranch."

Burnham stepped over to the gunny sacks and looked at the dog. It had been shot in the breast, at close range. The bullet, of heavy caliber—had gone clear through the animal.

An hour later, mounted on Brougher's horses, Sinclair and Burnham were slowly tracking on the slope of the Manzano hills. Arrived at the spot where the rancher had found his dog, the officers also lost the tracks. Burnham circled, trying to cut a trail. Sinclair was using his field glasses. Presently he gestured to Burnham. "That road down there—"

"Cuts into the highway between Bernardo and Scholle. It runs north up the valley to Belen."

"Lonely looking road," said Sinclair. "Let's ride down."

Sinclair usually had a reason for a seemingly blind move. It was well past noon when they reached the secondary road. It showed few signs of travel. Burnham had dismounted and was looking at the infrequent tire tracks. Walking down the road in the opposite direction,

Sinclair swung round as Burnham called to him. The motorcycle officer had picked up several pieces of shattered glass — obviously from a windshield. There were no signs of a collision. "A windshield doesn't bust itself, in open country like this," said Burnham. "Funny thing—they're nearly all small pieces."

SINCLAIR began to explore the brush east of the roadside. Burnham rode down into an arroyo on the west side of the road. A coyote dodged through the brush of the opposite slope. In the bottom of the arroyo lay the body of a man. The clothing was neat, the shoes of a fashionable make. His silver belt buckle was initialed. Burnham called to Sinclair. They removed the loose rock which, evidently, had been piled hastily on the body. Among the dead man's effects was a loose leaf order book which identified him as a traveling salesman of groceries and condiments. He had been shot to death. Tiny particles of flying glass had cut his face in several places.

"They were after his car," said Burnham.

Sinclair noted that the last order in the loose leaf book had been taken in Scholle. He inferred that the traveling man had been on his way from Scholle to Belen. Burnham stood looking down at the body. "Lucky Brougher didn't run into those birds," he said, half to himself. But he was thinking of young Bob Armstrong.

As they rode up out of the arroyo they saw a Mexican sheepherder crossing the road north of them. They hailed him. Burnham spoke in Spanish. The sheepherder had seen three men walking across the flats north of the highway early that morning. Two of the men were carrying guns. Later he heard shots fired but had paid no special attention because he thought the men were hunting. Still later a brown roadster—*un automovil chico, color de café*—had driven past his camp,

going very fast. Sinclair gave the herder a dollar. The Mexican shuffled up the road to look after his sheep.

As there was no telephone at the Brougher ranch, Sinclair sent Buzz to Belen with messages to be wired to Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and his own headquarters. Buzz already had the now famous descriptions of the bank robbers, Gleason and Heinrich. He also had the license plate number, the type and make of the brown roadster, data found in the dead man's card case. Buzz left the ranch with a machine-gun on the seat beside him. This seemed to bring the curiously warlike features of federal work more sharply to Burnham's understanding than anything else had done. Like most folk he read of gunmen and their killings without its coming home to his imagination. Now he realized that the battle of the law with the modern outlaw is no longer the comparatively simple business of society against criminal, but a complicated warfare of government forces against the highly organized forces of criminality. And any noncombatant unlucky enough to get within range, he thought grimly, was apt to get his. Already there was young Armstrong, the murdered drummer and Brougher's dog, Dan.

Brougher wrangled up a meal for the two officers and withdrew to the front porch. What they talked about was their own business. After supper Sinclair fetched a machine-gun from the bedroom. Burnham watched him as he deftly examined it. Sinclair explained that it was a new type, superior to the old style .45 machine-gun, which, he declared, would turn you around in your tracks if you fired six or eight shots in succession. The recoil of the new type gun was almost completely absorbed in the action. It was a lighter gun. There were only ten of them in service. It was not yet on the market.

AT BURNHAM'S request Sinclair explained the new features of the mechanism, suggesting that Burnham try it out. Before sunset that evening Burnham had given the gun a thorough test. To his surprise, Sinclair made him a present of the gun. "I have two more with me," said Sinclair. "I'm used to handling the old style gun."

"It's a wicked tool," said Burnham. "Which would be all right if it was issued to peace officers and never got into the hands of crooks."

"That's the trouble. A criminal with money can buy anything."

Buzz returned about seven that evening. Brougher warmed up the coffee. Buzz had sent the wires. He had seen nothing of the brown roadster. The coroner was on his way to get the body of the murdered drummer. Apparently Buzz had nothing more to report. But there was a glint in his eyes that Sinclair knew. Brougher, a lank figure in overalls and cotton shirt, sat on the porch smoking and reading the latest paper which Buzz had fetched from Belen.

About seven-thirty the coroner and a deputy sheriff drove up to the ranch and asked for Sinclair. Burnham offered to go and help locate the body. Brougher, who had been told of the murder, and knew the arroyo described by the officers, volunteered to go in Burnham's stead.

The three natives drove on down the Scholle-Belen road. Buzz lighted a cigarette, and settled himself in a chair on the front porch. "It's this way, Chief. After I sent the wires, and reported to the coroner, I gave the town the once over. I made a round of the garages. No brown roadster in sight. In the White Garage I ran across a guy in clean, new overalls and a clean shirt. His shoes were new. He gave me kind of a quick look, as if he'd seen me somewhere. But my old map stayed flat. To make good I asked him where I could find an auto camp. Told him my bus was coughing—

that I'd have to lay over and get her right. He told me to wheel her in and he would fix me up."

Sinclair nodded. "How did you happen to pick on him?"

"Everything he had on was new and clean. Any mechanic will buy a new pair of overalls or a shirt, or shoes, once in a while," Buzz grinned, "but not all at the same time. Just to make good I drove over to the auto camp. Told the owner that my bus had the bellyache. He said they could fix me up at the White Garage—to ask for Jimmy Whelen, who was one top hand mechanic.

"Between the auto camp and the White Garage I stopped and adjusted the carburetor intake so she would load up. When I got to the garage I asked for Jimmy Whelen. Jimmy Whelen had quit—gone to work in Albuquerque. But the boss said he had a first-class man. He pointed to the guy in the new outfit. 'New man,' says I. The boss nodded. I asked him how he knew the guy was such a hell of a good mechanic. 'By the way he goes at it,' said the boss. 'When I hired him, the first thing that boy did was to go get himself a new rig, complete. He didn't ask for an advance to get it with, either. Now a mechanic that has the dough to outfit himself before he goes to work, ought to be good, even if he did light here afoot. More than that. He's neat. Instead of chucking his old clothes in a heap out in the wrecking yard, he burns 'em. He's only worked on two, three, cars today, but he's a humdinger.'

"While the new mechanic was monkeying with my bus," continued Buzz, "I took a stroll out back of the garage. A mechanic burning his old clothes seemed kind of out of the picture. There was a little heap of ashes where he had burned his clothes. Here's the dope."

Buzz displayed a triangular fragment of blue serge and a bottle cap, blackened and twisted badly by fire.

"The cloth has been saturated with gasoline," said Sinclair. "The bottle cap is too badly burned for identification."

The officers sat looking at Buzz, who was lighting another cigarette. "The new mechanic," Buzz waved his hand, "arrived in Belen on foot. The boss didn't say when, but it was sometime today. The new guy was dressed in blue serge. He had a bottle cap in his pocket."

"He must have quit his pals somewhere south of Belen and walked in." Sinclair was talking as if to himself. "Got a job so he could be in the neighborhood of the plane. He had money. He's a stranger in Belen. He's a first class mechanic. Did he fly the plane? Perhaps."

"Didn't take him over ten minutes to tune the motor," declared Buzz. "I watched him. He knows his stuff. He's no ordinary small town garage mechanic."

"Isn't he?" Sinclair's question touched Buzz off.

"Ask me again, Chief! I'm telling you. He don't talk like the guys around Belen. Don't act like 'em, either. He steps fast. Those blue eyes of his are on the quick every second. He ain't got hands like a hay tosser, either. There was grease on 'em, but they hadn't done a whole lot of hard work lately. And he isn't Gleason or Heinrich. Here's the dope. White. American. Blond hair, blue eyes, weighs about one hundred and fifty, smooth shaven, height about five feet ten, and age, mebbly about twenty-eight or thirty."

"Politics?" Sinclair smiled.

"You fellas at The Works think that all I can do is drive a bus," exploded Buzz. He puffed at the cigarette. "Politics? Well, Chief, judging by his breath I'd say he was a Bolshevik."

SINCLAIR, knowing that Buzz always kept something up his sleeve as a sort of dramatic surprise, said nothing.

"Those fellows ought to be getting back with the body," observed Burnham.

"Speaking of stiffs," Buzz shrugged. "I almost forgot, Chief, that the new mechanic was packing a gun."

Still Sinclair made no comment.

"It was this way. Just before he got through with my bus I stepped into the garage office. The boss was out pumping gas into a Lizzie. There are four clothes lockers in the office. None of 'em was locked. The mechanic has his head in my bus. I opened those lockers right now. Found the usual plunder in three of 'em. In the fourth was a new felt hat. Under the hat was a nice little gat—a thirty-eight automatic. Brand new. Just as I stepped out of the office I saw the mechanic coming up front looking for me. 'The boss is outside,' says he. I offered the new guy a cigarette and lit one myself. 'It was the carburetor intake,' he told me. 'How much?' I asked him. He told me I would have to see the boss.

"While we were waiting for the boss I told the new guy that I'd heard that a plane crashed somewhere in that location. He didn't bat an eye. He said he had heard about it. I asked him if any passengers had been killed. He said not any so far as he knew. I asked him if he had been out to see the wreck. He said he hadn't. I asked him if the fella that was flying the plane—I didn't say 'pilot'—was in town. The new guy said he didn't know, that he hadn't heard any details of the crash. 'Details', thinks I, is a neat little word for a hick town garage mechanic. 'That's the third time one of them big passenger planes has crashed in six months,' I said.

"'It wasn't a commercial plane,' said he. 'It was a Beeliner.' That was the time he slipped bad.

"'And what the hell is a Beeliner?' says I. Just then the boss came in. It cost the government just one dollar for the job."

As Buzz said later, probably there wasn't a man this side of Albuquerque who knew a Beeliner from a threshing

machine. In fact there was no name, number or other symbol by which the plane could have been identified by a layman. If there had been, originally, such marks had been painted over or filed off. Nor, for that matter, were there any identifying marks on the government car which Buzz was operating. The original license plates were in Sinclair's suit case. The car now carried the copper colored license plates of Arizona.

Burnham rose and stretched. "Guess I'll turn in. Say, Buzz, where was the machine-gun while your car was in the garage?"

"I'll show you." Buzz and Burnham walked over to the car. Buzz indicated a closed compartment back of the front seat. Sinclair joined them. "Buzz, how would you like to sleep in the plane to-night?"

"There you go, stealing my ideas right out of my mouth."

Sinclair laughed. "You're getting there, all right. I wouldn't trade you for a sore thumb."

"Sore thumb!" snorted the little man. "And me sleeping standing up, for the honor of the service. Maybe you didn't notice that little old Beeliner out there is resting on her nose."

EQUIPPED with a blanket, flashlight and his gun, Buzz bade Sinclair and Burnham a brusque goodnight. "You guys got a soft job," he grumbled. But nothing this side of an avalanche could have kept him away from the plane that night. As he said when speaking of the new mechanic in Belen, he had an idea.

Spreading his blanket under a wide-branching juniper about thirty or forty yards south of the wreck, he lay looking up at the stars. The little man could sleep any time, any where. Yet so high strung was he that he would be wide awake at the least unusual sound. About midnight a muffled vibration like somebody walking awakened him. Buzz rose

on his elbow. Slowly his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light. He outlined the plane and something moving near it. He lay down again muttering to himself. One of the horses had approached the plane and was sniffing at it.

It must have been two o'clock before the little man again woke up, aroused by a sharply distinct clink as of metal against metal. Concentrating his gaze he was able to differentiate between the normal shape of the plane and a something which seemed to be moving above the edge of the cockpit. Again came a faint clink. Buzz sat tense and motionless. Presently the head and shoulders of a man showed above the cockpit. Tempted to challenge the visitor, Buzz finally decided to wait. If Whoever-it-was was after something concealed in the plane—Buzz himself thought he had searched it thoroughly—it would be better to let Whoever-it-was finish his job, and then hop him.

"He's using a wrench," murmured Buzz. "Once in a while it slips. Wonder what in hell he's up to?"

Two or three times previously when in the federal service Buzz had made the mistake of trying to clean up a job too soon. This time he decided to give his man a chance to get what he was after and then jump him. The clinking of metal against metal ceased. Buzz rose and began to walk softly toward the shadowy plane. Mr. Whoever-it-was was standing near the cockpit, distinctly outlined from the plane itself. The little man was within thirty feet of the plane when one of Brougher's horses, apparently startled by the slowly moving figure, snorted and tore off across the pasture. Mr. Whoever-it-was turned, saw someone approaching in the starlight. Buzz called out to him to stick up his hands. In reply, a gun snarled. The man kept on running. Turning his flashlight on the distant figure, Buzz fired. Still the man kept on. Disgusted, Buzz

walked over to the plane and examined it. He could find nothing to indicate that it had been tampered with. He turned his flash to the ground looking for footprints. Almost under his feet lay a new hundred dollar bill.



"Had his dough cached in some little old secret hideout," muttered Buzz. "And he gave me the slip. I'm a hell of a good federal man."

Someone was coming on the run. Buzz signalled with his flash. Burnham, scantily clad, puffed up. "Get him?" he panted.

"Who?"

"Then you didn't," said Burnham. "I heard two shots."

"So did I." And that was all Buzz would say until he reported to Sinclair, who was up and sitting on the ranch-house porch. Following his report Buzz displayed the hundred dollar note. It told them nothing, save that Whoever-it-was had, in his haste, dropped a tidy sum of money. "If it was mine," declared Buzz, "I'd lay it against ten that I can spot the man who was monkeying with the plane."

"Spot him as soon as you like," said Sinclair.

Buzz shrugged, moved over toward the black sedan. It was then about three o'clock in the morning.

"Buzz is on the warpath," said Sinclair. "You had better go along with him, Burnham." Sinclair gave Buzz a code wire to be sent as soon as he arrived in Belen.

An hour later the two federal men were installed in one of the auto park

cabins in Belen. Not until six that morning did either of them leave it. Then Buzz, on foot, started for the White Garage. A few minutes later Burnham drove the sedan round to the alley back of the garage.

At seven o'clock the new mechanic came on duty. Buzz, who was in the garage office talking with the proprietor, complained that his bus was still groggy. "She ran all right till I got about ten miles up the Albuquerque road, then she began to buck. I coaxed her back to the auto camp—and as the fella says in the show, here we are."

The new mechanic looked as if he had had a bad night. "Wheel her in," he said. "Probably the feed line is plugged."

"That's the way with you guys," growled Buzz. "You turn a fella loose, figuring he'll be back for another job that you ought to have done first off. I was due in Albuquerque this morning. Instead of that I'm hung up here, wondering if there's a mechanic in town who knows a carburetor from a coffee grinder."

"We'll fix you up," said the garage proprietor placatingly. "If your car doesn't run all right this time, I won't charge you a cent."

BUZZ nodded, but he was looking at the new mechanic. Had the coroner told of the murder in the arroyo? Undoubtedly he had. That would mean that the new mechanic must have heard there were strangers stopping at Brougher's ranch. Buzz became exceedingly wary.

"If you can wait till I get a cup of coffee," said the new mechanic. "I turned out late this morning. I haven't had a breakfast yet."

The garage proprietor was agreeable. So was Buzz. In fact he was struck by the idea. He had not had breakfast either. He would go with the new man and get some coffee.

On the way to the restaurant Buzz in-

troduced himself as the chauffeur of a wealthy Easterner who had been taken sick at Kansas City some two weeks past, and was now coming by train to Albuquerque. The new mechanic's name was, so he said, Jack Wilson.

As they consumed hot cakes and coffee, the mechanic reached for the sugar bowl. The sleeve of his cotton shirt slipped back, disclosing a handkerchief tied round his forearm above the wrist. "Wrench slipped," he said in explanation, although Buzz apparently had not noticed the bandage.

"Lucky it wasn't anything worse than a wrench," said Buzz pleasantly.

A few minutes later they left the restaurant.

"I'm going over to the doctor and have him fix this up." Wilson indicated his arm. "You might tell the boss I'll be back in fifteen or twenty minutes."

Buzz gave the garage proprietor Wilson's message, and strolled through the garage to the wrecking yard. Burnham had parked the black sedan out of sight behind the next building. Buzz hastened to the car. "That new mechanic is acting funny this morning. Just now he's over to the doctor's getting his arm dressed. Wrench slipped, so he says. I've got an idea. Suppose you wheel the bus round to the main stem and park this side of the White Garage. I'm going to keep my eye on that bird. You stick in the car."

Fifteen minutes passed and Wilson did not show up. Buzz stepped over to the doctor's office. The doctor said he had had no patients that morning. Buzz backed out. As he was about to cross the street to the garage a green roadster swung round the corner at high speed. Buzz made the curb just in time to save himself. The man in the green roadster was the new mechanic. Buzz shouted to Burnham, started to run toward the black sedan. But Burnham, who had seen the green roadster careen round the corner, didn't wait. The motor roared. The

black sedan leaped forward. Buzz made a grab for the door handle. He was swept off his feet. He sat up, staring at the black sedan now zooming down the Albuquerque road.

The garage proprietor and another citizen helped Buzz to his feet.

Buzz got police headquarters, Albuquerque, on the phone, and reported the green roadster. He described the driver in detail. The garage proprietor was flabbergasted. In less than half an hour news spread through town that a garage mechanic had murdered a traveling man on the Scholle-Belen road and had just left town in a new roadster for which, it was learned, he had paid spot cash. It was also rumored there were federal men in town looking for the murderer. Meanwhile Buzz called up the first town north of Belen. Up to that time a green roadster had not passed through La Chavez. Burnham had been gone a good half hour.

MMOTORCYCLE OFFICER BURNHAM never knew how fast he drove. The new, light, eight-cylinder car ahead of him took the curves like a swallow. On one straightaway Burnham gave the black sedan all it had. He seemed to be gaining. On another straightaway he gained again. The drone of his motor quickened to a shrill wail. The highway became a gray streak edged with a blur of fence posts. The surrounding country seemed to drop away as if slowly sinking into some unmeasurable abyss. Approaching the next curve the green roadster skidded, but straightened out again, grazing the edge of the highway by inches. Burnham had gained perceptibly. But he realized that he was up against an expert driver. Another mile of sunlit, twinkling gray highway and the bus, as Buzz had called the government car, seemed to settle down to business. Though Burnham never took his eyes off the tail of the green roadster to glance at

his speedometer he could feel the sedan respond to the throttle as his foot went down to the floor board. A picture flashed swiftly across his vision—Bob Armstrong speeding down the Rideout road and a blue sedan following him. With his entire being centered on overtaking his man, the motorcycle officer held the big car to its utmost. He seemed to be gaining only by inches. Yet he was gaining. If he put the other car into the ditch, it didn't matter. If he went into the ditch himself, it didn't matter, so long as he got the man who had helped the killers of his friend.

About three miles south of La Chavez, Burnham was within fifty yards of the green car. Taking up the machine-gun with one hand he jammed its muzzle through the windshield. A sliver of glass laid his cheek open. Resting the muzzle of the gun on the edge of the hole, Burnham opened up. The green roadster shed a rear tire in strips, lurched, dragged on one side, turned over and rolled off the highway. The smell of burning rubber—and Burnham set his car up, amazed that he had run so far past the wreck.

WILSON had been thrown clear of the car. He lay half against the roadside fence. His face was lacerated by barbed wire. Burnham examined him. The man was alive, though unconscious.

From an adjoining field a rancher came on the run. After asking him to phone the state highway patrol and report the wrecked car, Burnham swung the sedan round and laid the unconscious man in the tonneau, and headed south.

Arriving in Belen he drove to the doctor's office. "Here's that patient that didn't show up this morning," he told the physician. "See how badly he is damaged. You needn't phone the police. I'll take care of him. I happen to be a federal man."

Buzz, limping across the street, was crestfallen. A new guy in the service had beat him to it. But Buzz was game. He congratulated Burnham, asking if Wilson was dead. Buzz's expression changed when he saw the shattered windshield. Like a mare inspecting her colt, the little man examined his bus, looking for bullet holes and other damage. "How in hell," he said finally, "did that guy shoot the windshield out and never touch you?"

"He didn't," replied Burnham. "I did the shooting."

A broken collar bone and minor abrasions, was the doctor's report. Wilson was now conscious, and said he wanted to get up and go outside.

"If he's that good," said Burnham, "I'm going to take him to Sinclair."

Buzz limped to the telegraph office, returning with a code wire for Sinclair.

Bandaged and hardly able to stand, Wilson was helped into the sedan. Buzz took the wheel. Burnham sat beside the prisoner. "Where you fellows taking me?" asked Wilson.

"That depends on you." Burnham's tone was laden with significance. "No monkey business, Wilson, or the coroner will take you back."

Wilson, as he still called himself, sat propped up in an armchair on Brougher's front porch. Buzz lay stretched out on the ground, his head on his arms. Sinclair lounged on the edge of the porch facing Wilson. Brougher was out in the fields somewhere.

Burnham stood in the doorway of the ranchhouse, his attention seemingly on the distant plane.

Sinclair showed Wilson the hundred dollar bill Buzz had found near the plane. "This yours?"

"No."

"Ever see it before?"

"No."

"Why did you leave Belen in such a hurry?"

"That's my business." Wilson was

weak, scarcely able to talk, but he was stiffly defiant.

"You are in pretty bad shape," said Sinclair. "You can save yourself a lot of misery by coming across clean. Is that your plane out there in the field?"

"Never saw it before."

"You weren't near the plane last night, or early this morning?"

"I was in my room in Belen last night—all night."

Sinclair gestured toward Wilson's new shoes. "There's a *cienea* in the pasture over there. There's dried black mud on your shoes. Did you get that mud in Belen?"

"What are you fellows trying to do, anyhow?"

"What time was it when you took off from the dry lake back of the Argus mountains and headed for Plainview?"

Wilson's gaze, fixed on Sinclair, went blank. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Take a rest, and think," said Sinclair. "Burnham, take off one of his shoes and see if it fits the tracks in the *cienea*."

BURNHAM walked out across the pasture. Wilson had closed his eyes. Presently Burnham returned. "They're his tracks, all right. Here's a shell I picked up. Tallies with Buzz's description of the gun in Wilson's locker—a .38 automatic. I found a thirty-eight automatic in his car," said Burnham. "It's a new gun."

"This guy bought it in Phillips's hardware store in Belen," said Buzz. "While the doctor was fixing Wilson up, I checked the number with Phillips's record."

"Did you pay cash for the green roadster?" asked Sinclair.

"That's my business."

"It is also mine, Wilson," Sinclair's tone changed, "you've been spending too much money lately. You dropped a hundred dollar bill when you were monkey-

ing with that plane, last night. You paid over seven hundred for a new car this morning. Burnham, here, found a thousand dollars on you right after your car turned over. You were working as a garage mechanic. Where did you get all the money?"

"Earned it."

"Why did you burn your blue serge suit when you went to work at the White Garage?"

"Giving me the third? Well, you won't make it."

"To the contrary, Wilson, I have made it. You flew the plane that picked up Gleason and Heinrich fifteen miles west of Plainview, Arizona. They killed and robbed Armstrong, a clerk in the First National Bank. You were heading for Albuquerque when your plane ran out of gas. You and your pals took to the hills after the plane crashed. You and your pals murdered a traveling man on the Scholle-Belen road, took his car and drove to Belen. But you quit the car south of Belen and walked in. Ever been in Glendale, California?"

Wilson's mouth twitched. Obviously he was a pretty sick man. But surmising that Wilson was beginning to break, Sinclair did not let up. "Glendale, California," reiterated Sinclair. "Who staked you to the cash to buy a new Beeliner?" Was it Gleason?"

"That's a lie!" cried Wilson, trying to sit up. "I bought the plane with my own money."

Burnham glanced swiftly at Sinclair whose expression had not changed in the slightest.

"All right," said Sinclair quietly. "You bought the plane with your own money. How much did Gleason give you to fly to Plainview and pick him and Heinrich up after the robbery?"

Wilson's head sagged. He half sat half lay with his chin on his chest. "I'm sick," he murmured. "Take me back to Belen—to the hospital."

"I'll send you back. But you'll have to answer another question first. You're not a professional crook. This was your first job." Sinclair produced a code wire. "John Sanders, a commercial aviator, bought a new Beeliner at the factory in Glendale, March twenty-third, this year. Paid cash for it. Made several trial flights in the vicinity. On April third he left Glendale, since when he has not been seen.

"Recently inherited eighteen thousand dollars from an aunt in San Francisco. Investigating Sanders's record." Sinclair glanced up. "Are you John Sanders?"

The injured man made no answer.

"All right." Sinclair's tone was cheerful. "Where are Gleason and Heinrich?"

"I don't know." Wilson, or Sanders, closed his eyes.

"It will be easier for you if you come clean now, Sanders. Where is Gleason?"

"I told you I didn't know. Gleason never spilled his plans. I—"

"That's all I want to know for the present." Sinclair rose. "You can take him back, Burnham."

"Not the pen!" cried the injured man starting up. "You'll never put me in the pen!"

SINCLAIR took Burnham aside and talked with him. Sanders was to receive the necessary medical attention, but to be kept under guard.

Buzz raised his head. "Is Burnham going to wreck my bus again, chief?"

Sanders seemed about done up. Burnham loaded him into the tonneau. Buzz was standing at Burnham's elbow. "I'll go along. Get in there with your prisoner. Mebby he ain't as sick as he looks."

Buzz was correct in one way, wrong in another. Sanders was in great pain, physically. But that was as nothing compared to the thought that he would probably spend the rest of his life in the penitentiary. As Sinclair had said, it was his

first job. He had made a mess of it. But he thought he saw a way out.

Halfway to Belen, with Buzz holding the car to sixty, Sanders grasped the door handle, shoved it down and leaped from the sedan. When they came back and picked him up they found that his neck was broken.

"He had guts, at that," said Buzz.

Burnham lifted Sanders and laid him in the car. Not many days past, Burnham had laid the body of young Bob Armstrong in the car that was to take him to Plainview, and his family.

Although he showed no surprise when he learned that Sanders was dead, Sinclair was taken aback. He felt that under pressure Sanders would have turned State's evidence in case the killers were brought to trial. Sinclair knew that the chances of getting them alive were mighty slim, yet rather than shoot them down in a fight, he preferred that they be captured and sentenced through the regular process of law. Sinclair's silence upon hearing of Sanders' death caused Buzz to remark that the newspapers would undoubtedly charge the federal officers with having put their prisoner through, until, desperate, he committed suicide.



"He's better off where he is," said Sinclair, with what Buzz considered an unusual show of sentiment. "Sanders was headed the wrong way. It's a good thing he stopped himself before he caused any more misery."

Burnham nodded. "So far as I am concerned Sanders was just as guilty of Bob's death as if he had shot him. I'm not losing any sleep over Sanders."

"Not now," said Buzz. "Say, Chief, which way do we go from here?" The three officers were sitting on the ranch-house porch in their shirt sleeves. It was a warm evening. Brougner was washing the supper dishes.

Sinclair hesitated. Thus far radio broadcasts and a general police check up had netted him nothing. While he hardly dared to hope that the killers were still in New Mexico, he was pretty sure they had made for the transcontinental highway after killing the drummer. Until he had some clue as to their whereabouts, it would be senseless to start out in any direction. Albuquerque was the nearest city of any size. Sinclair decided to make it his temporary headquarters. "We'll run up to Albuquerque and look around," he said casually. "Gleason isn't going to hide out in a small town, or in the country, if he can help it. He'll head for a big town. Probably he'll lay low for a while. If he were in the East he would be running with some woman. He's that way. But out here — I doubt if he'll take that chance."

"His moll would," said Buzz. "She's red-headed crazy about him. She can't leave him alone. And I guess the trains are running regular, if you ask me."

"To where?"

"You asked me." Buzz grinned.

SINCLAIR went into the house, returning with a small photograph which he handed to Burnham. It was a photograph of Gleason's woman.

"Red hair, blue eyes, kind of plump," volunteered Buzz. "Got a way of looking at you and smiling a come-on smile. About five feet six, dresses cabaret, and she is one of the slickest dames in the business. Her business is Gleason."

Burnham handed the picture back to Sinclair.

"And she's just as likely to show up with ash blond hair," declared Buzz. "And no paint on her finger nails or

face, dressed plain, and playing the sad sister. Then is when she lays 'em low. I mean the johnnies that fall for dames, regular."

"Ever fall?" Sinclair asked.

"Not so hard. But I'll admit I came awful near losing my alley to that dame before I got onto her curves."

Sinclair rose. "If you've got it out of your system, Buzz, we'll start for Albuquerque. Find Brouger. I want to settle with him."

With the aid of the local police, every garage in Albuquerque, every automobile agency, was quietly searched. Burnham watched the trains. Buzz loafed among the garages posing as a mechanic out of work. The federal men were unable to turn up the slightest clue as to the possible whereabouts of the killers. Nor did any news of them come in by wire or telephone. Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, had nothing new to report. The chase had come to a standstill.

Sinclair knew that sooner or later the criminals would make some slip that would discover them to the authorities. It might take a month longer to land them. It might take a year, five years. Gleason would become an old story to different local police officials. New crimes would be committed in every section of the country. It was natural for the local police to step lively while a case was hot. With federal men a case never grew cold.

Buzz reported daily, with his customary, "What next, Chief?"

"Keep at it."

Following the arrival of both east and west bound trains, Burnham also reported to Sinclair. Sinclair's only acknowledgment was, "Keep at it."

MEANWHILE Sinclair himself was keeping at it. Long distance calls and telegrams were costing some pretty money. Gleason had already cost the government thousands of dollars. He had

already killed three federal agents and two Chicago policemen, not to count Bob Armstrong and the drummer. His operations had netted him something like seventy-five thousand dollars—which he had or would spend chiefly in keeping himself alive. Sinclair recalled his own chief's terse remark in regard to Gleason: "Get him, if it takes you the rest of your life."

Personality, sentiment, preferences were submerged in such a job. As Buzz remarked, "A guy in this business travels with a gun in one hand and his life in the other." Buzz also declared that often he would wake up at night imagining he had heard Burnham say, "Keep at it!"

While lacking experience in this kind of work, Burnham possessed one quality essential to success—tenacity. His was a cold tenacity. It tended toward patience when patience was most needed. Day after day he loafed on the station platform watching the trains. He felt that actually he was doing nothing to forward the operations. Yet watching the trains was necessary. Someone had to do it. He did not know that, meanwhile, Sinclair was trying him out. However, it occurred to Burnham that Sinclair had given him the job because he was unknown to the criminals. Buzz knew considerably more about Eastern crooks, would be able to spot one of them quicker than Burnham. But Buzz, like Sinclair, was too well known to the underworld. So Buzz was kept at his daily exercise of making friends with the local garage men. Never once did Burnham tell himself how he would conduct the operation if he were chief. Nor did he make any suggestion. He simply banked his fires and waited for the command to get up steam.

Strolling along the station platform one morning, nodding to the Pueblo women who displayed pottery especially made for the tourists, Burnham was marking time when the Sante Fe west-

bound pulled in. Casually Burnham watched the passengers as they crowded into the Harvey House lunch room. A few passengers whose destination was Albuquerque were loading their luggage into taxicabs and automobiles. Burnham walked the length of the train and back. From the Pullman next to the diner a woman stepped down. She was quietly dressed, yet there was about her a certain style and dash that attracted the officer's attention. As Burnham passed her she was inquiring about the telegraph office. An obsequious porter directed her. She disappeared into the station. Burnham handed the porter a dollar. "Is her husband traveling with her?" said Burnham, smiling.

The porter thought, mistakenly, that he knew what was in Burnham's mind. "No, boss. She's traveling alone."

"Los Angeles, I suppose."

"No, boss. She's going through to San Francisco."

"Thanks."

Burnham approached the telegraph office. The woman was coming out. Blue eyes, but not the come-on eyes Buzz had mentioned—full lips only slightly tinted, hair a golden blond. She was pretty, no denying that. And she was cosmopolitan to her finger tips. Just the faintest hint of a smile touched her lips as she passed Burnham. Burnham swung round. In spite of her swift, easy walk, he noted that her right foot toed in slightly. Buzz had mentioned this.

Burnham turned and stepped into the telegraph office. The day operator knew him. "Let me see that wire," said Burnham. "The one that pretty girl just wrote."

The telegram, addressed to Nathan Schwartz, at a certain number on Market Street, San Francisco, read: "Arrived Albuquerque. All right so far. Will stop at St. Francis." It was signed "Marion."

"Hold that wire till I come back," said Burnham.

"Hotel St. Francis, San Francisco," mused Burnham as he walked toward the Pullman she had boarded. Should he arrest her and take a chance that she was Gleason's woman, known to the underworld as Ruddy? He thought she was this Ruddy. If she continued her journey, it would mean that the San Francisco officers would be notified to watch her, and be on the lookout for Gleason. If, on the other hand, she were arrested here, and Gleason heard of it, it would prolong the chase.

Passengers were coming from the Harvey House. In a minute or so the train would pull out. From the third window of the Pullman a face was beaming down upon him. The demure eyes had changed. They were now the come-on eyes Buzz had mentioned. The pretty woman smiled. Swiftly Burnham made his decision. Stepping past the porter he entered the car. The pretty woman sat with her hands folded on the handbag in her lap. "He fell easy," was her reflection as Burnham stopped at her seat. "Beg your pardon," he said, "but how do you happen to be, today, Marion?" He was watching her closely. The woman's eyes hardened. Burnham's hand shot out, grasped the handbag in her lap. "Don't try it," he said in a low tone.

The woman's neighbor across the aisle, a stout, florid business man, asked Burnham what he thought he was doing.

Followed by the porter, the conductor entered the car. Burnham showed his badge. "This lady," he said, "is getting off here."

To the surprise of the conductor, porter and passengers the woman offered no resistance. Her suitcase was put off. Curious passengers hung for a moment to watch her. Burnham escorted his prisoner to the waiting room. "We'll take a walk up to the police station," he told her.

"Is that so? If I'm going, we'll take a taxi."

"That would be better," said someone who had just come in. Burnham glanced round. Sinclair was quietly observing them. As the woman recognized Sinclair she made a grab for the handbag which Burnham still retained.

SINCLAIR relieved Burnham of the handbag. "Nice little gat," he remarked, opening it and putting the gun in his pocket. "I'll call a taxi."

The taxi happened to be a black sedan. Buzz was at the wheel. In spite of himself the hard-boiled little man's eyes popped. He nodded to the woman. "How's the weather back East, Ruddy?"

"Ruddy yourself, you little dried-up son of—" The sound of the motor deleted the rest. Rud Gleason's woman had begun to show her real speed.

Spence Burnham had never met a woman of this type. Hard boiled was a mild designation. It was difficult for him to associate her language with her stylish clothing and pretty face. Gleason's woman now sat quietly between Burnham and Sinclair as Buzz stepped on the starter. "Which way, Chief?"

"My room."

Gleason's woman was escorted to a small hotel on a quiet side street. Declining a chair she sat on the edge of Sinclair's bed, smoking a cigarette. Her defiant attitude had vanished. She seemed quite at ease. She asked Sinclair if he would have a drink. "There's some in my suitcase," she told him.

Burnham was about to hand the case to her when he, as Buzz expressed it, had an idea.

Digging into the handbag he had taken from her, he found the key and opened the suitcase. Among her belongings was a silver mounted flask. Also there was a large, business-like revolver, contrasting strongly with the dainty automatic she had carried in her handbag.

Gleason's woman poured herself a drink. She lighted another cigarette.

"Where's Rud?" asked Sinclair.

"Search me."

"I intend to. Where's Heinrich?"

"Really! Who is Heinrich?"

Sinclair watched her closely. "Is Gleason in San Francisco?"

The woman merely stared at him. He had mentioned San Francisco at a venture. Burnham promptly quoted the wire she had sent. "I told them to hold it," added Burnham.

"Dump the stuff in that suitcase on the floor and go through it," said Sinclair. He turned to the woman. "I imagine you won't talk?"

"You're dam' well right!"

"Usually. This time I'm going to put you where you won't have to talk for a while. Got any money with you?"

"Change for cigarettes."

Buzz was industriously noting the articles in the suitcase. He held up a newspaper clipping and a soiled envelope. The envelope carried a "registered" stamp and was postmarked San Francisco. It was addressed to Marion Holmes, Vendome Hotel, Chicago. In the envelope was an unsigned note which read, "Here's a couple of grand, kid. Don't spend it all in one town." Buzz handed the note to Sinclair.

"Change for cigarettes," said Sinclair. He glanced at the newspaper clippings. There were two, both containing accounts of the Plainview bank robbery and the murder of young Armstrong.

"Jack Sanders is dead," said Sinclair suddenly. His plane is standing on its nose a few miles south of here."

The woman's face went white, but she soon regained her poise. "Talk English," she said. "Then maybe I can understand you."

Sinclair smiled. "You're going back to Chicago under guard. You're going to-night."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite. You are going to pay for your transportation out of that cigarette

money. The government doesn't pay for your ticket, this journey."

"Money?" said the woman, smiling. "I haven't got enough to buy a decent meal."

"The matron at the police station will determine that. And there'll be someone to meet you in Chicago."

"Is that so? Maybe, now, I'll just get a lawyer—"

"No, you won't get a lawyer. And there won't be any extradition papers. You are not formally arrested yet. There has been no charge lodged against you. A mere technicality, which you will understand."

The woman lighted another cigarette. "Shoot the works," was all that she had to say.

SHORTLY after the Santa Fe east-bound had pulled out that evening, Sinclair and Burnham stood on the station platform discussing recent events. Sinclair had wired San Francisco earlier in the day, asking for information as to a Nathan Schwartz at a certain number on Market Street. As yet he had received no reply. The wire signed Marion was still being held. Burnham was surprised when his chief said he had decided to send it.

"Gleason will be expecting her, then?" ventured Burnham.

"When he gets the first wire she drafted."

"If she don't show up, won't he get suspicious?"

"Naturally. That's why I'm sending a second wire tonight. It's a gamble. Gleason may fall for it and he may not. He's shrewd enough when he isn't scared. One reason for my sending her wire as it read is that it may be worded in a way agreed upon. For instance, 'Everything all right so far' probably has considerable significance."

"About that Nathan Schwartz?"

"A fence, possibly a friend of Gleason's. Or Schwartz may be entirely ig-

norant of the significance of the telegram. I surmise he is to receive the wire and deliver it to someone who will call for it. Money does wonders. Gleason has money."

"If he gets the first wire, do you think he'll look for a second? Maybe he won't send to Market Street for any more telegrams after he gets the first one, but just mark time expecting Marion to show up."

"I'm taking a chance on that. As Buzz said, the woman is crazy about Gleason."

"She was crazy to carry those clippings and that note in her suitcase," declared Burnham.

"Not exactly, Burnham. We've caught some big shots simply because they were so anxious to see what the newspapers had to say about their doings. We have found such clippings on crooks we have killed or captured. Also, criminals often find it hard to keep away from the towns where they have robbed and murdered. And from their kind. Time after time killers come back, knowing the police are on the watch for them. Billy the Kid couldn't keep away from White Oaks, and his woman. It's an old story."

Sinclair and Burnham walked over to the telegraph office. Sinclair drafted a wire. "Stopping in Albuquerque. Sick. Los Angeles and San Francisco not so good. Everything all right here. Marion."

"Perhaps he will fall for it," said Sinclair. "Marion is a mighty attractive woman — when she keeps her mouth shut."

"Think he'll take a chance and come back to this country?"

"I don't know. I'm banking on the fact that he was expecting her."

THE capture of Gleason's woman, and three days later a wire from San Francisco advising Sinclair that Gleason was known to have left there, and was probably on his way east, put the federal men on their mettle.

Buzz had a new job. His cap and blue

serge were discarded for gray sport clothes and a soft gray felt hat with a black band. He visited the real estate offices, looking for a small, inexpensive



room in a quiet neighborhood. He was a difficult client. Nothing suited him. In less than a week had a fairly comprehensive listing of all the regular and the out of the way vacant rooms and houses. He was particular to mark in his note book those with telephone service. By careful manipulation of money and liquor he gained access to the tough joints. Compared with eastern cities Albuquerque had its limitations as a hide-out for crooks. Years ago, single-handed, Pat Garrett had cleaned up the town. Since then the local police hadn't allowed it to tarnish to any great extent.

Spence Burnham, so far as the streets and the station platform knew him, had disappeared. A hobo in dirty overalls, faded black cotton shirt and greasy felt hat camped along the highway west of town. Time and again he caught a ride into town, loafed around the saloons for a while and then disappeared. Always he returned to his camp along the highway. His presence was known to the police, but he was never pinched. He never begged a meal or panhandled on the streets, save when, apparently by accident, he met Buzz down by the railway station. On each occasion Buzz gave him two bits and told him there was nothing doing yet.

One night as the hobo sat by the ashes of his supper fire, smoking a yellow paper cigarette and watching the east-bound cars zoom down the highway, he noted a pair of headlights coming from the west. These headlights came on slowly. Ordinarily, traffic at night passed him at high speed. As the car approached it veered to his side of the road, and stopped. He rose and slinging his bed roll across his back, shuffled forward. "Broke down?" he queried hoarsely.

There were two men in the car—a dark colored sedan. The man at the wheel asked the hobo how far it was to Albuquerque.

The hobo stood blinking in the glare of the headlights. "About eight or ten miles."

"Let's get going," said the man at the wheel.

"We'll get goin' when I'm ready," said his companion. He turned to the hobo. "Which way you headed?"

"Albuquerque."

"Hop on."

The hobo was more than anxious to hop on. The men in the car had awakened his interest. So far as he could make out in the dim light from the instrument board, they were well dressed. But their talk and their manner were not in keeping with their clothing. The man at the wheel was short, solidly built. He looked like a tough that had money. His companion was taller, of slender build. He had a very wide jaw and very hollow cheeks.

Tossing his bed roll into the tonneau, the hobo started to climb in.

"You ride on the runboard," snapped the man beside the driver.

"All right, boss. Suits me." The hobo stood on the runboard. The windows of the car were down. He grasped the edge of the front door. There were no bundles or packages in the tonneau, simply two suitcases and an overcoat. The occupants of the car were traveling light.

STANDING as he was, his face close to that of the man on the right hand side of the car, the hobo was able to identify his features and the way he carried his head. The driver stepped on the gas.

The big sedan leaped to thirty, forty, and was doing sixty when the man nearest him spoke. "How did you happen to hit Albuquerque? I thought you guys dodged that town."

The hobo braced himself against the sixty mile wind that tore at his clothing and flattened the brim of his hat over his eyes. "My mistake. Got ditched off a freight at Las Vegas."

"Traveling west, eh?"

"I was. But I changed my mind. Settin' out there on the flats I got thirsty. Been flaggin' cars all afternoon, but nobody stopped. You fellas was the first. Thought I'd run into town and get a drink. You ain't got a dime on you, have you?"

The man laughed. "Here you are." He shortened his arm as if to reach in his pocket. His fist shot out—took the hobo square between the eyes. The hobo swayed, lost his grip on the door. He lurched out into space. The car slowed down, stopped. The bed roll was thrown out. The car sped on.

About an hour later the driver of an eastbound truck discovered the hobo. He fetched a canteen and dashed water in the unconscious man's face. "What hit you, bo?" he asked as the hobo began to come to. The hobo's nose was swollen and his face spattered with blood. He seemed unable to speak. The driver heaved him up and loaded him onto the truck.

Down the highway the driver stopped again, climbed out and carried the bed roll to the truck. He thought it queer that somebody hadn't spotted it. But folks were getting leary of picking up anything at night.

A few minutes later the truck left the

highway, buzzed down a long drive and stopped in a ranchhouse yard.

"I'm bunking here by my lone," said the truckdriver as he helped the hobo down. "What in hell hit you, anyhow?"

"That's what I'm wondering."

The driver unloaded the bed roll.

"Found this about a hundred yards east of where I picked you up. They must have hit you a hell of a wallop to separate you and your roll like that."

They were in a bare, rough room lined with bunks, its walls papered with pictures, flossie ladies cut from magazine covers. The driver gave the hobo a shot of whisky. "I'm going to turn in. I got to light out at four. It's half past twelve now. Roll in. You'll be all right in the morning."

Sore from head to foot, his clothing torn, his face battered, the hobo was a sorry sight. He asked if there was a telephone on the ranch. The driver directed him to the foreman's office. He asked the hobo what he wanted a telephone for.

"To call up my rich uncle, in Albuquerque."

"Give him my love," said the driver grinning. "You're sure a tough guy to take a fall like that and come out of it alive."

The hobo limped to the telephone, got a number. The truck driver's boots thumped on the floor as he undressed in the next room.

"Burnham," said the hobo, his lips close to the mouthpiece, "at the first ranch west of town." He gave the telephone number. "Spotted a limousine, black or dark blue, two men, headed for Albuquerque. They stopped and picked me up. I got a good look at one of them. It was Gleason. I rode on the run-board. No. I don't think he suspected anything. He jolted me in the face and ditched me. No. I got my bed roll. They must have tossed it out of the tonneau after I hit the ditch. . . . All right. . . .

"I'll be on the lookout for Buzz." Burnham gave the number, style, and general description of the limousine. He limped back to the bunkhouse and lay down. The truckdriver was already asleep.

About forty minutes later someone knocked on the bunkhouse door. The truckdriver rolled out, yawning. Burnham sat up. He switched on the lights. Buzz stood in the doorway grinning. "Sweet Marie, but they sure worked you over!"

"This," said Burnham, as the truckdriver rubbed his eyes, "is my rich uncle. Thanks for the lift." He fished in his pocket, handed a bill to the truckdriver.

The truckdriver pocketed the five dollars. His eye roved from the hobo to the neatly clad Buzz. "Who are you guys, anyhow?"

"That five," said Burnham, "is to make you forget to wonder."

The husky young truckdriver grinned from ear to ear. Easy money didn't come his way every day. "I'm blind," he declared. "But that isn't saying I don't hope to meet you again." He followed Burnham to the doorway. Buzz was loading the bed roll into his bus. The hobo's rich uncle drove a nifty car. It bore an Arizona license plate. The truckdriver noted the number, not because he intended to report it; simply for his own satisfaction.

BRIEFLY Burnham sketched his recent experiences while Buzz drove toward the town.

"Sounds like Gleason," said Buzz. "He's the kind of crook that would shoot a man down just to see him wiggle. He knocked you for a loop just to see you roll. It's a wonder he hasn't bumped off Heinrich long ago."

The car drew up to Sinclair's hotel. They found Sinclair in his room. Burnham reported, then washed his battered face. Buzz sat smoking the inevitable cigarette. Burnham unrolled his bed roll.

Out came the soogun, the skillet and pail and cup. Wrapped in a thin cotton blanket which he carefully unrolled, was a short, ugly looking machine-gun. He examined it. "Well, they didn't get that, anyhow."

"It would have been right up their street," said Sinclair. "If they'd found it they'd have come back and finished you for keeps. You're lucky."

Burnham occupied Buzz's room, next to Sinclair's. Buzz, who had another of his ideas, left the hotel shortly afterward. From two that morning until daylight he made the rounds of the night garages and auto camps, looking for a dark colored limousine with a California license number. He found two, but neither of them was the car he sought. He made for the Harvey House lunch counter. Two cups of coffee, a slab of apple pie, and a cigarette, and he was ready to go again. He went. If the wanted car was in Albuquerque he was going to beat the local men to it.

Several hours later someone knocked on Burnham's door. Burnham roused himself. He got stiffly out of bed, noting that it was eight o'clock. Sinclair stepped in, followed by Buzz. "How do you feel?" asked Sinclair.

"Rotten. But I can still wiggle my ears."

"Hold 'em still. Buzz landed the car. About ten-thirty last night a man drove it to the garage. He sold it for cash. Gave the garage boss a clean bill of sale.

"I took a look at the bill of sale," said Buzz. "Name of owner James Burchell. Which doesn't mean anything. Was purchased in Los Angeles, spot cash. No time payments. Burchell me eye! My name is Jones."

Burnham was watching Sinclair's face. Sinclair said nothing.

"The boss at the All Night Garage," continued Buzz, "didn't want to talk. I took him to one side and told him a couple of things. He came across. Gave

me a neat description of the driver. It was Heinrich."

"Probably Gleason will buy another car, here." Sinclair nodded to Burnham. "Shave yourself and get fixed up. Wear your regular street clothes. We'll take a look round."

Sinclair reasoned that Gleason must have received the second telegram stating that Marion was sick in Albuquerque. Otherwise the killer would not have stopped there. He would telephone the hospitals, the sanatoriums. He would read the local papers, anticipating a clue as to her whereabouts through the advertising columns. That the killer would not locate his woman at once did not worry Sinclair. Had she been in town, doubtless she would have taken a room in some quiet neighborhood, waiting until she was certain the coast was clear before getting in touch with Gleason. A newspaper advertising column was a frequent medium of communication between crooks. Sinclair wrote the following ad. "Young lady traveling east would like companionship of middle aged couple who will share expenses. Man must be a good driver. Kindly give references. Reply care of this paper. Marion."

BUZZ took it to the newspaper office. Burnham and Sinclair considered the immediate possibilities. Gleason knew Sinclair by sight. The federal man, who had heretofore appeared on the streets, would have to keep in the background until Gleason was located. Meanwhile Burnham and Buzz would have to handle the active end of the operations. This suited Burnham. He said nothing. But Sinclair saw that he was as keen as ever to get the man who murdered young Bob Armstrong.

Sinclair called up Police Chief Calloway. When the Albuquerque chief learned that Gleason and Heinrich actually were in town, he offered to do all that he could to help land them. Sinclair

cautioned him to go slow. Gleason was a fox.

One wrong move and the killer would disappear. Sinclair suggested that the chief have a couple of plainclothes men watch the trains, and another check up the new and second-hand car sales. Meanwhile Sinclair's own men would try to locate Gleason.

After placing the men as Sinclair had suggested, Chief Calloway came over to the hotel. He had lunch with Sinclair. That afternoon Calloway, Sinclair and Burnham held a conference. Calloway was to see that his men didn't give out any information to the newspapers. When he learned that Sinclair hoped to take Gleason alive the police chief exploded. "If you hadn't started this job," he declared, "I'd order my men to kill him on sight. Suppose you fellows do get him alive. Chances are he'll break jail and shoot up a lot of officers before somebody gets him again. It's been done."

"If I happen to run into him," said Burnham quietly, "he won't break jail."

"That's different," growled Calloway. "You're a Westerner."

The following morning an ad appeared in a local paper. The writer stated he would like to meet the owner of the car going East. He described himself as middle aged and married. His wife would accompany him. Would the lady signing herself Marion call up such and such a telephone number. The ad was signed Richard Grant.

Burnham went to the telephone exchange. In ten minutes Burnham was back. The phone mentioned in the ad was in a service station, corner of Mountain and North Fourth Streets.

Burnham was instructed to drive out there, get some gas, size up the location and telephone to Sinclair. Gleason or Heinrich might be watching the service station. Gleason would be expecting a phone message. Sinclair doubted that the killers would now recognize Burnham,

shaved, in his street clothes and driving a car.

"If they do," said Burnham, "I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed. You won't take Gleason back to Chicago alive."

Sinclair said nothing. He liked Burnham, and trusted him. If the motorcycle officer didn't run into a trap and get killed, he had a future in the federal service.

Sinclair shrugged. Federal men, however, didn't count much on futures. They lived from day to day.

While driving out to the gas station Burnham asked himself what he was up against. He had come a long way since he had found his young friend Armstrong dead on the Plainview road. Gleason and Heinrich had to eat and sleep somewhere. They might be in the service station district. Or they might have taken a room in some other part of town and be using a car. In that event the probabilities were they would drive round to the service station to see if any message had been received for them. If he should bump into them at the service station—Burnham drove more slowly as he turned the corner at Fourteenth and headed toward North Fourth—well, he had a machine-gun, and he knew how to use it.

THE service station was new and neat. The two attendants stepped lively as Burnham told them to fill up the tank. He got out of the car, stretched and asked if he might use the telephone. There seemed to be no one loafing round the station or on any of the four corners. Burnham reported to Sinclair, and hung up.

As he paid the attendant he asked if he could notify him in case a friend called up.

"Sure. Dames or business, it's all the same to me."

"It ought to be," said the other attendant. "I'd quit pumping gas and run

messages all day for five bucks a message."

"That's a little high for me." Burnham got back into the car. Gleason was keeping out of sight. Obviously the expected message from Marion would be written down by one of the attendants and delivered to Gleason's address. By the merest flicker of chance Burnham got some more valuable information before he left.

"Those two guys at Mrs. Hathaway's," one attendant was saying to the other, "didn't look like ready money to me. But they've got it. Anyhow that fella Grant has. The other is a grouch. Five bucks—"

Mrs. Hathaway's? Grant? Burnham drove out of the service station onto North Fourth Street, stopped down the block and entered a drug store. The telephone directory showed Mrs. Hathaway's to be a boarding house on Mountain, the street number locating it about halfway down the block from the service station. Burnham asked the druggist where he could get a good room and board. Mrs. Hathaway's, the druggist told him, was the nearest place. Nice, clean rooms, reasonable rates and a good table. She might be full up. There were seldom any vacancies.

"No vacancies now," said the soda fountain clerk. "I board there myself. A couple of fellas blew in last night and took the only vacant room, the little room over the kitchen. Mrs. Hathaway didn't like their looks, so she asked 'em double what she'd been charging for the room. They never batted an eye. Paid in advance."

Burnham bought cigarettes, and stepping to the telephone booth, called up Sinclair. A few minutes later, Burnham met Sinclair, Buzz and Chief Calloway at the hotel downtown.

Immediately upon receiving Burnham's report, Sinclair drafted a message which read: "Party going East will be at North Fourth Avenue and Mountain Street at

eight-thirty this evening to arrange details. Would like to leave tomorrow if possible. Am feeling much better, Marion." Chief Calloway had his wife telephone the message to the service station at North Fourth and Mountain Street.



It was then three o'clock in the afternoon. At first Burnham wondered why Sinclair had mentioned the gas station corner in the message. But when he reasoned it out Burnham saw that it fitted into the general scheme perfectly. The Marion of the telephone message was Gleason's woman, quick to take a hint. She would check up the telephone number in the "Richard Grant" ad, find that the phone was located at Mountain and North Fourth, and arrange her plans accordingly. It would be far safer for her to come to Gleason than for Gleason to meet her downtown. If a downtown rendezvous had been mentioned it might have awakened Gleason's suspicions. Moreover, Gleason would be quite apt to ask the service station men if the message had come from a woman. Hence Mrs. Calloway's participation in the maneuvers.

Unfortunately Chief Calloway made a mistake. He had placed two men at the Santa Fe station in case Gleason should show up there. This was quite satisfactory to Sinclair. Calloway also had two plainclothes men watch the gas station at Mountain and North Fourth. These men

located themselves in the vicinity of the cigar stand directly opposite the gas station—not near the drugstore, a block down the street, where Sinclair would have placed them. Their instructions were to simply watch the gas station, telephone if Gleason or Heinrich appeared, but not to start anything until Calloway himself showed up. In all probability Gleason and Heinrich would be on foot. If the bandits had procured a car, the officers at the drugstore were to follow the car. Calloway intimated that the killers were not to be captured alive.

All this was regular routine so far as Buzz was concerned. But the little man didn't approve of it. Too much lost motion. Why not go after the killers right now, surprise them in the boarding house, and make a job of it? Without discounting Gleason as a killer, Buzz was quite willing to lead the way up the boarding house stairs, break into the back room and start something. Sinclair knew it. Knew also that Burnham if permitted, would do the same thing. But Sinclair did not intend to waste his men in such a move, even if he got the credit for wiping out Gleason.

While loafing near the cigar stand, one of Calloway's detectives saw a stocky, ill-featured man in a brown suit stop at the gas station. It was Heinrich, inquiring if there had been a phone call for Mr. Grant. Yes, a woman had phoned. Heinrich read the message, stuck it in his pocket and crossed the street to the cigar stand. He bought a couple of packages of cigarettes, glanced at the clock, and went on down the block on North Fourth. He walked over to Fourteenth Street and came round to the boarding house on Mountain Street from the opposite direction. The officer immediately telephoned to Calloway at Sinclair's hotel.

WHEN Sinclair learned that Calloway's men were located directly across from the gas station he asked Cal-

loway to have them placed near the drug-store down the block on the opposite side of the street. Calloway was still at the phone. He issued the necessary directions.

A few minutes later Gleason, with a machine-gun wrapped in an overcoat, stalked into the gas station. He gave one of the attendant's a bill for taking the phone message. Meanwhile Gleason was watching the cigar stand across the street. Finally he crossed over. Describing the plainclothes man who had recently been there as a friend of his, he asked where he was. The cigar clerk didn't know. After calling up someone on the phone, he had left. Hadn't been back.

Gleason laid a dollar bill on the counter. "Happen to know the number he called?"

"I don't pay much attention to guys phoning," said the clerk. "But this guy was a stranger. He might have been trying to work a long distance call and charge it to our phone. So I listened in. But it was a local number—R.G. 2604."

Gleason called the number, learned it was the Antlers Hotel. That told him nothing. Had R.G. 2604 been the police station it would have explained Heinrich's suspicion that the man he had recently seen near the cigar counter was a plainclothes man. Gleason got the police station. "This is Bill," he said, at a venture, "corner North Fourth and Mountain. I want to talk to the chief."

The chief, he was informed, was not at the station, he was at the Antlers Hotel. Gleason's mouth twisted in a hard grin. "My mistake," he said, and hung up. He was stepping away from the cigar counter when the clerk called to him. "I didn't know you were on the force," said the clerk, as Gleason, his eyes boring into the other, swung round. "The guy you're looking for and his partner got their car parked down at the next corner. Looks as if they were watching for somebody."

"I'll see 'em," said Gleason. But ignoring the police car which the cigar clerk had pointed out, he kept on down Mountain to the boarding house. Always alert, always suspicious, the killer had not until then even imagined the Albuquerque police knew he was in town. He was in a particularly ugly mood when he told Heinrich they were leaving, and leaving on the jump. Heinrich dared to expostulate. It was still daylight. They were on foot. Wouldn't it be safer to slip out of the boarding house the back way, make for the open country west of town and lay low until night? And how about Ruddy?

"To hell with her! We're leaving now, and we're leaving in a car. Take the suitcases. I'll handle the tommy." Gleason indicated the machine-gun wrapped in his light overcoat. Heinrich picked up the heavy suitcases. With both hands full he would be in a bad fix if they tangled with the police.

As usual Gleason sent Heinrich out to the street to see if the coast was clear. At Heinrich's signal Gleason came out of the boarding house. They walked to the gas station. Gleason telephoned to the drug store on North Fourth a block below. Stating he was Chief Calloway he asked the clerk to slip out and tell the officers in the patrol car to drive up to the gas station, corner of North Fourth and Mountain. Meanwhile Heinrich stood near the door of the service station watching the street. There were no cars filling at the station. The lot was clear except for a truck which stood at one of the air hose standards. Both attendants were talking with the truckdriver. Gleason gestured to Heinrich. They stepped into the men's toilet room and closed the door.

FOOTSTEPS crunched on the gravel. The service station attendant was talking. "No, I haven't seen anything of Chief Calloway. Say, you guys got it

pretty soft, sitting in your car watching the world go by." Gleason nudged Heinrich. Heinrich opened one of the suitcases, taking out a machine-gun with the stock removed. He was about to step out when the man who had been talking to the attendant walked round to the toilet room. "Excuse me," he began, as he saw it was occupied. "I didn't know—"

Recognizing the detective he had seen at the cigar stand, Heinrich instantly opened up with the machine-gun. The plainclothes man swayed, started to reach for his gun, but sank down, his chest riddled.

"The car!" cried Gleason. He jumped past Heinrich, dashed out. The other officer had stepped out of the police car, was running toward the station. Gleason swung the muzzle of his gun. A ripple of shots mowed down the running man. One of the slugs, which went high, took the cigar stand clerk, across the street, between the eyes.

He span round and dropped behind the counter, where he lay unnoticed for several minutes.

"Get the suitcases!" cried Gleason. "I'll take care of the hicks." But those on the street had been quick to take care of themselves.

Gleason stood near the police car, ready to shoot down anyone who made a move to stop Heinrich as he lumbered across the gravel with the heavy bags. As the killers jumped into the police car, the service station attendant ran to the station, took a gun from the drawer below the cash register. Just as the car started, he fired. The shot tore through the shoulder muscles of Heinrich's left arm. The car roared, jumped the crossing and droned away, heading out North Fourth Street. The service station attendant grabbed the telephone.

From behind the truck parked at the air-hose standard came its driver. He was known to the boys at the station as

a good natured guy. Only a few days past he had picked up a crippled hobo on the main highway and toted him to the ranch. The truckdriver's name was Joe Baker.

Joe didn't seem so good natured now. "Give me that gun!"

"Hell! You ain't going after those birds—"

"Ain't I?" Baker glanced at the body of the plainclothes man near the toilet room doorway. He shoved past the attendant, took the gun and started towards his truck. He was out of the lot and roaring down North Fourth Street before the dazed attendant knew exactly what had happened.

About five minutes later a dark colored limousine swung up to the corner of North Fourth and Mountain. Chief Calloway jumped out.

"Those fellas," said the service station attendant, "went north on Fourth Street. Joe Baker took after 'em in his truck."

Calloway hastened to the telephone.

Sinclair spoke to Buzz. The limousine swung round the driveway and onto the street. "That truckdriver's got more nerve than judgment," said Sinclair as they zoomed out North Fourth Street. "Give her all she's got, Buzz."

Far out beyond the city limits they overtook the truck which was doing a perilous fifty. As they swept past, Sinclair leaned out and signaled to the driver to stop. Joe Baker didn't know why he should stop, but he had caught the number of the limousine. It was the car that had come to the ranch for the hobo.

Joe Baker stopped. He had recognized Buzz. But there was no time for explanations. "Those fellas," said Baker, "quit the highway yonder. Second road running east. I saw 'em turn off."

"How do you know it was their car?" asked Sinclair.

"There wasn't any cars between them and me, going north."

"Sure they didn't keep on toward Santa Fe?"

"Dead sure. They turned down the old Gomez road."

"Know that country, Burnham?"

Burnham shook his head.

"I know every foot of it," declared Baker. "She's a blind road. Runs out to the old Gomez ranch. You can't drive a car beyond that. Too many arroyos."

"Good road?"

"No. Rougher'n hell. That's how I come to spot 'em. They had to slow down, or get ditched."

"How about the ranch? Who runs it?"

"Nobody runs it since old Solario Gomez cashed in. She's a dump."

As usual, Buzz was nervously anxious to get going. The killers had taken a blind road. To escape they would either have to drive back to the highway or take to the brush on foot. Sinclair, however, seemed in no hurry. Up to this time he had hoped to capture Gleason alive. But since the killing of the two plainclothes men, Sinclair had changed his mind. He intended to stop Gleason and stop him now. "What's the country like round the Gomez ranch?" he asked Baker.

"Flat, open country. Plenty of arroyos. Not much brush. And no water that I know of, except at the ranch."

IN TWO or three hours it would be too dark to do any tracking should Gleason and Heinrich abandon the car. The probabilities were that they didn't know they had been closely followed. They would hesitate to abandon the car. When they found they were on a blind road, would they turn back, or would they hide out at the abandoned ranch until nightfall and then return to the highway?

Both Buzz and Spence Burnham were wondering why their chief didn't drive up to the Gomez road now, and block it. Sinclair, however, didn't want the killers

to know they were trapped. If they took to the country on foot, it would mean a long chase with the possibility of losing them. They could travel a considerable distance under cover of night. It was now about half-past four.

Burnham, who sat in the front seat beside Buzz, leaned over and spoke to him. Buzz nodded. "Chief," said the little man, turning to Sinclair, "we've got it all fixed. We're going to need this truck here, to pull the job."

"She's yours," said Joe Baker quickly. "You can wreck her—if it'll help land those birds."

"O.K.," Buzz grinned. "Burnham and I'll take the truck and drive to the ranch. If Gleason is there, and sees a truck coming, he won't be so likely to take to the brush. If we drove up in this car he would know there was something wrong. What I mean, in the truck we can get close enough to him to do some good."

"You wouldn't get within a mile of Gleason in those clothes," said Sinclair. Nevertheless he was inclined toward Buzz's plan.

"That's easy. Baker and I will make a quick change. Say the word, Chief, and I'm a hick truckdriver, and Baker is a Sears Roebuck dude."

Buzz and the truckdriver exchanged clothing. Sinclair and Joe Baker sat in the limousine, parked just off the highway. The truck lurching and pounding, Burnham and Buzz drove down the rutted Gomez road.

"This is my party, Buzz," said Burnham.

"That Armstrong boy was a pretty good friend of yours, wasn't he?"

"I wasn't his only friend."

"I get you. Now if there were a few shells dropping on this road I'd feel right at home. Can't you sing something, or is dancing your long suit?"

Buzz kept up his kidding until they came within sight of the ranch buildings,

huddled in a hollow that dipped from the right hand side of the road. Thus far they had seen no sign of the killers except the tire tracks of the police car. There was still about a quarter of a mile to go. Burnham's gaze was fixed on the distant ranch buildings. Joe Baker had said that the road ran past the ranch a few hundred yards and ended in an arroyo. "Keep right on past the ranch," said Burnham. "When we find you're on a blind road, naturally we'll turn back and make for the highway. That means we've left this neighborhood. If Gleason and Heinrich are watching it may help to throw them off their guard."

"Getting cold feet?"

"No. I'm getting off the truck when you turn back, if I can do it without being seen from the ranchhouse. You're driving back alone."

"Got any more funny ideas?"

"I'll try to make it up the arroyo Baker mentioned," said Burnham, "and come round on the ranch buildings from the south. Gleason and Heinrich will be watching you drive back, if they're anywhere around."

Buzz was about to expostulate when he had another one of his ideas. "All right, buddy. You're just as crazy as I am."

ABOUT two hundred yards back from the roadway stood the old adobe ranchhouse, its heavy walls badly eaten by the rain, its windows broken, the roof of the front porch sagging. In the yard lay rusted tin cans, rags of discarded clothing, rusted iron springs, a decrepit wagon box, a broken wheel—the filth and litter which accumulates round an abandoned building. Beyond the house the barn and outbuildings huddled in a forlorn heap.

As they drove past, Burnham could see no fresh tire tracks leading into the ranch driveway. He wondered what Gleason had done with the police car.

His gaze swept over the dilapidated corral, the water trough, the straggling fence south of the outbuildings.

The truck lumbered on, following faint tire tracks of a lighter car. Buzz was singing a ribald ditty about doughboys in France. He noted there were no return tracks. Evidently Gleason had driven past the ranch, unaware that the road ended a few hundred yards beyond. The truck lurched and clattered in the still, evening air. A rabbit dodged from the roadside brush. Burnham noted that the stolen police car had turned off the road to the left just before reaching the arroyo. Surmising it was hidden in the willows that lined the arroyo's western bank, he nudged Buzz. Were Gleason and Heinrich hiding near the police car, or were they laying low in one of the abandoned ranch buildings?

Buzz stopped the truck. "Hell!" he said in a loud tone, "We're on the wrong road!"

Burnham played up to this lead. "I told you we couldn't get over to Agua Fria on this road. We should have taken the first road south. Now we've got to get back to the highway."

"Then we'll load the alfalfa in the morning. The boss is in a hell of a lot more of a hurry than I am." Laboriously Buzz backed the heavy truck and swung round. "Been driving since four this morning. I'm all in. What's the matter with camping at the ranch over there? We can get a feed and a sleep, and light out early tomorrow morning."



"We're going back, and we're going to load the alfalfa tonight. Maybe next time you'll listen when I tell you which road to take."

Burnham dropped off the truck and ducked into the brush. Buzz drove on down the road, arguing in a loud tone as if his companion were still in the truck. The little man drove fast, regardless of ruts and high centers.

Arriving at the highway he reported to Sinclair. "Give me a tommy-gun," said Buzz. "I'm going back on foot."

Joe Baker was keen to accompany him, but Sinclair told the truckdriver he could use him right where they were. "Back your truck across the Gomez road and leave it there. If Gleason tries to make the highway he'll run into something. Take care of yourself, Buzz."

Buzz laughed. He lighted another cigarette as he swung briskly down the old dirt road as if late for a party at which he would meet convivial friends.

Burnham lay in the brush peering toward the willows along the arroyo, listening, speculating as to whether Gleason and Heinrich were in the police car or in one of the abandoned ranch buildings. The air was still, the evening pleasantly warm. By degrees his vision adjusted itself to the dusk creeping across the mesa. In spite of himself he kept thinking of young Bob Armstrong, of Armstrong's parents, and the girl Bob was to have married. Getting the men that killed Armstrong was a tribal matter, not a federal job. But even if he got Gleason, what satisfaction was there in it? Merely the questionable satisfaction of revenge. Gleason's death would be no solace whatever to Bob's friends, his parents, or his girl. For the first time since he had started on the long chase it came to Burnham that his job really was not a personal matter. It was bigger than that. It was a national job. Blotting out the killer meant eliminating one more menace to humanity. If he continued in the federal service Burnham knew he would have to put aside all personal preferences and animosities. He would be sent after men who had never done him or his

friends an injury. He wondered if he would be as keen to get his man in such instances.

FIFTEEN, twenty minutes passed. Starlight had dissolved the evening dusk. Surrounding objects were actually more distinct. A great silence enveloped him. Another five minutes passed. Buzz, Sinclair and the truckdriver would be guarding the west end of the Gomez road, speculating as to the outcome of his lone attempt to get the killers. Patiently Burnham watched and listened. The bandits might have abandoned the car in the brush and taken to the mesa on foot. Cautiously Burnham rose and crossed the road.

Feeling his way step by step, he approached the willows along the arroyo's edge. From clump to clump he moved like a shadow. Finally, through the thin, ghostly willows he discerned a glint of starlight on metal. Slowly he outlined an automobile, the starlight glinting on the polished radiator cap. Although aware that Gleason and Heinrich might be hiding nearby, Burnham kept on. Now he was alongside the car. It was empty.

"They're either out on the mesa, or in one of the ranch buildings," he told himself.

As cautiously as he had come, he retraced his steps to the arroyo. Plodding through the heavy sand of the arroyo until about opposite the ranchhouse, he lay on the edge watching and listening. Finally he rose and crossing the dead orchard, made his way to the rear of the barn. As he stood peering through a frameless window he heard a sound like the fall of a hard object on a board floor. The sound came from the ranchhouse beyond. Had there been a breeze it might have been a loose door slamming. But there was no breeze.

Moving round the end of the barn, Burnham crawled to an old, wheelless wagon box in the yard. He was now

within thirty or forty feet of the ranch-house. About to make his way up to the building he was startled by the sound of a voice, so distinct in the silence that the speaker might have been within a few feet of him. "Let's get out of here, Rud. This damned arm——"

"I'll put you out!" came in another voice, harsh, snarling.

Burnham heard a shuffling as if some one who had been sitting had risen. Then came the first voice in a hoarse, terrified appeal: "Don't quit me, Rud! I'm your pal."

"Hell of a pal you are! Squealing like a rat because a slug burned you."

Evidently something had happened to Heinrich which had made him more or less useless to Gleason. Burnham surmised that Gleason intended to leave Heinrich in the adobe and make his get-away alone.

Rising, Burnham stalked through the shadows. He reasoned that Gleason would be in the front room, watching the road. Reaching the back door Burnham hesitated. The floor of the house would be old. The warped boards would creak under his step. Quick as thought with his gun, Gleason would fire at the first sound.

TO ENTER from the rear, not knowing the position of the interior doorways, would be suicide. Burnham crept along the weathered wall to the front of the house. The sagging veranda roof darkened the doorway. He could not tell whether the door was open or shut. If he made a run for it, and it was closed, Gleason could put a dozen shots through the door before it could be kicked open. Reaching down Burnham picked up a few small pebbles. He tossed one onto the veranda. No sound came from the dark interior of the adobe. He tossed a second pebble. In the succeeding silence he counted five, and tossed another. "Where you going?" he heard someone say in a

muffled voice. A board creaked. Burnham watched the darkened space midway down the veranda. But nothing appeared. Gleason, in stocking feet, was making for the rear of the house.

Burnham heard the faint whine of a rusted hinge as the front door slowly swung open. As slowly the muzzle of a gun pushed out, a thin dark rod against the plane of starlight at the farther end of the veranda. Dropping on one knee Burnham waited for the man behind the gun to show himself.

But there were two men in there. One of them was standing just back of the front doorway. The other—— Burnham glanced along the wall of the adobe toward the rear. Moving silently, a blurred figure was gliding along the building toward him.

Had Gleason's vision been adjusted to the dim starlight, he would have immediately identified that huddled something at the corner of the adobe. Over cautious, he wanted to make sure.

Catching a movement as Burnham swung round, Gleason pressed the trigger of his machine gun. Burnham, however, had opened up, with Gleason centered in the circle of the sight. Shots buzzed round the federal man like a storm of bees. He was hit once, twice, but he kept on firing. Then something jolted him like the blow of a sledge. Dimly he heard the sound of shots behind him, heard someone call his name. He tried to rise. He fell forward, plunged down into a soft and ever deepening darkness.

HE AWOKE, conscious of considerable pain, but his mind had cleared. He was in a hospital. Someone was standing in the doorway talking to the nurse. "Five minutes," she said. "He must not talk or get excited."

"Lady," it was Buzz's voice, "I'm the guy that's excited."

Buzz breezed in, fumbling an unlighted cigarette. Burnham raised his eyes. Buzz

was looking down at him, a peculiar half smile on his hard, thin face. "You listen," said Buzz. "I'm doing all the talking." He gestured round about. "I been through this five or six times myself. About the first thing a guy says to himself when he comes out of the big sleep is, 'How long have I been here?' Answer, 'You've been here three days, and you didn't go out nights any.'"

A faint smile touched Burnham's lips. Buzz grinned. "As you were!" said Buzz. "Next question, 'How bad was I hit?' Answer, 'three times, and each shot drilled you clean.' Lucky. The doc didn't have to do any excavating."

"Just about now," continued Buzz, "you're wondering why Heinrich didn't mow you down from the front door. Making it short and sweet, one of your friends was squatting behind that old gatepost in front of the adobe watching you toss gravel onto the veranda. When he saw you wheel and open up on somebody down along the side of the house, that guy behind the gatepost he opens up on the front door. Seems Heinrich was standing in the doorway. Too bad."

Buzz kept fumbling with the unlighted cigarette. "Fact is, Spence," he said seriously, "when I turned you over and took a look at your front, I figured you was a total loss. But I took a chance and freighted you into town. And here you are."

"For how long?" murmured Burnham.

"Sinclair's been here pretty regular. He says you'll be up and out in a couple of weeks. He wrote to your family, and the banker in Plainview. I guess that's all."

"Not quite," said Burnham. He raised his hand slowly and with some difficulty. Buzz stared for a moment, then grinned. "Hell! The patient wants to shake hands with me!" Buzz felt embarrassed. His throat grew tight. He turned to the nurse. "How about it, nurse?" But he didn't wait for an answer. Burnham's fingers were pressed in the little man's hard grip.

"Your time is up," said the nurse.

Ignoring her, Buzz was speaking to Burnham. "Don't you believe it. The chief has got us slated for another big job just as soon as you can travel. Details later. You see," Buzz hesitated, then he had one of his ideas, "I'm going along with you so I can hold your hand in case you get lonesome."

"Get to hell out of here," said Burnham.

And Buzz got out. As he walked down the street he smoked furiously. Burnham had had a try out. Burnham was the goods!

As for Burnham himself, he felt pretty well damaged and helpless. Buzz's visit had tired him. Well, there was nothing to do but rest. Rest and wait—the waiting was the hard part of it—until he was up and could tackle the new job. But why worry about anything? A federal man lived from day to day. If he had luck he might live a long time.



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"Damn It All", Said Corporal Downey, "I Am Hunting Murderers, Not Moose!"



BEAVER FEED

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Many Stories of Corporal Downey of the Mounted and of Halfaday Creek

1
CUTER MALONE, proprietor of the notorious Klondike Palace, a dive shunned by the sourdoughs, but liberally patronized by those chechachos whose tastes ran to lurid women, gambling, and bad whisky, mouthed his black

cigar and, from his position behind the bar and directly in front of the huge iron safe, eyed the scene without fatuous satisfaction. It was one o'clock in the morning, and the Palace was going strong. Through a thin haze of tobacco smoke he could see beyond the wide archway where the dance hall floor was crowded with men and women whirling like Dervishes

to the accelerated tempo of a rag-time piece pounded out on the tinny piano by the pasty faced "professor," hopped up to a frenzy of rhythm.

At the farther end of the bar four men argued drunkenly about the advisability of blondes, and across the room six silent men played stud. In the rear of the room the faro dealer dealt indifferently against half a dozen players who strung their piker bets on the upturned cards. At the roulette table, though, there was real play. Men rimmed the table five and six deep, staring wide-eyed, and breathing deeply, while the croupier spun the wheel and raked in and paid out stacks of chips as four men fresh in from the new camp on Ophir bucked the tiger with bulging pouches of dust.

Malone's pig-like eyes twinkled with greed as he contemplated his unholy profit from the women, the bar, and the gaming tables.

Before the bar, almost opposite Cuter, a tall youngish man with a hooked nose, and an older, thick bodied, squat one drank sparingly as they eyed the passing show with apparent interest.

The group about the roulette table parted to make room for one of the players who made for the bar, a fat pouch in his hand. "Chips," he demanded, tossing the pouch onto the bar before the proprietor, "all that'll buy."

Malone opened the sack, weighed the dust, tossed the empty sack back, and handed the man several stacks of chips from a niche at the corner of the back bar—for it was a rule at the Palace that no dust and no cash should pass across the tables, only chips; and those chips must be bought and cashed in at the bar where Malone kept personal supervision over the big iron safe. He took no chances on any of his profit sticking to his croupiers and dealers over and above the percentage he paid them at the end of each night's play.

Pocketing his empty pouch, and with his hands full of chips, the chechacho re-

turned to the roulette table, as Malone pouched the dust from the scales, popped the little sack into the safe, closed the door without twirling the dial, and leaned back against it as he held a match to his half-burned cigar.

Casually, the tall, youngish man left the bar and sauntered over to join the group which had again parted to let the player through with his fresh stacks of chips. Bets were laid, the wheel spun and the croupier snapped the little ball as the crowd watched with bated breath.

"Damn you, get off my foot!" Those were the words that several bewildered men reported to Corporal Downey later that morning. None knew who had uttered them, nor did any man know to whom they were addressed. All anyone could remember was that someone, presumably at the edge of the crowd that rimmed the roulette table, had cried out, "Damn you, get off my foot!" and had followed the words with a violent shove, that sent men lurching against the table which crashed to the floor amid a shower of clattering chips and the sound of splintering wood.

THE next instant pandemonium reigned as men fought frenziedly—punching, kicking, gouging, to free themselves from the tangled mass, or to fill their pockets with the precious chips that could be cashed in at the bar for gold. Chairs crashed down on heads and flew into splinters. Men dropped to the floor and lay very still, as others fought with fists, chairs and table legs, trampling the prostrate bodies.

The stud players joined the *mêlée*, fighting, they knew not why—but fighting just the same. The music stopped suddenly, as men and women surged through the arched doorway from the dance hall, the men to join the fracas, and the women to rush screaming and squealing into the street where they started a cat fight of their own as they jammed the doorway to

get a view of the *mêlée* from that point of comparative safety.

Malone had launched his huge bulk around the end of the bar at the first sign of trouble and stood at the edge of the squirming, fighting mob, bawling for his bartenders, and roaring curses at the crazily fighting mob. A flying chair-rung smashed his glowing cigar back into his thick lips and he clawed frantically to rid his heavy mustache of the burning particles, just as the three bartenders arrived swinging bung starters with telling effect.

A bartender went down as a table leg caught him on the side of his head, smashing his ear, and Malone, cursing like a mad man rushed back to the bar with murder in his heart. Just as he reached the end, and started to pass behind it, a squat figure with lowered head lurched heavily toward him, meeting him in the narrow alley between bar and safe, the head catching him squarely in the fat paunch with a jolt that set him flat on his back with an agonized wheezing grunt as the world became a chaos of black, shot through with whirling stars.

It was just at that moment that young Constable McBain, of the Northwest Mounted Police managed to force his way through the clawing squealing women that clogged the doorway, and with drawn gun, reached the rear of the room, to pause at the edge of the fracas and call loudly for order.

A hickory chair leg swung high and descended with a sickening, smashing thud upon the back of his head, and he pitched forward among the writhing struggling men, as his gun slipped from his nerveless hand.

II

CORPORAL DOWNEY opened his eyes and glared sleepily up at Constable Peters who bent over his bed at detachment.

"Wake up, Downey! There's hell to

pay down to the Klondike Palace! A fella jest run up from there to report it."

"What do you mean—hell to pay?" asked Downey. "Why can't McBain handle it—he's on town patrol tonight?"

"Accordin' to this fella, McBain's dead, er anyway knocked—"

"What!" Corporal Downey's two feet hit the floor, as he reached for his clothing.

"That's what he claims—says there was a hell of a rookus started in the Palace an' McBain run in there, an' got knocked cold. An' Cuter Malone's knocked out—an' a lot more."

"Damn Malone!" growled Downey, as he buckled his belt and stooped over the lacings of his shoes. "It would be a good thing if he'd stay knocked out for keeps. Believe me—if McBain's done in, an' Malone had anything to do with it, he's robbed his last chechacho—you can bet yer life on that!"

When Downey reached the Palace he found the place a shambles. Half a dozen men lay among the debris of broken tables and chairs that littered the blood splotted floor, while men with battered faces slumped in the few remaining chairs, leaned against the bar, or sat along the edge of the raised dais that held the piano in the dance hall.



The big cannon stove, cold because the night was warm, lay on its side, with sections of its long pipe lying about in confusion. The women, their tawdry finery torn and rumpled from their street fight-

ing, and streaked with soot from the stove pipes, stood about still bickering.

Downey made straight for a small group of men who stood looking silently down at a still form, clad in police uniform, that lay stretched on the floor. Swiftly he dropped to one knee beside the young officer, as his fingers gently explored a wound in the back of his head from which blood had trickled to form a pool on the floor. Then he rose abruptly to his feet and those nearest him involuntarily stepped back, as they caught the steely gleam of his gray eyes.

"Who killed McBain?" he demanded, in a hard, tense voice. "Out with it—quick! Who killed him?"

A girl screamed hysterically at the words, but no one answered, as the young officer's gaze swept from face to battered face.

"Shut up!" snapped Downey, and pointed to the dance hall. "Get in there—every one of you!" he ordered. "You, too!" he added, as his eyes swept the men. "Every damn one of you. There's no outside door to that room, an' the only way you'll get out is to talk yer way out."

WOMEN and men moved into the dance hall, and Downey turned to the bar where one bartender was applying bandages to another one's ear, while the third bent over the thick-bodied proprietor who lay unconscious on the floor, just beyond the open end of the bar. "Come on—you!" he ordered. "You heard me—I said all of you—an' I meant it."

The beaproned one looked up from the prostrate man. "Cuter's knocked out," he explained. "We got to fetch him to."

"Let him stay out!" snapped Downey. "If he's dead, you can't do anything; an' if he ain't, he'll come around all right. Get in the dance hall an' make it snappy. A policeman's been killed in here—an' every man an' woman in this house is in serious trouble till I find out who done it. Someone swings for this night's work—

an' don't you forget it! There ain't a chance in the world that he'll get away with it—an' anyone that lies, or holds out information on me'll either swing along with the murderer, or do plenty of time. An' remember this—the police are the judges in this man's camp, an' a policeman has been killed."

When all were in the dance hall, Downey took his place in the doorway and allowed his gaze to travel slowly from face to face. The girls huddled in a group near the piano, whimpering, sniffing, preening their rumpled and besmirched finery, carrying on their venomous bickering in hissing undertones. The men waited in silence, some nursing their injuries, others eyeing the officer in sullen expectancy. Downey beckoned to the croupier.

"You, Creegan—come here. By the looks of things, the thick of the rookus was around your wheel. Who started it—an' why?"

The man, Creegan, his left eye swollen and discolored, stepped in front of Downey. "I don't know who started it," he said. "Four guys from Ophir was givin' my wheel a play. They was flush, an' slingin' their chips around lib'ral. One guy jest stepped to the bar an' bought him a fresh stack, an' no more'n they'd got their bets down after he comes back, then someone hollered, 'Damn you, git off my foot,' an' the next thing I know'd the table went down with three, four guys on top of it, an' the chips all scattered to hell, an' everyone punchin', an' gougin' one another, an' clawin' an' grabbin' fer chips off'n the floor, an' table legs, an' chairs swingin'. I figger someone tromped on someone's foot an' he give him a shove an' shoved some of the crowd agin the table—an' that's what started it."

"Who was it said, 'Damn you, get off my foot?'"

"I don't know. Like I told you, the bets was down, an' I'd jest spun the wheel—my eyes was on the layout."

"Are the four men you claim was playin' the wheel here?"

Three men detached themselves from the crowd and stepped forward.

"Where's the other one?" asked Downey.

Silence greeted the words, as men peered about, searching for the missing player. Then the croupier pointed through the doorway, beyond the officer. "That's him—layin' there on his belly acrost the table top. He's the one that bought the fresh stack. Someone must of socked him."

Downey eyed the three. "Know anything about how this started?" he asked, suddenly.

The men shook their heads. One of them spoke. "We was right around the table layin' our bets. There was a crowd behind us, lookin' on. Whoever started it must of been in the back of the crowd. The first thing I know'd was when we all went down in a heap an' someone was sockin' me."

The faro dealer reported that he had heard the sharply uttered words, "Damn you, get off my foot," and looked up from his layout just in time to see the crowd surge suddenly forward and the roulette table crash to the floor amid the sound of grunts, and curses, the thud of blows, and the splintering of wood. He had no idea of who uttered the words, or who shoved the men against the table. A moment later his own table was smashed by the milling, fighting crowd, and he sought protection behind a bartender who had followed Cuter from the bar and was wielding a bung starter.

Further questioning developed the fact that none of those questioned saw McBain struck down—not one of them even knew that a policeman had entered the room until after the fighting subsided they saw his body on the floor. Each, apparently, had been too busy with his own part in the war to take note of any happening beyond his immediate vicinity.

BELIEVING that the men had told the truth, Downey took their names, and allowed them to pass into the bar-room, telling them to do what they could for the unconscious men on the floor.

As they filed past him a man holding a bloody handkerchief to his forehead rose from the edge of the dais and confronted Downey.

"I seen the guy sock the policeman," he said. "He done it with a chair-leg, an' then, when he seen I seen him, he let me have it, too."

"Who was it?" asked Downey eagerly.

The man shook his head. "I never seen him before. But believe me I want to see him one time more—swingin' on the end of a rope! If you kin git him, I'll help hang him—the son of a gun damn near knocked my head off."

"Where did he go after he hit you?"

"How in hell do I know? The next thing I know'd I was crawlin' through the door there, an' then I laid down. Gosh, my head aches! It feels like it's stove in."

Downey stepped closer and examined the wound, as the man removed the handkerchief. "You're all right," he said. "The skull ain't busted—only the skin. Look around careful now, an' tell me if the man that brained McBain is in this room. Take yer time, look at everyone—an' don't be afraid to speak up if you see him."

"Don't worry," said the man. "I'll talk." Slowly he passed among the crowd of some twenty or thirty men, looking intently into their faces and returned to Downey. "He ain't here," he said.

Downey, who had been watching his progress with lynx-like eyes to note any threatening glance that might stop the man's tongue, was satisfied that the murderer was not in the room. Each had withstood the man's scrutiny with apparent indifference.

"Are you sure you'd know him if you saw him?" he asked.

"I'd know him if I seen him in hell,"

replied the man with quiet conviction. "Could a guy sock you in the face with a chair leg—an' you wouldn't know him agin, if you seen him?"

"Go look over them men that's layed out, an' see if he's one of them," ordered Downey.

The man complied, and returned to say that the killer was not among them. Downey took the man's name, and ordered him not to leave the premises. Then he turned his attention to the girls.

"Come over here—all of you," he ordered curtly. "What was you all doin' when the fight started?"

SEVERAL piped up with the answer for all—they were dancing. One, acting as spokeswoman, stepped forward. "When it started the men all piled out here an' got in the row, an' we ran for the door. What with furniture flyin' around, an' the stove pipe fallin', an' the yellin', an' cussin', an' fightin', it wasn't no place fer a girl, an' we beat it." She paused, and Downey nodded.

"All right—go on. You beat it fer the door—what did you do, then?"

"Why—we stayed there an' tried to see what was goin' on. But what with all the pushin' an' pullin' an' shovin', an' the smoke in the room, an' the soot from the stovepipe flyin' around we couldn't see nothin' much—but we could hear it."

"All right—now listen to me, an' mind you get this straight. I'm tellin' it to you fer yer own good. You all know who I am—you know I'm in command of the Dawson detachment—an' you know that means I can make it damn tough for anyone that tries any monkey work. We haven't be'n hard on you girls. You've got yer livin' to make, an' that's your business, the way we've looked at it—as long as you don't overstep certain bounds. There may be a few of you girls that hates a policeman, because he's a policeman—an' that's all right with us, as long as you don't interfere with our work. But

most of you have got sense enough to know that you're a lot better off if the police know yer on the up-an-up.

"I don't believe there's any of you, even those that hate policemen, that would uphold the murder of a young officer who was merely doin' his duty in tryin' to quell a riot. I know that most of you girls look at it just like I do, an' jest like every right-thinkin' person would—as a low down, cowardly unprovoked attack." Downey paused, and noted that nearly every girl in the crowd was nodding agreement. He continued. "I don't know why McBain was killed. I believe there's somethin' more to this murder than appears on the surface. The man who killed McBain must have had some better reason than jest because McBain was tryin' to stop a barroom brawl. He had some personal grudge against McBain—or he was afraid of him for some reason. If it was a personal grudge, we prob'ly can find it out, by checkin' back over McBain's arrests.

"If it's some other reason, we'll find that out, too. A policeman has been murdered, an' we'll find his murderer an' hang him, if it takes every Mounted Man in the Yukon to do it—an' you girls have got to help. An' believe me—when this is over with, we'll know who has helped us, an' God help the ones that holds out information, or lies to us. Jest think that over, an' see if yer goin' to be better off lined up with the police—er with some damn rat of a murderer that ain't fit fer any one of you to wipe yer feet on.

"Listen, now—you girls was all crowded around that front door from the time the fight started. Is that right?"

There was unanimous agreement, and Downey continued. "Then you must have been there when McBain come in."

The girl who had volunteered the information before, answered. "Sure we was. He shoved on past us, an' hurried on to the back of the room. I was jest inside the door tryin' to keep from gettin' shoved

further into the room by the girls behind me who wanted to see, too."

"Did you see McBain struck down?"

"No, I didn't. Like I told you the room was full of smoke an' soot, an' we couldn't see nothin' plain—jest a kind of a mix-up of men fightin'—an' the sounds."

"All right—now this man that saw McBain struck down, says the man that done it ain't here in this room. The bartenders, an' the croupier, an' the faro dealer all claim the back door is always kept locked when there's a play at the table. It's locked now. Did anyone go out past you through the front door?"

The girl's brow wrinkled in thought. "Yes," she replied, after a moment of hesitation, "two men shoved out past us. I didn't pay no attention to 'em—much. I was tryin' to see what was goin' on back in the room."

"Was that after McBain went in?"

"Why—yes, I guess it must have been—"

"Sure it was," supplemented another girl. "I remember the both of em, 'cause they shoved me around, an' I took a poke at the first one—he was a drunk."

"A drunk?"

"Sure—he walked kind of slow an' staggy. He was a kind of a heavy-set guy with a stubby beard, an' he shoved right through us."

OTHER girls corroborated the statement, fixing the man's exit as occurring after the arrival of McBain.

"All right," encouraged Downey, "an' how about the other one? You said there was two."

"The other one was a tall guy, an' younger. He didn't have no whiskers, an' he had a kind of a thin, sort of hooked nose—an' he wasn't soused. He come bustin' out through us, hell-bent, like he was scairt."

"That's the guy that socked the policeman!" exclaimed the man who had seen the assault, and who had remained at

Downey's side. "Tall an' thin, an' a nose like a hawk!"

"That's him," agreed one of the girls, as others nodded agreement. "But it was his eyes I seen plainest—they was hard, mean lookin' eyes, pale blue. I got a good look at him when he shoved past me. I figgered he was scairt of gittin' one of them clubs that was flyin' around. The dirty pup, if I'd known he'd croaked that young cop, I'd of grabbed him—it was a dirty trick."



"Did any of you ever see him before?"

All shook their heads in the negative.

"How about the other one? Know him?"

Again he received a reply in the negative.

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

Two of the girls, the one who said she had taken a poke at him, and another, thought they would know him if they saw him, but could not be sure, as they thought him only a drunk, getting out of the way, and paid him scant attention in the excitement.

"If we bring anyone to you for identification you want to be sure you're right," Downey cautioned. "Them two might tie in together, somehow—an' we don't want to hang no innocent man."

A loud bellow of rage from the direction of the bar focused attention on Cooter Malone, whose thick shoulders could be seen above the counter, as he leaned forward staring into the big iron safe. "I've been robbed!" he roared loudly. "Downey—I've been robbed!"

CORPORAL DOWNEY turned toward him with a frown. "Shut up," he said. "This murder comes first. I'll get to you later." He turned to those in the dance hall. "I guess I've got all the information I need to start out with," he said. "If anyone thinks of anything further that will help throw any light on this case, they can tell me about it. I'll take all yer names now, an' then you can go—but no one is to leave Dawson without reporting to detachment, until this case is cleared up."

Those in the room filed past, each giving a name, which Downey recorded in his note book. Then he turned to the bar. "All right, Cuter, how about this robbery?"

For answer, the man pointed into the safe, the door of which stood open, exposing to view rows of small gold sacks stuffed like sausages. "There's a lot of 'em gone," he said. "I can't tell how many till I check 'em with the book."

"When did you find this out?" asked Downey.

"Right now—when I yelled to you. I got knocked out—the boys jest fetched me to—an' the first thing I done was look at the safe—an' it was locked."

"Looked at yer safe before you looked at McBain, layin' dead there on the floor," said Downey dryly.

"Hell, you was there to look after McBain. The safe was my worry."

"Yeah? Well, you said it was locked. How could it have been robbed, if it was locked?"

"That's the hell of it—it hadn't ought to been locked. I don't keep it locked when I'm here—too damn much trouble to turn the combination every time I want to git into it, so I shet it an' turn the knob jest a little—but not enough to lock it. I'd jest sold a big stack of chips an' shoved the dust in the safe when the rookus started, an' I run over there. Then, when I seen it was a real fight had started, I yelled for the boys to fetch the bung

starters, an' run back here fer to lock the safe an' git my gun, when a guy comes bustin' out around the bar, stooped low, an' butts me in the belly with his head, an' that's all I know'd till the barkeeps fetched me to, an' I seen the safe was locked. What happened, this guy musta know'd the safe wasn't locked, an' when the rookus started, he waited till me an' the barkeeps had run over there, an' then ducks around behind the bar, opened the safe, an' helped hisself to what dust he could pack off in his clothes, an' then when I come back fer the gun, he ketched me in the belly with his head."

"What did he look like?" asked Downey.

"Look like! How the hell do I know what he looked like! I never see nothin' but his back, an' the back of his head, the way he come at me—all bent down. I do know he had on a checked shirt an' a red undershirt—I seen the red under the collar of his checked shirt."

"Was he light built, or heavy?"

"He musta been heavy built, 'cause he looked damn wide acrost the back—what little I seen of him. He come at me so damn quick I didn't have no time to look. All I know about him—his head is hard as hell. No light-built man could of set me back the way he done."

"Were you lookin' on when the fight started?"

"No, I was lightin' my seegar, when someone in the crowd by the roulette table hollered to git off his foot, an' the next thing I know'd hell was a-poppin' fer fair. Looks to me like the damn cuss that got his foot tromped on give someone in the crowd a shove, an' knocked him agin the table an' knocked it over, an' then they all begun fightin' fer chips."

CORPORAL DOWNEY nodded, "Yeah," he agreed, after a moment of deep thought. "Only, I don't believe anyone stepped on anyone's foot. The whole thing was planned for the purpose

of robbin' the safe. Two men teamed up—the one that butted you down, and the one who killed McBain. They knew, somehow, that the safe wasn't locked—so one of 'em deliberately started the fight, knowing that if he could tip the table over when it was piled with chips, it would start a fight that would draw you an' the bartenders away from the safe. Just as soon as you ran over there, the other one slipped around the end of the bar, opened the safe, grabbed off what dust he could carry, closed the safe door, twirled the combination, and then beat it, after knocking you out. That, too, would explain the other man's vicious assault on McBain. He wasn't killed merely because he ran in here to quell a riot—it was because he'd busted right into the middle of a robbery. Stop an' think, Malone—didn't you notice two men at the bar just before the rookus started—a tall slim man with a hawk nose, an' a short thick-set one with a beard?"

Malone scowled as his low, heavy brow wrinkled in thought. "Seems like they was a couple of fellas like that, but I didn't pay no 'tention to 'em. Seems like I seen 'em standin' there in front of the bar when I sold that chechacho that last stack of chips."

"Standin' where they could see whether or not you twirled the safe knob after putting the dust in?"

"Well—yes, they could of saw that. Seems like they was standin' right there where they could look acrost the bar an' see the safe."

"All right," said Downey. "Get a move on an' check the dust in the safe."

A half hour's work revealed the fact that twenty-five eighty-ounce sacks of dust were missing.

"Two thousan' ounces!" bellowed Cuter, "Thirty-two thousan' dollars in dust gone to hell—an' a couple more thousan' fer tables, chairs, an' a new wheel!"

"That's a hundred an' twenty-five

pounds of dust," figured Downey. "Too much for a man to stuff into his pockets. That robbery was planned beforehand. The man that got the dust had a sack of some kind hid under his shirt. An' that's why he walked out past the girls slow—like he was drunk. A man can't move very fast with a hundred an' twenty-five pounds of dust on him. The other one ran out."

III

AT detachment, Corporal Downey summoned his constables and told them to comb Dawson for a tall, smooth-shaven young man with pale blue eyes and a hooked nose, and for a thick-set man with a stubby beard and a red undershirt worn under a checked shirt. He dispatched a constable downriver with word of the murder to the Forty Mile detachment, where the Inspector ordered every man to be stopped who was heading downriver, thus cutting off escape to Alaska. The Inspector also sent Downey five extra constables for work on the outlying creeks where gold camps of considerable size had sprung up on Bonanza, Ophir, Hunker, and numerous other creeks and rivers in the Klondike area.

A constable left on the steamboat, *Sarah*, for Whitehorse to notify the detachments there and Tagish to cut off escape to the outside by way of the Passes. Whitehorse detachment sent three constables to swell Downey's forces and every man jack of them was on duty twenty-four hours a day, running down leads, investigating tips and rumors, and questioning men by the hundreds.

It was discouraging work from the start. No clues had been left at the scene of the crime, and apparently no one had seen the two wanted men, either before, or after their appearance that night at the Klondike Palace.

For three weeks Downey sat at his desk, scanning the reports of his con-

stables, directing the search—listening to a hundred worthless tips and suggestions from well-meaning, but over-meddlesome citizens.

One morning he called Constable Peters. "You take over here at the desk," he said. "We ain't gettin' nowheres. We've had fourteen men on this case fer three weeks an' about all we've found out is that you can't buy a red undershirt in Dawson, that damn few thick-set men that wear checked shirts wear red undershirts under 'em, an' the few we've found didn't have nothin' to do with the robbery."

Peters nodded. "It don't seem possible that two men could come in here, an' no one ever see 'em—except jest that one time," he said.

"They were smart enough to keep inconspicuous. Either they kept apart, or else they camped outside town, somewhere. I've checked the boat records with Tagish, an' no one remembers two men like that comin' in together, an' the steamboat crews don't recollect any such characters comin' in on the boats."

"Mebbe them dance hall girls give a bum description of 'em?" Peters suggested.

Downey shook his head. "Nope—I've questioned 'em again an' again—an' the bird that saw McBain struck down, too. They all stick to the description they gave first. They're tellin' the truth as best they can. We've got to remember that they seen these men at a time when they was all excited, tryin' to watch that fight, an' their descriptions might be a bit sketchy—but they're O.K. in the main. Anyhow, it's all we've got to go on."

"You say you want me to take over the desk? What you goin' to do? Got a hunch, er somethin'?"

"Yeah," answered Downey. "I'm goin' up to Halfaday Crick."

"I'd thought of Halfaday," said Peters, "an' kind of wondered why you hadn't sent someone up there."

Downey grinned. "I've thought of it, too. But I knew there was no use of sendin' any constable up there. Them boys on Halfaday know me—an' it might be I can find out somethin'. Any other policeman goin' up there wouldn't have no luck, an' if the men we want are there, it might make 'em uneasy so they'd hit out through Alaska. I'd of gone sooner, but I wanted to direct the hunt myself, an' to be here on the job in case they were picked up. I figured that if they'd got to Halfaday, they'll stay there."

Peters nodded. "Yeah, I s'pose they would. Damn it—they must be there! We've combed this whole country for a hundred miles around with a fine toothed comb, an' they ain't here. They didn't git outside upriver, or down—they must be some place—an' if they ain't no place else, they must be on Halfaday."

"Stands to reason," grinned Downey.

"Black John Smith would know if they was on Halfaday," said Peters. "But damn it—when it comes to that—Black John's an outlaw hisself."

Downey nodded. "Yeah, that's right. But you've got to remember, Peters—there's a damn sight of difference in outlaws. Black John would never club a policeman to death from behind. An' he wouldn't have much use for anyone that did."

IV

"AN' of course," opined Black John Smith, as he stood, his foot resting on the brass rail, and a drink of liquor before him, "you got to admit, Cush, that the acquisition of them Philippine Islands might be a damn good thing fer the U. S."

Old Cush, the sombre-faced proprietor of Cushing's Fort, the combined trading post and saloon that served the little community of outlawed men that had sprung up on Halfaday Creek, close against the Alaska-Yukon border, mopped

the bar perfunctorily, and spat into a box of sawdust. "In what way?" he asked. "An' what's acquisition?"

"Why takin' 'em over—like we will, when we git them niggers licked. Them islands might be a damn good thing to have."

"What fer?"

"Why—hell—they raise bamboo over there—an' coconuts."

"Who in hell would go to war over bamboo an' coconuts, both of which ain't neither of 'em worth a damn if you git 'em?"

"They raise rice, too."

"Chinese feed," grunted Cush. "If I would be a soldier an' git shot over bamboo an' rice an' coconuts, I would be mad as hell. An' if it would be a nigger that shot me, I would be all the madder."

A form darkened the doorway, and a man in the uniform of the Northwest Mounted Police stepped into the room.

"Hello, Downey!" greeted Black John.

"Yer jest in time to jine us in the drink Cush is about to buy when we git this one throw'd into us. What's the good word?"

Corporal Downey ranged himself beside Black John and poured a drink from the bottle Cush shoved toward him. "Any newcomers on the crick lately?" he asked.



"Well, folks come, an go—specially in the summer time. Was there any special newcomers you had in mind, er are you jest takin' the census?"

"Special ones—a tall, slim, youngish man with a sort of a hawk's nose an' pale blue eyes—prob'ly smooth-faced. An' a heavy-set man, prob'ly wearin' a stubby

beard. This 'one might wear a checked shirt, an' a red undershirt."

"Hell," grinned Black John, "so might anyone. Is these parties friends of yourn, er have they, in some way, overstepped the bounds of respectability?"

"Fer one thing, they robbed a safe in Dawson?"

"H-u-m. Did they make the venture pay?"

"They got away with two thousan' ounces."

"The item is worth contemplatin'. Whose safe did they rob?"

"Cuter Malone's."

"Cuter Malone's! Haw, haw, haw! Well, there's one act in their career that old St. Peter will have to credit 'em with on the right side of the ledger! They didn't, perchance, further enhance their value to society by injurin' Malone in the process, did they?"

Downey turned to Cush. "Have these men showed up on Halfaday?"

"I couldn't say."

"How about it, John? Are they here on the crick?"

"Nope. An' I'm plumb surprised an' disappointed in you, Downey, that you'd harbor the thought that I'd dabble in the nefarious business of connivin' at the arrest of anyone who could rob Cuter Malone."

"If anyone would run John through a wringer an' squeeze all them big words out of him onct, someone could tell what he was talkin' about," opined Cush sourly.

"It ain't the Malone robbery that brings me up here, John," Downey replied. "It's the fact that in pullin' it off they killed a policeman—young McBain, a damn fine young officer."

"Killed McBain, eh?" exclaimed Black John. "He was a nice chap! About the pick of yer bunch down there, I'd say, except mebbe Peters. That's shore too bad, Downey. How did it come about?"

Corporal Downey gave a full account of the happenings that night in the Klon-

dike Palace, and at its conclusion, Black John scowled darkly.

"Clubbed him from behind with a chair-leg, eh? Never give him a chanct. An' him doin' his duty stoppin' a bar-room scrap. You say the tall one done it, eh? Whilst the other made off with the dust? You shore you kin hang 'em, Downey—if you was to, somehow, pick 'em up?"

"Dead sure, John. We've got an eye witness to the murder—an' both are equally guilty."

Black John nodded. "Looks like the law couldn't find no handy way to botch that case, from what you say. But you never kin tell." He paused and cleared his throat roughly. "Of course," he suggested, "if you couldn't locate these parties—an' later someone was to deliver 'em down to Dawson in a defunk condition, that would preclude any chanct of yer evidence back firin' on you, wouldn't it?"

"We're goin' to hang the man that killed McBain legally, in Dawson," Downey replied.

"Been about a month since this here murder come off, eh?"

"Just about."

"An' I s'pose you been kind of busy—been workin' kind of hard on the case, eh?"

"Fifteen of us have been on it every minute since McBain was killed."

"An' you ain't got nowheres?"

"Not yet, but we will. You're sure these men are not on Halfaday?"

"Nope—I told you they wasn't. An' I ain't had no reason to change my opinion. But the fact is, Downey—you been workin' too hard. You look kind of tired an' wore out. What you need is some kind of a rest—a chance to git yer mind off this case fer a while. How about me an' you goin' on a moose hunt?"

"A moose hunt! Are you crazy? As I told you, I've been on this case every minute since McBain was killed, an' I'm

goin' to stay on it every minute till we crack it—till the man that murdered him is hanged."

"We're gittin' kind of low on meat," Black John said. "We don't like to kill no more'n what we need, on account of it sp'ilin' in hot weather like this. I see fresh sign the other day on a crick that runs into Halfaday a little ways above here."

"Damn yer moose!" exclaimed Downey impatiently. "I'm huntin' murderers; not moose."

"Yeah, that's what you was tellin' me. A good moose hunt never hurt no one, though. An' sometimes I've been huntin' one thing an' run plumb onto somethin' else, when I was least expectin' it. Cush, there, he's got a good rifle he'd loan you. He's got three, four of 'em. You could take yer pick. I'd shore like fer you to go along—we need that meat pretty bad."

Something in Black John's manner focussed Corporal Downey's attention. "All right," he said abruptly, "let's go after meat."

WITHOUT a word Old Cush handed a rifle and part of a box of cartridges across the bar, and Downey took them. Then he followed Black John to his cabin, where the big man procured his rifle, and led the way up the creek.

Some three miles above the fort Black John paused at the mouth of a smaller creek that flowed into Halfaday from the north. "There's plenty of popple on this crick," he said. "That sign I seen was a couple of miles up in the popples near a beaver dam. Keep yore eye peeled when you come to them popples—yer liable to start yer game in there. Moose is dangerous, this time of year. I'm goin' to foller around along the rim in case they'd try to bust out up a draw."

They separated, Downey following the creek, and Black John striking upward onto the higher ground that formed the

rim. As the officer proceeded his heart beats quickened with expectancy. He knew Black John Smith, knew him well as an outlaw who brazenly boasted the hold-up of an Army payroll over in Alaska, but who had kept his skirts clean of crime in the Yukon. He knew that there had been occasions when certain sums of money and dust had mysteriously disappeared from the cache of some crook who had sojourned on Halfaday, and had come to grief through disobedience of the iron-clad law laid down by Black John, and enforced by verdict of miners' meetings, that no crime of any kind would be tolerated on Halfaday—and he held no doubt whatever that Black John had appropriated these sums to his own use. But he knew, also, of numerous other sums which the big man could easily have appropriated without possibility of apprehension—sums belonging to innocent individuals who had been robbed or swindled—which had been returned to their rightful owners, or to the police for restitution.

The big man's ethics were the ethics of a Robin Hood, supplemented by a Gargantuan sense of humor. He knew that Black John would not have turned over his hand to aid the police in the arrest of the men for the robbery of the notorious Cuter Malone, that he would, in all probability, have warned them of the presence of the police on the creek in time for them to have slipped across the line into Alaska. But he also knew that the wanton murder of young McBain had put an entirely different aspect on the matter in the mind of Black John, and that there was some deep significance in the big man's persistent invitation to go on a moose hunt at this particular time.

DOWNEY pushed on up the creek, along the banks of which patches of scrub willows alternated with groves of aspen and open meadows, moose pastures, in the vernacular. Crossing an open

meadow, he approached an aspen grove larger than any through which he had passed.

Swinging the rifle into the crook of his arm, Downey smiled to himself. "This must be the grove of popples where John said he saw the moose sign. But why would moose be hanging out in the popples? And why did he warn me that moose were dangerous this time of year. He was warning me about something—what was it?"

Just as Downey was about to step through the fringe of scrub spruce that rimmed the grove, a sharp command startled him. "Drop that gun, Copper—an' drop it quick!"

Downey whirled to find himself looking squarely into the muzzle of a rifle held to the shoulder of a man who stepped out from behind one of the bushy trees, not twenty feet distant. He promptly dropped the rifle, and the man advanced a step or two, still keeping him covered.

"Now git them hands up, an' turn around!" When Downey complied, the man advanced behind him and, with the rifle muzzle against his back, reached out and drew the service pistol from the officer's holster. "Now walk on ahead of me through the popples—an' don't try no monkey work, er out goes yer light."

Downey noted that the man was tall and young and smoothshaven, and that his thin, high-bridged nose gave his face a decided hawk-like appearance. Noted also the pale blue eyes that fixed him with a gleam of hate—the cold eyes of a killer. He complied, following a faint trail through the aspens, and directly came out into a small clearing made by the beaver in falling trees for food, and for a damn that formed a considerable pond. In the doorway of a small A tent sat a squat, thick-set man whose face was covered by a stubby brown beard. Downey noted that he wore a red and black checked shirt that flared open at the

throat to expose an undershirt of red flannel.

The bearded one grinned. "Hello, Copper—glad to see you. Welcome to our home, as the feller says. I s'pose Black John Smith tipped you off to where we was?"

Downey shook his head. "No," he answered. "When I described you two to Black John an' Cush, they both claimed there was no such parties on the crick."

The thin lips of the tall man twisted into a sneer. "That's right, Copper—cover up fer yer stoolies. But we wasn't made in a minute. I s'pose you come right on up here all by yer lonesome without knowin' nothin' about us?"

Downey regarded him with a level stare. "I know plenty about you," he replied. "Enough to hang you both higher than hell. You might have got away with the robbery of Malone's safe, but when you murdered young McBain you shoved your necks in a noose jest as sure as yer standin' there. No one can kill a policeman an' get away with it."

"No?" sneered the man. "You can't only hang a guy once—so what's the penalty fer knockin' off two cops?"

Downey grinned. "The two hangin's will prob'ly be allowed to run concurrently."

"Smart guy, eh? Quite a kidder. Well, if you know any more jokes, you better git 'em off yer chest—'cause you ain't got much time left. If you dumb cops wouldn't keep hornin' in all the time where you ain't wanted, there wouldn't be so many of you git croaked."

The squat man stood up, scowling. "What's the use of all the rag-chewin'? Let the damn copper have it—an' we'll git him buried before someone comes along."

"There ain't no hurry," the other replied, "an' besides, we ain't goin' to bury him. It's too damn much bother to dig a grave—an' then some other dumb cop might come along an' find it. We'll tie

a rock to his neck an' throw him in the pond an' give them beavers some fresh meat for a change. They must be tired of livin' on bark."

"Yer fools if you think you can get away with it," said Downey.

"Yeah? I s'pose we'd be smart guys if we turned you loose, eh? Hangin' a guy's all right, Copper—but you got to ketch him first. An' there's a hell of a lot of country around here—an' damn few cops."

"Let him have it!" growled the squat man nervously. "Hell, don't stand around an' talk all day!"

The other sneered, and extended the rifle. "Do it yerself, if yer in such a hell of a hurry," he taunted. "Here—take the rifle."

The heavily bearded one drew back and the tall man laughed. "I thought so—you ain't got the guts to. I take notice it was me that had to croak that other one while you clawed the dust out of the safe. At that, a good man would of grabbed off half ag'in as much."

"Is that so! Well, just you try walkin' off with—"

"Oh hell, there ain't no use in scrap-pin' amongst ourselves," cut in the other, and turned to Downey. "Git ready, Copper—in about two minutes, yer goin' to be shakin' hands with the devil." He drew Downey's service revolver from his belt, and handed the rifle to the other. "Guess I'll give it to him with his own gun so he'll know how it feels, an' besides, I've always wanted to try out one of these police guns."

V

"HELLO, boys!" With a smile on his lips, Black John stepped into the clearing, and instantly the squat man covered him with the rifle. "Drop that gun!" he commanded, and Black John complied, an expression of pained surprise on his face.

"What the hell? Oh it's you boys! So here's where you located, eh?"

"Yeah, come on to the party," invited the bearded one, as both grinned at Black John, who advanced to the group and seated himself on a fallen tree. "Couldn't of guessed where we was located, could you — you damn double-crossin' stoolie—steerin' the cop up here the first chance you got!"

"Black John Smith—King of Halfaday Crick," sneered the tall man. "Surprised as hell to find us on this crick, ain't you —when you been watchin' us from the rim with yer field glasses fer a week, tryin' to find out where we cached the dust! Thought we was asleep on the job, didn't you? Well we wasn't, by a damn sight. But you didn't find out, did you?"

"Nope," Black John replied. "It kind of looks like you boys had outsmarted me."

"You don't never help the police nor hinder 'em, neither, you told us," taunted the thick-set man.

"That's right," Black John agreed. "Downey here, he'll tell you I ain't never hindered him none — an' God knows, from the fix he's in, I ain't helped him." The big man paused and slapped viciously at his neck. "Looks like you could of picked a better place than a damn mosquito hole like this. Don't you know no better'n to camp beside a beaver pond?"

The tall man grinned thinly. "The mosquitoes ain't goin' to bother you long," he said. "Any damn doublecrosser that would steer a cop up agin' a couple of guys, ain't got long to live when them guys ketches up with him—see?"

"Cripes!" exclaimed Black John, a note of obvious anxiety in his voice. "You ain't figgerin' on knockin' us off, are you?"

"Oh, no!" grinned the tall man. "Hell, no—we wouldn't do nothin' like that! Why, we're even figgerin' on splittin' that

dust four ways—jest to show there's no hard feelin's—an' then buyin' a drink."

Black John fanned at his face with his hat, and reaching down his shirt collar, slapped at his shoulders. "Damn them mosquitoes! But say—the boys on Halfaday won't like it much, if you knock me off, an' the Mounted will be mad as hell if you croak Downey."

"Yeah? Well, to hell with the Mounted —an' to hell with the Halfaday Crickers, too! You got to be king of Halfaday because you was a little smarter'n the rest of 'em—that's the only way you could of. Well, when a couple of guys comes along that's a little smarter'n you —that's your hard luck. At that, though, we wouldn't of croaked you, if you hadn't of doublecrossed us. Halfaday Crick's goin' to have a new king, an' I'm him—see? An' there ain't goin' to be no more rules about helpin' er hinderin' police, an' keepin' crime off'n the crick. From now on, anything goes on Halfaday, an' if any damn copper shows up on the crick, it's goin' to be jest too damn bad fer him. By the time threé, four more of 'em turns up missin' in this neck of the woods, the Mounted will learn to cut a wide circle around Halfaday."

BLACK JOHN cursed the mosquitoes, slapping at his hands and face, and slipping a hand beneath his shirt to scratch at his chest. "You boys wouldn't murder a couple of fellas in cold blood, would you," he asked. "Why not give us a break?"

"We'll give you a break, all right," taunted the tall man, "the same kind of a break the law would give us fer croakin' that cop in Dawson."

"You'll swing for that," said Downey.

"Yeah? Well, you won't be there fer the swingin'."

Black John continued his slapping and smashing at mosquitoes, and scratching at his belly and ribs with a hand thrust

beneath his shirt. "Hey," he said, "you spoke of buyin' a drink, a while back," he reminded the tall man. "We won't hold it agin you if you don't divide up the dust, but we shore as hell would appreciate a drink—I'm dryer'n a post hole. You shore wouldn't begrudge a man one last drink, would you?"

The tall man turned to the other. "How about it?" he asked. "Should we give 'em a drink?"

"Give 'em nothin'," growled the other, "but a slug of lead between the eyes. What the hell's the use of wastin' good lickin'?"

"It wouldn't need to be good lickin'," urged Black John, "a pull out of one of them bottles you got off'n Cush would do us."

"Oh, all right," grinned the tall man, and turned to the other. "Keep 'em covered with the rifle, Hank, an' I'll fetch a bottle. Hell—even the law gives a man a drink before it hangs him. If either one of 'em makes a wrong move—plug him."

Thrusting Downey's service revolver beneath the band of his trousers, he stepped into the tent as Black John continued to dig at his ribs. Suddenly he cried out: "Don't try it, Downey!"

The squat man, swung the rifle toward Downey, and in that instant, Black John's hand flashed from beneath his shirt and his .45 six-gun shattered the silence of the little valley, as the squat man pitched forward upon his face, the rifle barrel rooting into the ground. The next instant, the gun roared again, and the tall man gave a yelp of pain as Downey's service gun dropped from his hand in the doorway of the tent and he stood staring at the blood-spouting stump of his thumb.

A moment later, Downey slipped the bracelets on him, and set about bandaging the injured member, as the man scowled at the gun in Black John's hand. The big man grinned at him.

"Hello, King!" he taunted. "I don't mind admittin' that fer about fifteen minutes you was King of Halfaday Crick, all right. But if you've ever read back in hist'ry you'll realize that kingdoms is fleetin'."

The man snarled. "The copper was s'posed to pack a revolver," he said, "an' I looked after that one—but I know'd damn well no one else in the Yukon did."

"You mean, hardly anyone," grinned Black John. "But you got to remember, Sliver, that there's always a few benighted folks in every community that refuses to conform to convention."

"It was them mosquitoes that throw'd us off," growled the other. "If it hadn't be'n that you was scratchin' at them, you'd never got yer hand under yer shirt. At that, I thought it was kind of funny that what few mosquitoes was buzzin' around would bother a man like you."

"It's overlookin' small matters like them that gits a man in bad," grinned Black John. "You ought to know damn well they wouldn't."

"Where's that dust cached that you got out of Malone's safe?" asked Downey abruptly. "It'll never do you any good—you might's well come acrost with it."

"Yeah?" sneered the man. "An' if I do come acrost, I s'pose the law won't hang me fer croakin' that cop? I'm no damn fool. I know that if things breaks agin me, I'll swing fer that job—an' turnin' in the dust wouldn't help a damn bit."

"That's right."

"But I ain't hung yet. Mebbe I'll git a break of some kind. An' if I do, that dust'll come in handy as hell. Go find it—if you think you kin. You'll never git nothin' out of me."

Downey turned to Black John. "Wait till I chain this bird to a tree an' then we'll hunt for the cache."

The big man grinned. "What do you mean—we? You know damn well, Downey, that on Halfaday, we don't neither help nor hinder the police."

"But I've got to find that dust."

"Yeah? Well, hop to it. Tellin' you about me—I ain't got no sech compunc-tions. Hell, Downey—I done you one good turn already, today. I knocked off one of them damn skunks, but I saved you the one you've got a clear case agin to hang. It would of been a damn sight easier to have drilled him right through the middle—them thumbs is hard to hit."

Old Cush, rifle in hand, stepped into the clearing.

"Well—what the hell you doin' here?" asked Black John in surprise.

CUSH dropped his rifle butt to the ground, removed his hat, and mopped at his brow with a huge red bandanna. Then, very deliberately, he shifted his quid and spat toward a beaver-gnawed stump. "Oh, I jest got to figgerin' that mebber them two birds might git it into their head that you two wasn't moose huntin', an' might try to git the best of you, some way. So I trailed along—jest in case."

Black John laughed loudly. "Git the best of us! You mean, you figgered a couple of punks like them two could git the best of me an' Downey? Cripes, Cush—what do you take us fer?"

"Well, One Armed John told me he seen you watchin' their camp through them glasses of yourn a few days ago, an' he seen that there tall cuss awatchin' you. So I kind of figgered mebber they might mistrust you if you was to show up here with Downey. Thought they might git the drop on you, er some-thin'."

"Oh, hell, Cush—nothin' like that!"

"No?" asked Cush dryly. "Well, mebber my eyesight's kind of gone back on me, but it looked for a while, from where I laid back there in the popples, like I might have to do some damn quick shootin'."

Corporal Downey laughed. "You win, Cush. An' I don't mind tellin' you I'd

have breathed a lot easier if I'd known you was there. If it hadn't been for you an' John, I'd have been in a hell of a jam. Come on now—let's see if we can locate that cache."

"What cache?" asked Cush, mouthing an end of his drooping yellow mustache.

"Why—the two thousan' ounces these birds have got cached somewhere around here."

"Whose ounces?"

"Cuter Malone's. I told you about their robbin' Cuter's safe."

Cush shook his head. "I couldn't work up no appetite to hunt around on a hot day like this fer to git Cuter Malone back his dust. It don't pain me none that he lost it. He never owned an honest ounce of dust in his life. Wait up, till I git that bottle that guy dropped when John clipped his thumb off, an' we'll take a little drink."

The three drank, giving the prisoner a drink, also. Then for a while Black John and Cush sat nicking away at the bottle while Corporal Downey searched for the cache.

Presently Black John strolled over to the pond and took a drink of the water. Cush stared at him in amazement. "Huh," he commented. "That's the first time I ever seen you drink water when there was licker around."

"I don't often indulge in water," the big man admitted, "but it ain't apt to hurt a man none, if took in moderation, 'specially on a hot day. I s'pose, that whilst Downey is searchin' fer that cache, me an' you might's well go ahead an' bury the corpse. Bein' coroner, I s'pose yer willin' to admit that he's dead?"

"Yeah, he's dead, all right, an' as sech, I s'pose he's got to be buried."

Black John produced a shovel from the tent, and proceeded to dig in the sand. Cush frowned. "Hey—why not dig over there by the crick instead of amongst them stumps where we'll be runnin' into roots all the time?"

"We kin chop what roots we'll hit easy enough," Black John replied. "We ain't goin' very deep. A damn cuss like the deceased don't rate no hell of a lot of diggin'." Downey joined them as the sand was mounded over the grave. He had succeeded in finding the twenty-five empty sacks buried in the earth under the blankets in the tent—but though he had gone over the ground carefully, and searched innumerable crevices in the nearby rock wall, he had found no trace of the gold.

And in the early evening they all returned to the fort.

VI

THE following morning, Black John sauntered back to the bar, after stepping down to the landing to see Downey off with his prisoner. Cush looked up, pencil in hand, from a paper that lay on the bar.

"Two thousan' ounces," he stated, with a confirmatory glance at the paper, "figgers up to thirty-two thousan' dollars. It's too damn bad that all that dust is layin' in some cache up that crick."

"Yeah," agreed Black John. "When One Armed John shows up so you kin leave him to tend bar, you an' me'll slip up there an' git it. It'll figger sixteen thousan' apiece. Like I always claim, Cush—it pays to work hand in glove with the police."

"How in hell we goin' to find it, if Downey couldn't? You claimed the other day, you couldn't locate their cache with them glasses of yourn."

"That's right. They was smarter'n what I give 'em credit fer. They never tipped off their cache. Mostly, fellas like them, you kin locate their cache by watchin' 'em. Even if you don't see 'em cachin' the stuff, if you stick on the job, you kin generally ketch one er the other slippin' out to check up an' see if the other one's been tamperin' with it. Birds

like them ain't apt to be none too trustful of one another."

"How you goin' to find it, then?"

"Well, I believe Downey failed to draw logical deductions from some fairly obvious—"



"You mean, you know where the cache is at?"

"I could hazard a guess. Or, if you'd care to make a sportin' event out of it, one ounce will git you ten, if I'm wrong."

"I'll take that bet," said Cush. "Ten to one is a good bet, if I lose."

"Fer onct," grinned Black John, "I believe yer right. Here's One Armed John now. Come on—let's git goin'."

ARRIVING at the former camp site of the two outlaws, Black John began immediately to remove his clothing.

"What in the hell you goin' to do?" asked Cush, eyeing him with ill-concealed astonishment. "Yesterday you was fightin' mosquitoes for all you was worth with yer clothes on, an' now yer strippin' 'em off."

"Yesterday," replied Black John, "I utilized the mosquitoes. Today I ignore them."

"Huh, one way to kill a damn mosquito would be as good as any other, an' if big words would kill 'em, there wouldn't be a damn one left around Halfaday."

"Come on," grinned Black John, "let's go swimmin'—it's a hot day."

"Swimmin'! You gone crazy?"

For answer, Black John waded waist-deep into the pond and dived beneath the surface, to reappear a moment later with a billet of green aspen, some twenty inches long, its ends chopped as squarely as though they had been sawed. Laying the billet on the bank, he dived again and again, until ten such billets lay side by side on the bank. Then he climbed from the water and resumed his clothing."

"Them beavers," opined Cush, "would starve to death next winter, if you stayed in swimmin' much longer. What's the idee of stealin' beaver feed. They work hard fer their livin'."

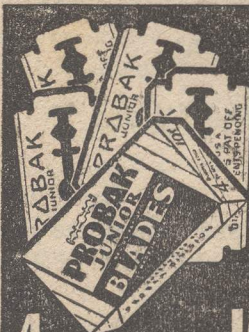
For answer Black John pointed to the ends of the billets. "They must of used an ax, then. See them ends? Notice the plugs in 'em? Now, just heft one of them chunks. Two thousan' ounces divided amongst ten chunks make two hundred ounces, er twelve an' a half pounds to the chunk."

Old Cush stared at the billets. "You mean that they cached their dust in them chunks an' sunk 'em in the pond?"

"Yup—right down among the beaver feed. To the casual observer, peerin' into the water, they wouldn't look no different than a hundred other lengths of green popple that they was layin' amongst."

"How come you figgered it out?"

"Well, in the first place, when I set there slappin' at them mosquitoes, an' tryin' my damndest to talk them birds out of the notion of butcherin' me an' Downey, I noticed there was two or three chopped stumps amongst all them beaver-gnawed ones. I know'd no one would chop green popple fer fire-wood, when there was plenty of dry spruce layin' around—an' I seen that their tent poles an' stakes was made of spruce, too. Contemplatin' them facts, I likewise seen that part of the little chips layin' around was made by an auger, an' not by beaver teeth. Recollectin' that even the smartest beavers didn't use axes an' augers, I come to the conclusion that them two damn crooks had been to work on the popple. Also, I remembered that that tall guy bought an inch an' a quarter auger from you when he come down to the fort fer grub an' licker, a couple of weeks ago. Assumin' that even chechachos wouldn't chop green popple an' bore holes in it jest fer fun, I got to castin' about in my mind fer a reason. An' whilst Downey was huntin' the cache, it come to me, an' I verified it by strollin' over to the pond where I seen them chopped chunks layin' amongst the gnawed ones on the bottom. The reason I buried that corpse amongst them stumps was fer the purpose of coverin' up them auger chips. Downey ain't so damn dumb—an' them chips might of put ideas in his head, if he seen 'em."



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A SERIES OF MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCES BY H. BEDFORD-JONES



THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF THE EARL OF ABERDEEN

*The Sea Chest of George H. Osborne of the "Hera"
Turns Up in Canton*

LAST week Commander McPike sent me a newspaper clipping from Washington—a mere obituary notice of a humble and absolutely unknown person. This, and nothing else, permits the publication

of the astonishing story anent the mysterious disappearance of the Earl of Aberdeen.

McPike, as you may know, is one of the characters of Washington. Since his retirement from the Navy, he has lived for

many years at the old Constitution House—a man six foot three, with a face like a meat-axe and a heart of gold. McPike loves queer things and queer people, there is no pretense about him, and he stops at nothing.

Also, he's capable of anything. I first met him at a Navy Dinner, when he brought in an old colored veteran who had served aboard Farragut's flagship in his youth. That made a rumpus, but McPike got away with it. Later, we came to be good friends.

He had a whole suite at the Constitution, and it was crammed with queer things. After Redding took over the old hostelry and made it into a crack hotel, Commander McPike refused to let them touch his suite. He kept to the faded hangings and the atrocious crimson curtains; it was typical of him.

One night I was up there with Barry Lynch, another character of the place. Lynch had been one of the great newspapermen of his day; now he was crabbed, sour, bitter at the life that had passed him by, and drank like a fish. He and McPike got into a rabid argument about the bleaching of linen—of all things! Lynch grabbed the telephone and asked to have the housekeeper step to the suite.

"There!" he said, glaring at McPike and chewing on his cigar. "Miss Osborne can settle the whole thing in a minute. And I bet a dollar she says I'm right."

"Done for a dollar," said McPike, and gave me a glance. "You don't know her? You've missed something. She's one of the best things left about this hotel."

"And if you knew what I know about her," Lynch snapped, with dark significance, "you'd have the solution to a mystery, a real one. If I could print it, the story would turn Scotland upside down."

"Why can't you print it?" I demanded. Lynch only grimaced, wrinkled up his nose, and sniffed in his bitter way. Just then, the housekeeper arrived.

She was a brisk, cheerful little woman

of perhaps sixty, maybe more. She stayed for only a minute or two, settled the argument with a word, and went her way. Lynch had lost the bet, and handed over his dollar with a growl. McPike chortled delightedly.

"If there's anything I love, Mr. Barry Lynch, it's to put a nick into you. Thanks. You and your stories that can't be printed, give me a pain in the neck. Your assumption of universal knowledge thrills me—the wrong way. Have another drink."

These two liked to kid each other. As a matter of fact, Lynch was a walking encyclopedia. The glasses were refilled, and he gave McPike a sharp glance.

"Something you don't know, is there?" he asked.

"Something nobody knows, not even you," and McPike shook with laughter. "I'll bet ten dollars to one you don't know the answer. When my ship was lying at Canton, I bought a sailor's sea-chest; that was long years ago. I still have the chest. It belonged to a George H. Osborne, whose name is inside the lid. Haven't thought of it for a long time. Bringing in Miss Osborne made me think of it. Now I'll call your bluff. Is it a bet?"

Lynch's snapping-turtle mouth opened, and closed again. He swallowed hard, his eyes dilating on McPike with incredulity and amazement.

"My lord!" he exclaimed slowly. "Are you kidding me? No; you haven't brains enough for that. You're serious. You actually mean it."

"Ten to one," and McPike broke into new laughter. "Come on, bluffer! Who was my unknown friend, George H. Osborne?"

"It's a bet," said Lynch, snapping out the words. "But to think of it? You living in this hotel all these years! And her the housekeeper!"

"None of your Irish tricks, now," said McPike. "Answer the question or pay up. Who was George H. Osborne?"

"He was the Earl of Aberdeen," said

Lynch slowly, picking his words. So earnest was he, so gravely intent, that McPike's amusement died out, changing to a frown.

"Eh? What kind of a game are you trying to pull off?"

"None," replied Lynch. "The very fact that you bought the chest in Canton—say, where's the thing now? Did it have anything in it?"

"No. It's been in my closet for the past ten years; I use it for my shoes. If it interests you, I'll get it out."

"It does," said Lynch.

"Well, what's all this nonsense about the Earl of Aberdeen?"

"Just this." Lynch fastened McPike with his gimlet eyes. "In 1866, the Earl of Aberdeen came to America on a visit. He never went home again. He was never seen in America. For a couple of years he wrote occasional letters home, from ports in America and Mexico. Then the letters stopped. So did he; disappeared. No Earl of Aberdeen had shown up in these parts."

McPIKE gawed at him. "Sounds like a novel. You can't tell me any real live earl could blow away like smoke! Not with all his nosey relations waiting to grab the title if he kicked off. If one of those birds so much as dropped out of sight for a month, there'd be solicitors and detectives and whatnot trailing him all over the world."

"Sure," assented Lynch. "And in this case, you bet they trailed him hot and fast! But if you want the story, let's see your blasted old chest."

McPike rose. "I still think there's some trick in it," he flung over his shoulder, as he went into the next room, "but I'll trot out the exhibit."

Lynch gave me a nod and a quiet word, reading my skeptical expression.

"The sixth Earl of Aberdeen; no josh about it, either. He threw up a great name and a fortune; he was only twenty

four when he came over here. Four years later, he completely vanished. Here comes McPike. Now I'll pull a fast one that'll curl his hair."

McPike appeared. He was carrying a seaman's chest, a rather handsomely carved piece of woodwork. As he set it down, Lynch spoke abruptly.

"Wait a minute. Before you open it. I'll make a prediction. You've said that Osborne's name is inside the lid. I'll venture there's another name there also—the word '*Hera*.' If I'm right, it'll prove my entire story true."

McPike gave him a long, probing look, then opened the chest and pointed to the inside of the lid.

"It's there, all right," he barked. "How you guessed it, damned if I can see! What does it mean?"

"It's the name of a ship, of course," and Lynch actually beamed. "Yep; Geo. H. Osborne, all done in brass tacks, and the ship's name below. He was chief mate of the ship, you know. Or rather, you don't know. But I do. I've worked on it a long time, investigating lost trails, running down clues, and so forth. Now sit down and rest your overtaxed brain. You were dead right in saying that no titled gent could shake off his chains without being run down by trailers. I've worked out the known facts up to his disappearance, and then gone past that to a solution. I'm not offering any proofs, but I'll give you the yarn as I see it.

"First," he went on, "you've got to get the picture of this Lord Aberdeen. His sea trip across the pond took two and a half months; sailing ship. He had bad lungs and was delicate. He had a passionate love of the sea. He hated pomp and ceremony. On the way across, it was my lord this and my lord that, and he pretty near puked at the word. So, as soon as he landed, he took his foot in his hand and skipped out, and that was the end of the Earl of Aberdeen. Still, the guy had a good hard jaw—"

So he had, and he needed it. Back in sailing-ship days, an ordinary seaman knocking around American waterfronts had no easy time of it; and for two years George Osborne was knocking around from pillar to post. In 1867, he got his master's ticket, passing the Shipmasters Association examination with flying colors and in the next year we see him as a full-fledged master—in steam, mind you. Captain Osborne of the *Walton*.

The jaw was there. A clean-cut young man who fought hard and prayed hard and hated the unrelenting pursuit that found him out in all he did. It had followed him to Boston, to New York, to obscure Mexican ports. Now it found him aboard the *Walton*, the very day she got home and tied up at her Front Street dock.

WHEN Osborne got back from settling everything with the owners, and the steward told him a gentleman was waiting for him in the cabin, his heart sank. There was no sign of weak lungs or anything else weak about him now, as he walked into the cabin and flung a hard, searching look at the bewhiskered gentleman there. A law shark, of course.

"Well?" he snapped. "You wish to see me?"

"Yes, Captain Osborne. My card, sir; permit me. We have been retained by a firm of solicitors in England to interview you—"

Osborne, in a passion of cold rage, tore up the card.

"I've nothing to say to you," he cut in. "I've nothing to discuss with you. So you've trailed me and run me down, have you? Get out."

"But, my dear sir!" protested the visitor, aghast. "This is a matter of the highest importance! As the bearer of a noble title, you—"

"My privacy is a matter of the highest importance to me," snapped Osborne. "Get out before I have you thrown off the ship!"

"Very well, sir." The visitor rose. "But if you would give me three minutes, it would save me from keeping after you."

The argument appealed. Osborne cooled instantly, and nodded.

"Right. What is it you desire?"

"A reply to three questions, sir—this is the nub of the whole thing," said the other eagerly. "First, the estate agents desire instructions from you in regard to the sale of certain properties; will you look over their letters?"

"I will not," said Osborne. "Let the agents run the estate themselves. Next?"

"You are engaged in a hazardous occupation, sir. The solicitors write me that there is danger of matters becoming embroiled, in case of any unfortunate accident to you; the next heirs at law would like to have a clear statement of your present name and occupation and your intentions in regard to the title—"

"You apparently know enough about me to give them that," Osborne intervened dryly. "My intentions are my own business. Last?"

"Thirdly, sir, and you will pardon the personal question, if there should be any thought of marriage in your mind, it is requested that you communicate with our office here, since the family abroad desires to get into touch with you."

"Oh!" said Osborne. "Now we're getting to it, eh? Afraid they'll be done out of it if I should have issue, eh? I presume you know that I'm living in Richmond, Virginia, and have a small house there?"

The other bowed. "Yes, sir—"

"Then," said Osborne, "if you'll have one of your many agents seek me out there on the first of next month, I'll be very happy to go into this matter at length with him. You see, my intentions of marriage depend entirely upon a certain young lady."

"Oh!" At this evidence of warmth and friendliness, the other beamed. "Very good, sir; I thank you for giving me a hearing. On the first of the month, you

may expect to hear from us, your lordship."

Osborne whitened with anger, but showed his visitor out and then slammed the door.

"And if you're too sharp for me then, I've still another trick to play!" he said under his breath.

He flung off his things and sat down at the desk in one corner of the cabin. From a drawer he took out a photograph, and stared at it for a few moments, thoughtfully. A thin and hard smile touched his lips.

"Hazardous occupation, eh?" he muttered. "There's an idea in that—a good idea! I've done my best to throw 'em off and still stick to my chosen career; it simply can't be done. Kitty, I must choose between you and the sea, that's all. Why can't they leave us alone? Confound it, haven't I a right to live my own life? No; too many selfish interests are concerned. Well, my own interest becomes selfish, from now on. Let 'em look in Richmond and be hanged to 'em! So far as I'm concerned, this game of hide and seek has reached a limit."

Five minutes later, he was packing a carpetbag. When it was finished, he sat down at the desk and wrote out his resignation to the owners. His accounts were clear, everything was settled. He was free to depart.

WHEN darkness settled over the East River and the Battery, he went ashore, put his bag into a cab, and began a three-hour game of dodging about the city. He had no illusions; he was a hunted man, and knew it. Detectives watched him all the time he was ashore. With a fortune at stake, those cursed solicitors back in Scotland were sparing no expense to keep George H. Osborne in view.

The one lucky thing was that not a soul guessed about the girl in Boston. True, he had been living in Richmond for the past year; he even had a small bank account

there. Kitty Tremaine and her folks, on the other hand, suspected nothing about the Earl of Aberdeen. Old Skipper Tremaine hated all lords and such with a consuming hatred. Besides, Osborne had no notion whatever of taking the girl he loved back into the atmosphere he detested with all his heart and soul.

Five minutes before the midnight train for Boston departed, Osborne came aboard it. His uniform was gone. Now he wore a stoyepipe hat, baggy garments, and chewed at a long cigar; steel spectacles adorned his aquiline features. He was now embarked on the supreme effort, and no evading criminal could have been more circumspect in every step.

In this guise he came to Boston. In this guise, but without the spectacles, he called at the Tremaine cottage, not far from India docks. Skipper Tremaine was in China, or on the way there, but Kitty Tremaine sat in the parlor and talked joyously with the man she loved, while her decorous aunt knitted away in the room adjoining, and winked solemnly at the cat when any sound like a distant kiss was heard.

"George, I've the grandest news for you!" the girl exclaimed eagerly. "I was talking to Mr. Harper today—you know, he owns a lot of stock in the China Merchants, and they're outfitting a ship for the China trade now. She's to leave in three weeks. I told him about you. He said to call on him, and if you were to his taste, he might give you a letter to the office. They need a first mate for the *Hera*; that's her name."

"You're a darling!" said Osborne, the keen harshness of his features transfigured and warmed by the love in his eyes. "But if you think I'm going to China when I might be marrying you, guess again, my dear!"

"What do you mean? You don't want to ship as first officer, after being captain?"

Osborne laughed joyously. "No; I've a

better position, Kitty. Don't ask me what; it's a secret, until I'm certain of it."

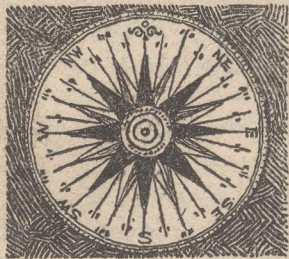
"Oh! Well, sir, it's no secret that you haven't shaved for days! You're not trying to be dignified and grow a beard? I just won't have it, George. Everybody wears beards, and I detest them. One reason I liked you was that you've been clean-shaven always—"

Osborne bubbled over with amusement. "My dear, it's a temporary matter only; on the day we're married, I'll shave it off. But I've been told that I look too young to serve as master, and must have the usual chin-whiskers."

She regarded him dubiously. "I don't like the mystery, but suppose I must make the best of it. Master, eh? Of a steamer?"

He shook his head. "No. My dear, you've begged me to give up the sea—"

"Oh, George!" Her eyes lit up. "You mean you'll give it up? Honestly? My dear, that makes me more happy than I can tell you. I hate the sea, I hate it!" she cried passionately. "Your love for it was the one thing that stood between us, George. I hate it with all my heart and soul! When I think of you being away for years, like father is, on a China voyage—why, it's unthinkable! But what else can you do? What can a seaman do, except follow the sea?"



Osborne broke into laughter again. "A thousand things, my dear! Yes, I'm in earnest about it, but on one condition. The last time we met, you said that you'd marry me on the day I gave up the sea for life. Is that a promise?"

She met his gaze earnestly, intently, and slowly nodded.

"Yes," she said with quiet resolve. "I love you, George; you know it, and I know you love me. If you give up the sea, I'll wait for you as long as needs be, until you can earn enough for us both. I have a little money too, you know—"

Osborne took her hand and looked into her eyes.

"Kitty, there's no need of that. I've made certain plans; I shan't tell you what they are, simply because I dare not risk disappointing you. But if they come to pass, if everything works out as I think it will—then we'll be married the day this ship of yours, the *Hera*, goes to sea. Three weeks, you said? Yes; it's a bargain."

"I just can't believe it's true," she said softly. "All right, George; I stand by the bargain. When shall I see you again? Tomorrow?"

"Not for a week or more, my dear," said Osborne gravely. "I'm off on a little trip to Maine; it's in connection with our plans. Forgive me the mystery, I beg of you! It's only that so much depends on it, I daren't risk false hopes—"

She pressed his hand. "I understand, George. Have it your way."

SO George H. Osborne, with his plug hat and baggy garments, voyaged north into Maine. He was gone only three days. He came back to Boston looking uncommonly like a pirate, with his beard sprouting rapidly, and acted like one to boot, for he took quarters at a dingy little sailors' lodging house.

Next day he went to interview Harper, the merchant who owned quite a share in the China Merchants line. Harper, an elderly and rather pompous man, greeted him with proper New England caution. After talking for half an hour, however, he was quite thawed out. Osborne could thaw out anyone, if he once let himself go.

"I understand the place is still open, sir," he said at length. "I'll be glad to give you a letter to Captain Grimm, at the

offices of the company; if he is as impressed with your ability and character as I am, I think you may count upon a berth. Of course, this will depend entirely on Mr. Grimm."

He wrote the letter. It was bitter winter weather; January of 1870 was just opening, and on the 15th the *Hera* was to sail for China—none of your fine tall clippers, but a small vessel with a private venture, a schooner. Owing to the holidays and the long voyage ahead, the officers would not come aboard until the last moment.

Having ascertained these facts from his conversation with Harper, Osborne betook himself to the offices of the company and there interviewed Captain Grimm, a dour old seadog quite worthy of the name he bore. Grimm fingered his chin whiskers and perused the letter. He eyed George Osborne's ticket as master and his other papers with a most critical scrutiny; then he set himself to probing Osborne's personality.

At length Grimm bestirred himself and gave judgment.

"You'll do, sir, you'll do. You're the man for us, I'm thinking. Cap'n Kent is taking the vessel out; a steady, sober, God-fearing man. A pity ye can't meet him, but he's with his family at Falmouth, and doesn't come aboard until the 14th. You may report to him then—unless you desire to stop aboard the *Hera* in the meantime."

Osborne had no such desire. It was settled that he was to report aboard on the 14th, and then the ship's papers were got out. He was duly signed on as chief mate, and the usual advance money handed over. Not that money made any particular difference to George Osborne, who had the entire fortune of Lord Aberdeen on which to draw!

Now Osborne did a curious thing. He went back to his cheap lodgings, and lost himself for days along the Boston waterfront, in taverns, among the haunts of seamen. He knew them like a book. He had

served as ordinary seaman himself, not so long since. And out of all this, he emerged with a somewhat dissolute friend named Lagg. His scheme was taking full shape and size, now.

Lagg had once held a master's ticket, but had fallen far. He was much the same general build as Osborne, but older; his shaggy beard and unkempt garments were hard to look upon. The beard was shortened and trimmed neatly. The garments were replaced by new ones. Then, of an evening, Osborne sat in talk with his new-found friend.

"I'll not give you a cent, Lagg, until the ship sails; then the full amount in your hand. I'll not trust you with that much money."

"What good will it be to me then?" Lagg demanded sulkily.

"Plenty, if you make the most of your opportunity. Go to the Revere House tomorrow and register there as George H. Osborne. I'll stand your expenses—and not too much liquor, mind—until the 14th. Then you report aboard the *Hera*, to Captain Kent. Here are all the papers of George Osborne; I'll hand them over to you when you go aboard on the 14th. When the schooner gets to Canton, go on playing the part of Osborne, or do what you like—it's all one to me."

"What's the lay, anyhow?" Lagg asked with open curiosity. "Who's after you?"

Osborne looked him in the eye and lied—for once.

"A woman," he said solemnly. "If she runs me down—or you, rather—and comes face to face with you, she'll know you're the wrong Osborne. Get it?"

"So that's it!" Openly relieved, Lagg grinned and winked knowingly. "I see, Cap'n, I see. Blow me if it ain't a rum game, but a good 'un! Well, that takes the sting out of it. I had an idear detecs might be after you, but a woman—well, that's worse. You can depend on me."

And off he went, jubilant and like a new man, to the Revere House.

Osborne went to the Tremaine cottage and had a long, heart-to-heart talk with Kitty's aunt. That good woman looked over the figurative cards he laid down, and opened her eyes with surprise.

"Well, I vow!" she declared, when she had caught her breath. "I never heard the like, George Osborne—but it's a fine thing you're doing. So you've actually bought the farm! Yes, I'll do it as you say. But going to Bangor to be married looks like a scandalous waste of money! You young folks will need all you have, if you're going to work that farm. And you're really giving up the sea?"

"Really," said Osborne, a twinkle in his eye. "To be a farmer. My folks were all farmers, back in Scotland, so I ought to be able to manage it. But mind you, not one word to Kitty!"

"Well, I'll do my best," and the buxom aunt sighed and laughed. "You send us the telegram, then—that Cousin Abner is ill and wants me to come. Be sure to sign it 'Martha.' Then we'll take the noon train for Bangor, on the 15th. Is that it? And you'll be on that train."

"If I'm not," said Osborne, "it'll be because I'm dead! The telegram will fix it all right. I'll arrange with Kitty that we're to be married on the 15th, in Bangor. And you arrange with all the family up there to be on hand. Understood?"

Understood; by everyone except Kitty.

She listened to all that Osborne had to say, with growing earnestness and gravity. He still maintained the mystery, and this irked her.

"If I didn't love you and trust you, George, I'd not hear to such a thing," she said at last. "You say we'll be married on the 15th—if everything goes well. You say we'll be married in Bangor—if nothing goes wrong. Can you realize what a woman feels at such uncertainty?"

"I can, my dear," said Osborne. "And believe me, I regret the necessity. Should my plans work out, as I trust they will, I'll have a pleasant surprise for you. All

is now going smoothly. And I hope to make up to you, all the rest of my life, for the few days of uncertainty that we now face."

"George, tell me one thing." She laid her hand on his, and looked him in the eye. "Remember, I'll keep my bargain. But I don't want you to be doing anything wrong, just to humor me. I don't want it on my conscience that you quit the sea and—and took up with some terrible thing, like counterfeiting greenbacks or—"

With a burst of laughter, Osborne swept her off her feet, held her in the air, and kissed her soundly.

THE 14th dawned cold and with snow-flurries in the air. Osborne walked to the Revere House and there met with his namesake, who greeted him jovially, and sent out his bag. They took a cab together.

"No trouble with anyone?" asked Osborne, as they jolted toward the docks. Lagg chuckled and dug an elbow into his side.

"Trust me, matey! An old codger showed up last night, a law-shark of some kind. I gave him his come-uppance, square on the nose."

So—they had run him down despite everything.

Osborne watched the other man go aboard the sturdy schooner, and hung about the docks for a bit. Nothing happened; evidently the impostor was accepted as genuine. The *Hera* was sailing with the tide at eight next morning. It was most unlikely that Harper would go aboard her, or even Captain Grimm; at worst, unless Grimm actually talked with the first mate, he would not notice anything wrong. The gamble was a good one.

The day passed, for Osborne, in a fever of impatience. If that vessel sailed the next morning with the false Osborne aboard, he was clear at last of the incubus that had so long weighed him down. But, if any attempt was made to get in touch

with the first officer—well, that would not be so good.

Evening came. Osborne took his grip to the railroad station and checked it against the morrow. He sent the telegram summoning Kitty's aunt to Bangor. He went back to his cheap lodgings and tried to sleep; but slumber came hard.

With morning, he was up and about early. He looked at himself in the glass, and looked at a stranger; worn and haggard with worry and suspense, beard untrimmed, he was a very different person from the neat and clean-shaven George H. Osborne of old. A little before the sailing hour, he was down at the docks, for his last look at the sea.

A crowd was there to say farewell. The schooner was bound and ready. The first officer, bundled against the biting cold, was casting off. On the dock, Captain Kent stood in talk with one of the owners. Osborne saw a man come bustling up, and edged nearer; it was the same man who had interviewed him in New York; and who now approached the captain in brusque haste.

"Captain Kent, I believe? My card, sir. I must speak with one of your officers, a Mr. Osborne. It is of the highest importance. You must hold the ship, sir—"

The skipper laughed and flipped the card away.

"Save your breath till we get back from Canton, sir. Talk with Mr. Osborne, indeed! No blasted law-shark is holding up my ship. Well, good by, all!"

And the skipper was gone, the gang-plank was out, the schooner was free of her lines and heading into the basin. Then Osborne felt a hand at his elbow, heard a rough voice at his ear.

"Here, you! What are you hanging about for? What's your name?"

"Eh?" Osborne turned, to see a policeman eyeing him suspiciously. Three feet away stood the lawyer, fuming and cursing; any mention of his own name now would mean disaster. He uttered the first

name that popped into his head. "Who am I? Why, I'm Cap'n Lagg."

"Lagg, is it? Bully Lagg?" With a startled oath, the policeman laid hold of him. "Steady, me lad! You're under arrest. We've been combing the waterfront these three days to find you—"

"Arrest?" Osborne started back. "Are you mad? I've done nothing—"

"Nothing except kill a man in a tavern brawl in Charleston last week. Easy, now! Put out your hands till I get the bracelets on you."

In a split second of time, Osborne's brain raced furiously. The scene was drawing the notice of the crowd. If he went to jail and proved that he was not Lagg, his name must figure prominently; all his careful planning would go for naught; besides, he would miss that noon train for Bangor—

His fist clipped the burly policeman under the jaw, staggered him, broke his hold. Osborne turned, darted through the fringe of the crowd, and took to his heels.

Well for him in this instant that he knew every street, every nook and corner of the waterfront. He led the chase among the warehouses, back into the streets; he ducked into a saloon and went on through the back door. Now he was only half a block from his own lodgings.

Desperately, he legged it. On around the block. Back suddenly into the cheap lodging-house. A yell told him he had been seen.

In his own room, lungs afire, he fell to work. While feet and voices resounded through the place, he hacked frantically with his razor. They were searching the house; he had not an instant to lose. He stripped, flung his clothes on a chair, gave his face a last scrape and a wipe, and was tumbling into bed as a thunderous knock came at the door.

Figures surged into the room. The panting policeman took one look at the clean-shaven man in the bed, and turned back.

"That ain't him. Come on, boys! Let's get upstairs—"

And George H. Osborne was free to make the noon train for Bangor, and the woman who awaited him.

SILENCE fell; the magic spell was broken as Lynch ceased to speak, and we were once again sitting in McPike's quarters with the dingy old crimson hangings, and before us the old seaman's chest with its legend spelled by brass tacks inside the lid. I pointed to it.

"You didn't mention the chest, here. What about it?"

"You're too damned critical," snapped Lynch. "Osborne's chest, of course. He sent it aboard the *Hera*, or handed it over to the other chap to use. It was in Canton you bought the chest, McPike?"

"Aye," replied McPike, frowning. "I don't know how that fits in, unless the false Osborne jumped ship at Canton."

"He never got there," Lynch declared. "His effects were sold there, yes, after the custom of those days. The real Osborne was playing in better luck than he knew. Here's a clipping from the *London Times* of somewhere in October, 1871, after Osborne's death was established and the heirs came into the estate."

I took the clipping and read it—a mere paragrah:

... 1870, he joined the *Hera*, Captain Kent, as mate, and in the log for the

27th of January the following record appears:—"While in the act of taking in the mainsail Mr. Osborne, chief mate of the schooner *Hera*, was knocked overboard; all efforts were made to save him, but, there being a heavy swell running, it was impossible." Such was the end of the Earl of Aberdeen. . . .

McPike, who had glanced over my shoulder, drew a deep breath and looked at Lynch with a certain wonder.

"Well I lose the bet," he said. "I'll be hanged if you're not a human marvel! So Osborne married the girl, did he, and went to live on a farm up in Maine?"

"He did," said Lynch. "And not a soul ever dreamed that he might be the Earl of Aberdeen. And he left one child, who's now a woman of past sixty, and who was in this room a little while ago."

McPike started up. "Good lord! You mean the housekeeper? Is she his child? Why, man, in that case you ought to tell her all this—or does she know the story?"

"Of course she doesn't," said Lynch, giving him a scathing look. "And it'll never be told while she's alive. D'ye think I'd plunge a fine happy woman like that into the hands of slimy lawyers, into a big lawsuit that'd do her no good except to wreck all her pleasant life? No; let Miss Osborne be."

He was right about it; but now you see why the news of her death has released the story.

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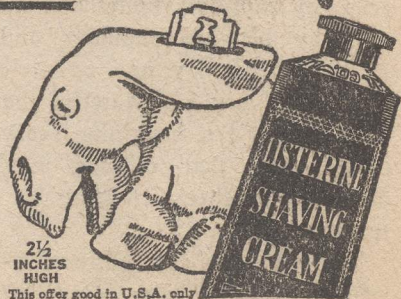
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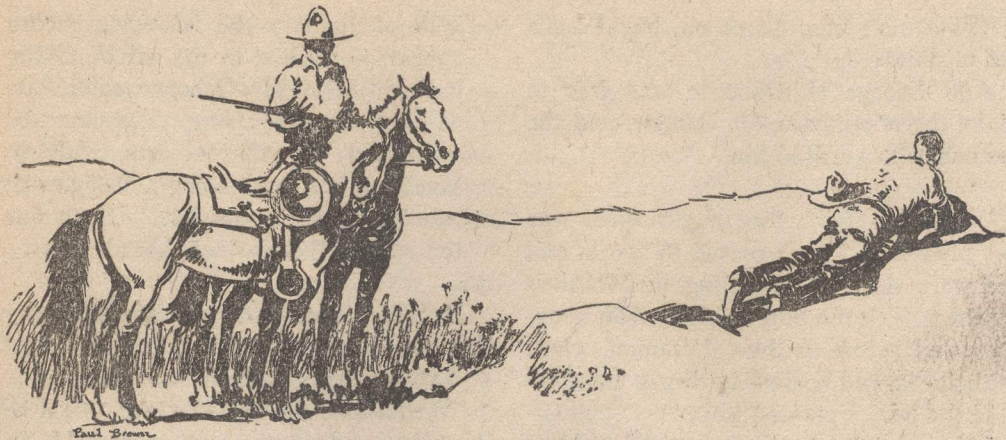
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LISTERINE SHAVING CREAM

Goin' into the Wilderness to Meet Wolf!



FREEZE-OUT

By FRIDTJOF MICHELSON

WHERE at one time Old Jason McCune's right arm had been, there now dangled an empty sleeve. It bloused loosely, the cuff tucked in the waistband of his belted jeans, eloquently proclaiming past hardships which were so plainly printed in the lines of the old man's face. Too, it was a symbol of the helplessness that Old Jason felt toward the tragic mysteries that in the last week had descended on the J Bar M.

"This thing has got the greasy, wooly stink of sheep, to me," Jason said, and the stub of his arm wagged reminiscently in the loose cloth at his shoulder.

It was in a sheep and cattle war, in nineteen ought nine, that he had lost his arm. A dum-dum bullet had smashed it mid-way between shoulder and elbow. And since that day, now twenty-six years past, Old Jason had watched the horizon with a wary eye, imagining every scud of cloud-wrack that crossed Eagle Nest divide to be sheep invading his precious range.

The old man's eyes glittered with recollection. Tawny eyes they were, like a

fawn's, which, for all the maimed and weathered age of his body, still held in them a glint of youth. They contrasted strangely with the oatmeal-cookie texture of his skin, baked and browned in the oven-heat of summer suns.

He paused at a porch pillar, leaning a gaunt hand against it. And his eyes met the tawny dust of the yard, deepening the crow's-feet that encircled them. Out of the past came a vision of Ot Black, dwarfed of body and wizened of heart, his sage-green eyes glossed with hatred, who had led the sheep men in that memorable struggle.

According to tales borne back to him by roving waddies, Black was now living in Deadwood, a solitary, twisted figure whose brain seemed eternally to dwell on the bitter memory of defeat.

Old Jason suddenly stirred.

From the gravel of the river-crossing behind the stables he caught the sudden thud of hoofs. A streak of blurred movement erupted from the river rut and came galloping toward him. Two riders; no— Jason leaned his thighs against the railing as if to bring the objects within reach of

his failing vision—one rider, leading a saddled horse. Across the back of the unmounted horse hung a strange object, slicker-wrapped and limp. Dangling stirrups, flapping ends telegraphed a tragic message to the old man in advance.

In the saddle, he soon discovered, was his lanky and youthful foreman, Truman Bidwell. And inside that limp parcel was Homer, Truman's kid brother, who had just turned his nineteenth year.

For just an instant, anger flamed in Old Jason's eyes. Then immediately it was snuffed out by a memory more devastating than the grim reality before him.

"Scooty! Where was Scooty?"

That morning, as she often did, Scooty had gone with Homer after the horses. And Homer was strapped across the saddle, plain to be seen, dead.

SWIFTLY the young foreman reined his horse close to the porch railing and swung his leg over it. He bent over the stricken old man in the rocking chair and drew it sled-wise behind the climbing vines to screen the body from sight.

For Truman it was a three-fold tragedy that strangled the vibrancy of his strong shoulders. Homer dead—Scooty missing—Old Jason on the verge of collapse.

Truman had hardly realized until now how dreamless the world would be without Scooty. Through four long years he had planned, doggedly worked, for her. But now— In June the blizzards of March were howling. And Scooty was out in it.

He found his voice on a low key, the straight line of his lips barely moving.

She went with Homer this morning after the horses——"

"Yes," echoed Old Jason, "she went with Homer after the horses." He hunched himself to the extreme edge of his chair. "The third one to go in a week," he said hollowly. "Where, Tru?" He pointed at the laden horse below the railing.

"Wind Caves," said Truman. "West

end. Ground all churned up with tracks. Looked every place. "Couldn't find her."

A dark silence, like night on a troubled sea, settled over them.

"Dad," said Truman at last, "we've come to the jumpin' off place." His gray eyes were drifting blotches of smoke, painted, if that were possible, with a hard, metallic substance. "This is where the J Bar M goes in for hell and leather."

Old Jason got suddenly to his feet, his bow-legs, like parentheses, enclosing an oval of daylight. Late years, with uncanny legerdemain, had padded the old man's girth with the flesh they had stolen from the fullness of his cheeks and the muscular rotundity of his legs. His booted feet beat an unsteady cadence on the boards.

"Son," he said, and a bony forefinger trembled in front of him, "I put you in as foreman because you understand my policies and was man enough to respect 'em. I'm not at all sure, after twenty-six years, that this is the time to take to the trails of outlawry again." Peace at any price had become Old Jason's credo since that turbulent day when his right arm had fallen in the dust at his feet. "I can't rightly allow men who work for me to repeat an act that I wouldn't repeat myself. "Life," he said, squinting philosophically, "is the wolf that followed the shorn lamb into the wilderness. Lookin' at it from where I stand today, I think I'd rather be the lamb than the wolf."

Bitterness burned on Truman's tongue. He wanted to spit words of fire and hatred. His fingers ached to clutch, his knuckles to batter. Even the unfeeling bore of his gun seemed to be filled with an itch for action.

"The shorn lamb," he said, "is in the wilderness now. Another one"—he jerked his head outward—"is strapped to the saddle yonder. And a third one," he said, tapping his own chest, "is goin' into the wilderness to meet the wolf."

"For twenty-six years," said Old Jason as if he had not heard, "the J Bar M has

lived under the smoke of the battle where eighteen men was killed. I don't rightly know but what we're payin' interest now. I bend my knees to a judgment that is bigger than mine." He raised his fist in sudden fury. "If my old head knew the name of the man that harmed Scooty," he cried, "I'd crush him as I would a scorpion and gladly pay the price of perdition. But innocent men will fall into the snare that's set for the guilty. Eighteen men died, but the greedy soul who started it all, for his own profit, still lives. No, son," he said, calming, "I don't know the answer. Peace and vengeance might be twins. But I, personally, will see to that. I can't rightly ask a man who works for me to suffer this." The stub of his arm wagged in the empty sleeve.

BITTERNESS, held in check by a pity that was bigger than courage, smeared itself across Truman's face. Sweat was visible below his hatband, and the taut muscles of his body seemed to make an evil humming in his ears.

"Then," said he, standing straight and ruddy against the morning sun, "the name of the J Bar M won't be brought into it. Headquarters for the manhunt I aim to start will be my own ranch over on First Creek. That's where Scooty and I planned to live, beginning this spring."

He turned away, but the usual spring of his walk was now like rubber that has lost most of its resiliency.

Truman was not a handsome man even in a happy mood. A strong, interesting face, rather too heavily wrought in the features that denoted its strength. People who met him for the first time instinctively liked him, and the demonstrative few who spoke their thoughts, said, "Son, I bet you ain't got an enemy in all the world."

But now, since death and misery had made him a partner, there was a sting in the glance of those gray eyes, a stolid fixity in the set of that strong jaw.

As he swung at a quartering angle from

the river trail he flicked a swift glance at the slicker-wrapped burden in the saddle, and without realizing that he spoke aloud, he said:

"Maybe Old Jason is right—maybe man's score *is* to mourn."

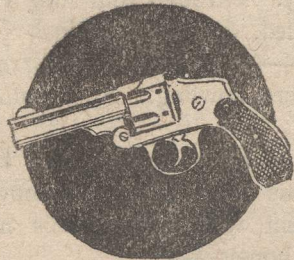
Then he lifted his eyes to Eagle Nest divide, yearning upward through a cobalt gloom to the sun. And in that moment he found again the feelings that had gone so starkly cold within him.

"I'll go back," he said, "and make it right with the old man—get the boys together from the hayin' camp."

Old Jason continued to fight the porch with his bootheels; fighting over again the battles of yester-year. Suddenly his mind was settled on a course of action. Leaving the door hanging wide, he entered the house; and from a bureau drawer he took an old frontier model .45 which had tasted no lead, no burst of muzzle flame since nineteen ought nine. Then he drew on his chaps and with one-handed awkwardness buckled the cartridge belt around his middle holding the buckle between hip and door jamb until he could catch the loose end and bring it around to fasten it.

"Don't make much difference about me," he muttered. "My boots is about wore out anyway."

Pulling his high-steeped hat over his eyes, he bow-legged to the door, and there



on the threshold, with doubt, disbelief, joy alternately swiveling in the deep lines of his face, he froze.

"In God's name!" he suddenly cried.

Across the ranch basin from the east came a running horse whose markings were as familiar to Old Jason as the back

of his own hand. In the saddle was a slim figure who lay across the horn in the manner of a jockey, hair streaming in the wind, tiny feet and elbows flicking in quick movements.

"In God's name!" he said again. "Scooty!"

AGE suddenly went out of those old legs as they ran swiftly down the steps. A streak of horseflesh, smelling strongly of lathered sweat, whisked past him as Scooty quit the saddle. In another instant she was clasped against Old Jason's ample girth with a single arm that was suddenly as strong as two. The buckle of his cartridge belt gouged them with painful pressure.

"Scooty—Scooty!" he mumbled into her hair.

Scooty shook his shoulders to release the pressure of his grip. "You're crushing me! I'm all right, Dad. Where's Truman?"

She punched her shirt back into her trousers and tucked her hair behind her ears. For a moment she stared at the belted gun, the high-steepled hat.

A miniature edition of Old Jason himself. The same tawny eyes, touched by a softness that was wholly feminine. Her hair, a deep brown—chestnut colored. Even in her present mussed-up state the curves of full-blown womanhood were noticeable under the even fit of her riding habit. A smooth, supple body, neither large nor small, that made one yearn to own it. Seeing her made it easy to understand Truman's savage affection.

Arm in arm they climbed the porch steps.

"There's a bad stink to all this, Scooty," her father said gravely. "The greasy, wooly stink of sheep—and Ot Black. Or else the hand of Providence is takin' back an eye for an eye for the old days." Bitterness chinked the deep lines of his face. "I don't rightly know, but it seems to me that a man like Young Homer more than

pays the toll for the rapsallions that fought under Black. Do you think, Scooty, it was Black that done it?"

Scooty settled to the railing and crossed a booted foot over her knee. It was going to be extremely difficult to talk about.

"I went with Homer after the horses," she began, and the sound of her voice was reminiscent of a bell that has suddenly been cracked. "He didn't want me to go. He had a funny feeling, he said, that something was going to happen. I laughed at him, of course, but he kept saying all the way up to Wind Caves that it would kill Truman if something awful happened to me." She bit her lip to hold back emotions that sooner or later must gush forth. "We found the horses the first thing, on the other side of the caves. It was early so we—well we've done it lots of times—we started playing hide-and-seek there in the caves. You know, on horseback. Homer rode into one of the caves so he couldn't see which way I went, and I rode off to hide. Pretty soon I thought I heard him coming, so I spurred Topsy into a wind-scoop thinking I'd slip around the outside edge and come in free.

"Then, suddenly, just as if your gun would go off now, I heard a shot. Topsy bolted up the side of the gully before I could get her stopped, and when I looked around, instead of one rider, I saw two.

"I remembered what Homer had said and my heart jumped into my throat. As soon as I dared I rode around where we had parted. And there he was"—she dropped on her knees beside her father's chair and buried her face in his lap—"ly- ing there in the sand—dead."

OLD JASON'S hand tenderly stroked her hair, but his slitted eyes roved over the thatched roofs of the sheds and stables and settled on the horizon where the hills dovetailed into the sky. No tenderness, no mercy anywhere in the mask-like parchment of his face.

"It was Ot Black," he said, "that done

it. Ot Black or some of his hirelings. Nobody else had a call to do such a thing."

"No," said Scooty, rearing up and drying her eyes. "No, it wasn't. I found out who it was. That's why I didn't get in sooner." It was easier now to talk; that suffocating tightness gone from her breast. "Skag Hillard and Dogy Martin of the Triple S.

"I followed them. Rode around to the far side of Teepee ridge and hid there until they came through the saddle. That's who it was—Skag Hillard and Dogy Martin."

"God's name," said Old Jason, and for a long moment he sat bereft of words. At last, "Then the Triple S is Black's outfit and they aim to freeze us out." A bony fist, because it had no palm to strike, smote his leathered thigh. "This," he said, using Truman's phrase, "is the jumpin' off place for the J Bar M. I'm through caterwauling about peace and the price of victory. With the small change that's left of my life I'm goin' out to pay the first instalment." He bent suddenly forward. "Scooty, are you sure nobody saw you ride away from Teepee ridge? As sure as they did there'll be a price on your head."

Scooty's reply hung stammeringly on her tongue. Her long curving lashes lowered.

"Yes, Dad—I'm sure." She left the sentence hanging there. "Where's Truman?"

Old Jason told her.

"I must see him!" She swung her booted feet over the railing and jumped. "How long since he left? I might catch up with him. I'll be back as soon as I can. Wait for me, Dad. I wanta go with you."

MISGIVINGS churned in Truman's thoughts when he saw an inverted comet of dust, undoubtedly raised by reckless riders, approaching him across the northern flat. Trouble or bad news

usually accompanied so much commotion. The tragic bundle in the saddle was warning enough. Swiftly he swung to the left, climbing to the spine of the ridge to avoid unnecessary danger.



Skag Hillard and Dogy Martin of the Triple S materialized out of the dust-cloud. Neighbors, and so far as Truman knew, friends. But still Truman wondered at their strange maneuvers. Not until they had effectively cut in ahead of him, stemming all possibility of flight, did the riders pull their ponies to a slow jog.

"Howdy, Bidwell," said Hillard. He was a blocky-built man on whose ruddy jowls rode a look of sullen challenge. His voice had in it the harsh, booming quality of a braggart.

"Skag—Dogy," said Truman quietly. "What's the drive?"

A cunning secrecy lurked in the shadows of Hillard's brushy eyebrows. He jabbed a black-nailed forefinger at the dead man.

"Who?"

"Kid brother," said Truman succinctly.

"No!" cried Skag. "What——?"

"Shot. Wind Caves—this morning."

Skag rapped out a bitter oath.

"Now, by God, Truman," he said, "that gets me mad! Alone, was he?"

Truman sensed a double purpose behind this cross-examination, but no clear reason for it came to him.

"Scooty—Old Jason's daughter—was with him."

"Damnation! Girl get back all right, did she?"

Truman shook his head.

"Not when I left——"

A significant glance passed between

Skag and Dogy—a glance freighted with a guilty man's hope that he might yet undo a grievous error.

"By God, Truman," said Skag effusively, "it's a outrage. Whether or not that girl is harmed, figure on the Triple S for everything it's got."

He might indefinitely have blown threats against the enemy, made promises of Triple S fidelity, but Truman gathered up the reins and touched his horse with the spurs.

"Gotta get—him—in out of the sun."

The Triple S riders swung off the hog's back and struck a swift, angling course eastward. When they were well out of ear-shot Skag said to Dogy:

"Bidwell is a little addled in the head. He don't know how lucky he is. We might of put both the Bidwells in a double grave, but that can come later. It's the girl we want right now. Drygulch *her* and we're under cover again."

A grin, seemingly concocted of pain, spread across a face that was hardly distinguishable from dirty burlap. But no emotion showed in Dogy's unblinking blue eyes—eyes like two holes punched in a sack of indigo.

"God," he said, his voice rusty from disuse, "won't Black have burrs in his chaps if his five-year freeze-out scheme turns into a range war?"

Skag's beefy jowls shook darkly.

"We gotta muzzle that girl, that's all."

SCREENED from view by conveniently placed boulders, Skag Hillard crouched on one side of the trail, Dogy Martin on the other.

Scooty hardly had a chance. Coming at a swift clip as she dropped over the brow of the ridge she literally rode against the muzzles of two leveled guns.

"That's a nice girl," chanted Skag. "Paddy-cake just a little longer while I get your dam' gun. There now. We're goin' by-by."

For just an instant confusion and fright

chained Scooty's tongue, but rebelliousness gleamed from those tawny eyes.

"Skag Hillard," she said, "you can't get away with this!" Then caution made her bite back the words that lay on her lips, aching to be said. They had seen her ride away from Teepee ridge, but they did not know, and must not know, she had talked to her father since they last saw her.

Dogy, suddenly disappearing, came from a washout with their horses, his slouching figure throwing shadows like the silhouette of an ape.

Hazing Scooty between them, they angled down the slope and followed a trail along the trough of the canyon. In a few minutes they rose again to a rimrock ledge against which their horses' hoofs beat with sharp concussion. Around them now, in the glare of a late afternoon sun, the brown hills lay like monstrous buffaloes lounging out their noon hour.

Skag twisted in the saddle, his sullen countenance hard-set.

"Snoopin'," he said, "ain't appreciated at the Triple S. Where'd you go this morning after you spied on us?"

Scooty rode on, thinking her own thoughts, as if she had not heard.

They entered the Triple S ranch basin by a little-used trail that came in behind the ranchhouse.

"Keep her under your muzzle," said Skag to Dogy, "while I sharpen the knives and cleavers." The door banged shut behind him.

The blonde woman lying on the bed in the adjoining room threw her arms wide and let a paper-backed novel fall to her bosom when Skag entered.

"Hello, darling," she said in a low, husky voice. "God, this is a good book. Kiss me."

Skag shushed her with a shake of his head and the girl sat up, wide-eyed with amazement.

At first glance hers was a pert, baby-dollish face, lighted by eyes that burned

blue and low, and framed by a tousel of cream-colored curls. Revealed at second glance was a bitterness half-hidden by the artificial redness of her lips, the mascarred darkness of her lashes. She was of the type who followed the miners to the Klondike during the days of the gold rush.

Briefly Skag sketched their predicament. He said:

"We got the girl out here now—ready for the grave of a desert rat." His thumb jerked in the general direction of Eagle Nest, beyond which stretched the brown sands of Sandora desert. "If she hasn't already squawked, which I don't think she has, we can still cover up."

The blonde's smudged eyelids tightened.

"So what?"

"You'll have to be the decoy, Maud." He patted her shoulder. "Here's the way we work it. We all ride together to the Forks—the Triple S gang and Old Jason's daughter. Beyond the Forks we split. Two of us ridin' northeast into the hills, two of us across Lone Pine Pass into Sandora.

"Two-three days out there and nobody'll know Miss McCune from a dried herring. No bullet holes, no nothing. Just naturally rode into the desert—got lost—died. We'll stop at the store and make sure Clem Stuart sees us. He'll squirt tobacco juice and information all over anybody that inquires about us.

"Take along an extra change of clothes, Maud. Another little scheme. Tell you about that later. Not our fault that Miss Scooty got sore and rode off alone, is it?" He shrugged. "No *sabe*—no spick English—"

"Marvelous, Skag!" applauded the blonde. She leaped up from the bed, making hasty preparations. "Maybe the hussy won't be so high-hat after this."

"Not so likely," said Skag, "but hurry, Maud. Never can tell who's snoopin' around. Snoopin'—that's what got us into this mess." His big body swayed import-

antly toward the stable to get Maud's horse.

"ONE false move," warned Skag as they dismounted in front of Clem Stuart's store, "and you'll find yourself in a dog-pile with Clem, on the floor."

Scooty moved into the store as if in a nightmare. So close to rescue, and yet so far, she thought. She smiled genially at Clem.

"Bless my soul," said the old store-keeper, wringing one handle of his mustache. "Miss Scooty—an' the Triple S." He didn't speak to the blonde, and it seemed to cut her deeply. "Did the gov'mint give you Injuns permission to



leave the reservation?" He slapped his thigh and sent a spray of tobacco juice across the counter. "You shore do come when you take a notion, don'tcha?"

"Yuh," said Skag. "Gimme six packets of Bull. Dogy wants somethin', too."

With concentration that was almost hypnotic Scooty watched her old friend fumble the purchases into striped paper bags.

"Clem," she said suddenly, "is my credit good here? I came away without a cent, and I don't like Bull, or any of the things Dogy is buying. You know what I like, Clem."

"Bless my soul," said Clem. "You can have the store. Why, a-course I know what you like—seedless raisins! Oughta know, been a-sellin' 'em to yuh since you was knee-high to a tadpole."

The package of raisins in her hand,

Scooty glided smoothly out the door that Skag held open for her.

When Dogy had crammed his crackers and bologna, cheese and bottled soft drink into his saddle pockets, they all mounted and set out again on the ride that was to be Scooty's last.

A short way up the trail Skag called the party to a halt, crowding close to the big blonde.

"This," he said in a low voice, "is where you go into your act. Take her down in the washout yonder and switch clothes with her. It might muddle the searchin' party if someone sees Miss McCune's *ridin' habit* travelin' in the opposite direction than she is goin' herself. Dogy and me'll stay here. Yell if she starts anything."

"Pooh!" said the blonde with infinite disgust. "Come along. You won't see nothin' you haven't seen before. She might as well get used to it. They don't wear clothes in heaven."

Dogy's unaccustomed eyes glittered at the sight of half-nude femininity. His nails bit deep into his palms.

Scorn trembled on the big blonde's lips.

"Well," she rasped, standing skin-tight in Scooty's clothes, "what next?"

Skag's ample paunch shook with silent laughter.

"Get on," he said, if you can do it without rippin' your britches——"

Scooty, in the baggy garments of the blonde, continued to munch raisins as if this ludicrous pageant had entirely missed her. Her thoughts clung tenaciously to the pin-prick of light she seemed to see through this dark predicament.

"When she begins to cry for water," scoffed the blonde as they rode away, "feed her another raisin. Very moistenin', they say."

OLD JASON stood leaning against the porch railing, his eyes almost swallowed by the crow's-feet that clutched at them, as Truman rode up.

"Where's Scooty?" he cried.

"That's what I wish we both knew, Dad," said Truman, "and that's what I aim to find out. I'll find her if I have to level off every knoll in the Grand River brakes with gun-lead."

"Didn't you meet her on the trail?" shouted Old Jason. "She was home—and went again to meet you!"

"Here!" cried Truman. "After I left——?"

"That's what I'm sayin'!" Daylight flashed between Old Jason's legs as he strode down the porch. "They've got her this time, Tru. They've got her sure. She knows who killed Homer. Saw 'em do it——followed 'em."

There was something of a bleat in Truman's voice.

"Who——?"

"Skag Hillard and Dogy Martin!" Old Jason launched a scurrilous attack against Ot Black. "It's that renegade that's behind it, or I'll pay perdition for lyin'——"

"Skag Hillard and Dogy Martin!" In swift retrospect Truman understood the meaning of their cross-examination. He braced his hand against the porch railing and vaulted over it.

"Hold on!" cried Old Jason. "I'm goin' too." Swiftly he bow-legged to the barn to get his horse.

"River trail?"

"No," barked Old Jason, "Took the hill trail, she did."

An hour later they came upon the spot where Scooty's suddenly checked horse had scarred the hard-packed ground.

"Here's where they overhauled her," Truman said bitterly.

"They got her all right, Dad."

But though they followed the trail with the skill of Piute scouts they lost it on the rimrock ledge where not even the flintiest hoofs could leave a mark.

"Professional killers," said Old Jason hollowly, "have a way of coverin' their tracks."

A mile or so beyond Clem Stuart's gen-

eral merchandise store, Truman and Jason dismounted. Old Clem, his mustache sagging like a piece of tarred rope pinned to a gray canvas, had told them everything.

Truman was on hands and knees now, microscopically examining the wagon rut. Savage excitement suddenly rang in his throat:

"Raisins! Raisins!"

Old Jason glared at him, thoughts of insanity leaping into his eyes. Then he, too, saw the sprinkling of wrinkled fruit beside the wagon rut. Into his thoughts burst a vision of a little girl with a red ribbon in her hair, eating raisins with fingers that had but a short time before been mixing mud pies.

"In God's name," he said at last, "we're on the trail, Tru!"

Bent almost double, his eyes examining every grass-blade, Truman darted to the side of the trail. Again he was on his knees, muttering, nodding.

At that moment a rider came over a bulge in the trail and drew rein beside Old Jason. It was Hank Mulkey, a lean-faced, wind-whipped puncher from the Flying V.

"What yuh doin'?" he yelled at Truman. "Catchin' ants?"

Old Jason barked at him:

"Did you see anything of Scooty?"

"Scooty?" said the rider. "Yeah—over on Bald Eagle. Her and Skag Hillard. Waved at me from the ridge. Why?"

"Huh!" said Old Jason, leaning from the saddle, his arm-stub wagging like a terrier's tail.

"Couldn't mistake her at that distance—that beer-colored shirt and that flashy scarf."

"Truman!" cried Old Jason. "Hank seen 'er over on Bald Eagle—ridin' with Skag Hillard—"

But Truman now stood rooted above the thing he had found in the grass, doubt, fear, indecision using his face for a battleground. Did Skag Hillard know Scooty's fondness for raisins? Was this a ruse to lead the credulous down a false

trail? Had Hank Mulkey actually seen her over on Bald Eagle?

"No!" he suddenly blurted. "No!"

In a leap he was in the saddle, spurring down an overgrown buffalo trail that led toward Lone Pine Pass and away from Bald Eagle. Shouting protest, Old Jason rode after him.

The Flying V waddie spat once in the dust, shrugged, and rode on about his own business.

After scrutinizing a long stretch of barren trail and finding no more sign, Truman reined in. Only the thoughtfully twitching eyes in that face seemed young and alive now. The rest was as a mask hewn in the bark of a dead cottonwood.

"How could she be in this direction," accused Old Jason, "when Mulkey seen her over on Bald Eagle?"

Without lifting his eyes, Truman shook his head. Those raisins, tantamount, in his mind, to Scooty's own signature. On the other hand, so was that beer colored shirt, as Mulkey called it; and that flashy scarf which he himself had given her.

For a moment, under the baleful impatience of Old Jason's glare, Truman sat drumming the pommel of his saddle. Then he spurred on again in the same direction they had been riding.

In the tall grass through which they traveled no fresh sign was found to reassure them, had, indeed, any been left. But Truman's mind was made up. Though Scooty's life depended on his decision, and though all that life meant to him depended on the outcome, he rode steadfastly forward.

As they climbed the slope of Lone Pine Ridge, from the peak of which the trail fell again into Sandora desert, Truman read the ground in front of them until the hillside trembled under his concentrated gaze.

At the summit they found a suspicion of a hoof-print in a patch of swirling sand. That was all.

Below them now stretched Sandora desert, heat waves beating upward from the far side of it, sunset writhing along its ribbed sand like a myriad copper snakes. A hot wind swept across it, funneling through the pass, as if from a smelting furnace.



Scanning the desert's grim face for a moment, they plunged on again, down the zigzag trail, into the shifting sands, wind and darkness rapidly obliterating the tracks they left behind.

THE desert twilight wove its spell over the sand, and a remnant of day, like an indirect lighting system, cast mellow, twisting shadows across Scooty's face. Leaning on one elbow she lay on a little mound, her smooth body stretched at full length.

Sitting cross-legged in front of her, his gross face even more distorted by the evening shadows, sat Dogy Martin. He gnawed on a stick of bologna which he peeled as he would a banana, a box of crackers wedged between his thighs, a bottle of soft drink stuck in the sand beside him.

Alone here on the desert with this beautiful girl, Dogy was emboldened to the point of speech:

"When the horses finished with their oats," he said, grinning crookedly, "we ride on to the dunes." But that was not the thought uppermost in his mind. The sunset hour, with its light and shadow, was a thing apart from Dogy. A dwarfed and pitiful thing was his understanding of romance. A thing gained by advantage rather than by finesse or mutual regard.

He rolled the bologna back into its

greasy paper, closed the lid of the cracker box and stood up dusting crumbs from his chaps.

Scooty was quick to see the molten glow that kindled in those dull eyes. She pivoted swiftly toward him, her elbow burrowing a hole in the sand. Clearly she saw her position; saw that something tactful was required on her part.

"Dogy," she said, smiling up at him, "sit down, let's talk."

"Tired of settin'," said Dogy sullenly.

Scooty's pulse ticked audibly in her temples.

"Why don't you be nice," she said, "and give me some dinner?"

In a few words Dogy laid bare his single-tracked desire.

"What'll you gimme if I do? Besides—tain't orders."

Slowly Scooty pulled herself to her feet.

"Isn't this a beautiful night, Dogy? Listen, Dogy, I've always been very fond of you, and I never could understand why you didn't like me. I've always wanted us to be friends. Now that we have the opportunity, why don't we get acquainted? If you just wanted to, we could do all sorts of nice things together."

Dogy was not to be dissuaded. All the starved emptiness of his soul had drawn to a focal point. The music of Scooty's voice set hammers pounding in his brain, brought an apoplectic glow to his coarse cheeks.

"Like what?" he said. "What would we do?"

"Well, for instance," said Scooty, struggling to turn defeat to temporary victory, "we could come out here and watch the sunset, see the stars come out, and the moon come up over Eagle Nest. Look, Dogy, see the first star of evening up there—how pale and lonesome it looks? And look back there, Dogy. See the blue shadows crowding in between the hills as if they wanted to be tucked in for the night?"

Accustomed to obeying, Dogy followed her pointing finger, his loose mouth hanging open as he searched the heavens for eve's lone star. Then, suddenly, as he turned half about to see the blue shadows, a whole constellation burst before his eyes. His hanging jaw snapped shut on his tongue as he staggered backwards.

Like a terrier after a wolf, Scooty was on him, her tiny, balled fists flashing in his face. But the strength of that emaciated body had been deceptive. It caught balance and lunged viciously toward her. Hands powered by madness clutched her shoulders and flung her violently sidewise. They toppled together into the sand.

No use to match strength with a force that was wrenching her arm from its socket. Her free hand groped at Dogy's hip for his gun. But Dogy's thumb had found her throat—pressing the eyes from her head, the tongue from her mouth. She felt the full weight of his body fall on her, then, suddenly, a clement darkness settled over her eyes.

WHEN consciousness returned to Scooty she found herself lying with her head pillowed on a leathered thigh. A hand was stroking her forehead tenderly. Her long, curving lashes swung upward and she looked gratefully into the haggard face of her father. Perspiration was running down his lined cheeks like water in an irrigation system.

"Take it easy, Scooty," he said gently.

"Everything's all right. We've got the beast hog-tied like a pig at a barbeque. Nicked Truman's side with a bullet, but not serious. It's Ot Black, Scooty, that's behind it all." His tone seemed to gratify all his years of suspicion. "Dogy squealed—told everything. It was Hillard that killed Homer. The Triple S is Black's outfit. Tryin' to freeze the J Bar M out." His tired eyes bit down at the corners while for a long minute he looked off across the moonlit desert. "I never thought I'd live to see the day when Ot Black got his just deserts. But the day has come, Scooty. Ot Black will pay perdition for his sins. A telegram from Sheriff Rickhart to the authorities at Deadwood will settle the account in full. And Hillard, too, will do the limber-legged dance right alongside of him. Rickhart'll have him in the net two hours after we give the word. The book is closed," he said, "as soon as justice has been served."

Truman, shoving his warm-barreled gun back in the holster, dropped suddenly on his knees beside Scooty and took both her hands. His face was drawn from the gruelling ordeal, but his eyes were bright with new hope and a memory.

"Scooty," he said tenderly, "spring has come again." He bent to press a kiss on her lips.

"My blessing," said Old Jason the stub of his arm nodding with his head. "After twenty-six years of trouble, now we can have peace."



Adventurers All

An Arabian Night

WHEN war struck Europe in 1914, I had returned to Belgium from nine years of service in the Congo Free State as a trader employed by trading companies. I enlisted at once in the Belgian army and went up through the various non-commissioned grades until after considerable fighting in the trenches, I was commissioned a second lieutenant. I had served but a few months on the Yser when I was detailed to the Belgian Colonial Army then serving in German East Africa.

One of a detachment of twelve officers and twelve non-commissioned officers, I sailed from Marseilles in the steamship *Sydney*, for Mombasa, British East Africa, through the Suez Canal. The detachment commander was Captain Count Duroy du Blickuy.

I was the only officer on board who had been in Africa, but there were some traders from Madagascar and a few French military officers. Among the passengers were two natives from Mombasa who were in first-class cabins. They said they were Arabs, but of a strong Negro type, so they looked more like Swahilis than Arabs. They took their meals at a corner table, and none of the Europeans had any social contact with these men.

We Belgians do not feel the same as the French in regard to the colored races. My friends, eager to hear me talk Swahili, urged me to enter into conversation with the two Arabs.

I introduced myself to the Mombasa

natives and found them to be brothers who had graduated from an English university—a doctor and a lawyer. I then introduced all the officers, some of whom could talk a little English. From then on the Arabs mixed with the other passengers and took part in our games.

With stops at Constantine, Algeria, Port Said, Djibouti and Aden, we reached Mombasa in nineteen days. We lodged in an English hotel. The Arabian quarter has wide streets but no sidewalks, with houses built of clay and roofed with iron plates. Stores in this quarter are owned by Greeks, Hindus, Arabs and Swahilis. The big trading companies, British and French, are in the European quarter.

The day after our arrival, one of the Arabian brothers who had been on the *Sydney* was outside the hotel waiting for some of us to appear. Being a native he could not enter the hotel. When we appeared, he invited us to dinner at his father's house, to repay the kindness of the officers on the passage out from France.

Captain du Blickuy accepted the invitation for the detachment, but was persuaded by higher officers not to allow us to be the guests of natives at dinner in Mombasa. Such things were not supposed to happen—not done, as is the saying in East Africa. We were all eager to go, and curious, and I induced the captain to allow us to go. That evening we were escorted to the house of our Arabian friends.

The house was large, built of clay, without the walls having whitewash, so it did not appear to differ much in appearance

from the other buildings of the native quarter. There were no windows on the street side, no veranda, and the door was only a narrow opening in the walls.

OUR two friends, dressed in European linen suits, greeted us, and we entered a room that had no furniture, with bare walls and mats on the dirt floor. We were standing in groups when two servants pushed a table on wheels into the room. Then the father of the Arabs entered. He was a tall man, about fifty-five, with a long white beard. He wore an Arabian robe of white and a white turban. He spoke English perfectly, but I, knowing but little English, addressed him in Swahili. It was then that I discovered that he was the Arabian governor of Mombasa, and a man of great fortune.

The host thanked us all for the friendliness we had shown his two sons on board the steamer and expressed his satisfaction because we had accepted his invitation to dinner.

We passed through a curtain of reeds to enter the dining room. To our astonishment, we found the floor covered with rich carpets, the walls were draped with embroidered silks. But what surprised us most was the fact that the table, covered loosely with an expensive silk cloth, held carved ivory candelabras inlaid with gold and jewels. Flowers formed a centerpiece.

The plates were of finest porcelain, the glasses were of carved crystal, while the handles of the knives, forks and spoons were of gold.

The only discordant note in the setting was the type of chairs; they were all wooden, but no two alike, as if they had

been borrowed for the dinner from various neighbors.

The dinner was excellent—soup, roast goat, and canned vegetables. The wines and champagne were the finest on the market and the Arabian coffee was unsurpassed. It was late in the night when we took leave of our friends, all of us being in the best of spirits.

About four years later I again passed through Mombasa and paid a visit to my Arabian friends. I was shocked to find them sitting with other natives in front of their home. They were barefoot, wearing Arabian garments, and eating roast goat and rice with their fingers in the customary manner of the Arabs.

I have always been puzzled about this appearance of comparative poverty on my last visit to my Arabian friends. Perhaps their fortune had been reduced by the war and the campaign in German East Africa; or they did not reveal to all their Arab friends the wealth which had been visible on my first visit with the other officers; or Western civilization really has little effect upon natives of Africa and they are inclined to revert to their own style of living when no Europeans are present. At least, as an old Roman said some centuries ago, "Out of Africa, there comes always something new."

Captain Frederick Moore with Mtala-Mtala (Mr. Glass-Glass)

(Mtala-Mtala, which means Glass-Glass in an African tongue, is the name of a Belgian trader who acquired the name from African natives because he wore glasses. He spent eighteen years in the Congo country, and campaigning in German East Africa during the war.)

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SILVER SYLVESTER— TILLERMAN

By **ANDREW A. CAFFREY**

Author of "To Sit and Take It," "Steel in the Man," etc.

SYLVESTER was on the hummer. He hadn't worked for a long time. What's more, he wasn't hustling for a job, and that's bad.

He had gone seedy, too, and was growing even more so. Then, to top it all, Sylvester was on the booze.

All day and far into each long night, week after week, he sat in the Marley's small lobby and watched traffic flow north and south between the cramping curbs and high buildings of narrow, noisy 3rd Street.

The Marley was a man's hotel. Not a flophouse, but a place where you put your four or six bucks on the desk once a week or else. And being a man's hotel, the Marley attracted and sheltered the boys from the hard spots. Men in from the timber and mines. Seamen from all the waters of the western world. Fisherman down from far Alaska, and horny-handed sons from ranch and range. Then there were those who earned it in town, such as

Carl Scott, Snoose the Swede, Al Kaufman and Harry Judge. All men who had a pay coming on every pay-day, or else enough jack in the Marley's safe to see 'em over till spring. And in company like that, a bum on the bench, such as Sylvester was getting to be, loomed like a sore thumb on piece work.

Not that Sylvester was on the mooch, for he hadn't fallen to that low level which is a total lack of laboring class. But as Sea-cook Slagel put it, "The guy's a hell of a thing to have on exhibition in our front window."

Al Kaufman, old stopper at the Marley, was the man to explain that. Al, in his way, was a pretty good drinking man too. Other drunks were inclined to cry on his shoulder, and tell all. He knew just about everybody who packed a bindle through the Marley's front, kick-stripped door. He knew when guys were strapped and borrowing on their insurance policies. Also, Al knew when guys were cinching up on

Once a Tillerman, Always a Tillerman



the belt and missing meals; and that the time had arrived to slip 'em two bits.

Snoose the Swede, sitting three chairs back from the Marley's front window, thumbed another wad of Copenhagen in behind his lip, grinned his goofy grin and told the half dozen habitual sitters, "Guess dat Seelwes'er feller's oot shasin' fire trooks, yah? Dat's crazy feller—Seelwes'er. Droonk now two-tree mont', mebbe more. Pretty tam soon all he yack bane shoot t'ell. Ten he bane moochin' on Tird Street yust like t'hopheads."

The sitters, never too quick to climb a fellow who's down and out, or approaching that stage, let Snoose the Swede's words trail off into heavy silence. But the subject had thus been introduced, and, naturally, Sylvester's status was of some interest there among men with whom he had been living for weeks. So Carl Scott sort of took the thing up from where Snoose the Swede quit.

"What is this guy Sylvester, Al?" Carl Scott asked Kaufman.

"Silver's all jake," Al said. "He used to be a fireman, as I get it, and—"

"A fireman!" said Carl Scott.

HE SAID it with the finest disdain. Scott was a fellow who wore neat, solid iron-gray suits, nigger-yaller shoes with proud bull-dog toes and a black felt hat with high, round crown and narrow brim. The brim was turned up in back and dipped over the right eye in front. In other words, Carl Scott was of labor's tip-top aristocracy, a stationary engineer, Pacific Coast brand. And as such, Scott had little use for the bungling human things that give good engineers the most trouble—firemen. Firemen! The damned things that won't wipe an engine correctly, fire an engine as it should be fired, or keep out from under a good engineer's feet!

"Not your kind of a fireman, feller," Al Kaufman told Scott. "Silver's the other kind—a fire-fightin' fireman."

"Oh-h-h! a scissor-bill, eh?" Scott said.

Anybody working for the city, county, state or Uncle Sam was a scissor-bill in Scott's acrid estimation. "What's the matter with him—ain't he workin' at the tired-lame-an'-lazy graft now? How come the guy's on the hummer?"

"Well, it's a long story," Al Kaufman said. "You see, this Silver guy's too old to apply as a rookie. But if he puts in for work as an experienced fireman he'll have to state where, when and so forth. Also, why he quit said job. An' that's where they'd have Silver with his suspenders cut. It seems Silver was pinched for some window breaking when he was a kid. He didn't think it was important enough to mention on his first application blank. After he'd served on the department for six years, and had gone up to this hifalutin' tillerman job, some chiselin' son—some bird that found himself standin' at the top of the civil-service eligible list—dug up this old juvenile-court record and managed to knock ol' Silver off that high seat of his. Yes, this robbin' son knocked that big, wide wheel right outa Silver's hands. Can you guys imagine that? Hell, every kid's chucked stones at one time or another, eh?"

"Sure," Carl Scott agreed. "But them dam' scissor-bills's all that way, Al. Always robbin' the next highest guy, if they can work a pull."

"Sh-h-h . . . here comes Silver now," said Al Kaufman.

Sylvester, dripping wet, came into the lobby, backed up to the wall, then stood there gazing out into the night traffic on 3rd.

"How're they goin', Silver?" Al Kaufman asked.

"Not so hot, Al," Sylvester answered. "She sure looks like a long, hard winter from where I stand."

"Then sit, Silver," Harry Judge said, getting up and starting for the door. "Guess I'll go out and take on a bite of grub so's I'll be sure not to sleep too well after I turn in. Am I a sap!"

Seated in the Marley's family circle, Sylvester became a bit more talkative. "I was down at that dock blaze in China Basin this afternoon," he said. "Man! What I mean—it was a hot session."

"By the way, Silver," Al Kaufman said, at the same time nudging Scott's elbow—"you were on the department in Baltimore, eh?"

"Boston!" Sylvester snapped. "Not Baltimore, Al. Hell, they don't fight fires down there! They let 'em burn. But you take old Bean Town—that's where they fight 'em."

"Listen, Al. There ain't a better fire town in America, than Boston. New York, me eye! In Boston you've got all the bets against you when an alarm comes in. You guys ever been in Boston? Well, you should get a peek at them alleys we call streets back there. When it comes to rollin' equipment through them streets, a department has to be there. An' I'll tell a man, we are there."

"Where d'ya get the 'we' stuff—you on vacation, Chief?" Carl Scott asked, with the usual anti-scissor-bill edge on his voice.

Sylvester didn't pay any attention to the cut. He said, "I was tillerman. I was tillerman." And you sort of noticed that he *was* tillerman, realized the past tense of that, and had a fear in his soul that he'd never ride as tillerman again.

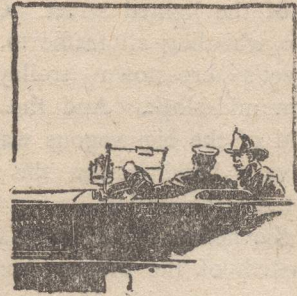
"Teel-a-man?" Snoose the Swede asked. "Wot's it, Seelwes'er—a teel-a-men?"

"That's on the ladder truck, Swede," Sylvester went on to explain. "You've seen that guy who sits way back on the swing of the ladder truck? The guy on the big tiller wheel, the john who turns the swing wheels, haven't ya? Well, that's me. The best dam' job a man ever had."

"How come you to quit that swell job—did ya put out all the fires, for years ahead?" Carl Scott ribbed. He nudged Kaufman.

Sylvester didn't answer. He was all

ears, leaning ahead half out of his chair, and that lobby was forgotten. A fire-alarm gong was ringing out in 3rd Street. That particular fire-alarm gong was on the second-floor front of the Winchester Hotel, directly across the street from the Marley.



The reason for that alarm gong lies in the fact that 3rd Street, in that one block, holds some twenty-odd eating places and three other men's hotels. Many firemen and cops of the district grab their on-shift meals on that block. Hence, when the Winchester gong starts rapping out a box you see all sorts of uniformed huskies coming from this eatery and that, pulling on coats, stepping to the curb, then to the pave, all set to swing aboard the equipment when it roars up or down 3rd.

SYLVESTER, being all fireman, never missed a call. So, with this alarm, he was out of his chair, pulling his wet overcoat high around his neck, clamping the old felt hat down tight on his head, counting that box. And then the Winchester gong stopped gonging.

A fireman popped out of the Home Cafe, next door to the Marley. The Marley's sitters could see the fellow step to the curb, then step back. He pushed the swinging doors into Sylvester's hands.

"Any of you men count that box?" the fireman asked.

Sylvester gave him the call number. Then he asked, "Do the extension ladders roll on that one, bud?"

"Everything rolls on that one," the fireman answered, going away. "It's right

down among the high ones. In the hotel belt."

And by then everything was rolling on 3rd. Sirens and gongs were wailing and clanging just to the south. The oncoming big parade of red paint and brass, glistening red paint and shiny brass in the driving rain of the lighted street. Crossing cops were whistling all traffic to a stop. 3rd Street's crosstown trolleys had stopped in mid-block. And the rumble and pound of the big wagons was shaking the very buildings on the ancient mud of their foundation.

Up at the head of 3rd Street's grade, a block north of the Marley, something had gone wrong with Market Street's traffic; and the passing fire trucks were beginning to slow down, drop back to low gear, and take the grade in labor. That was bad. There'd be hell to pay for those traffic men on duty at the five-points crossing where the tie-up was slowing the department down to a crawl.

By then all the Marley watchers were on their feet and crowding forward against the large, rain-streaked window. They saw a big pumper drop most of its thundering speed, shift to low, then pound ahead up the grade. Then a battalion chief, dodging through traffic and passing stalled street cars on the wrong side, roared through. A chemical rolled past, and now the mess up ahead had been straightened out and the equipment was flowing freer.

The big ladder truck was coming. It plunged over the crossing just south of the Marley's door at close to full speed. Then it was right out front. The driver braked it down a bit. But not for a gear shift.

And that fireman—the one who had popped in to ask whether anybody had caught the box number—did a stretch for the long grab-rail and swung aboard. Right with that fireman, grabbing and stretching, went Silver Sylvester. He was all legs and coattails.

"Yumpin' yimminy!" Snoose the Swede wailed. "Seelwes'er, you tam fuel!"

"What t'ell!" Carl Scott said, "Where does that guy rate that? Hoppin' a ride like that! Whew, what guts! I wouldn't take a chance like that even if my life depended on it."

"That's Silver's game," Al Kaufman said. "The guy's there."

"But he's rum-dum," Scott said. "Hell, man, that stuff calls for condition!"

"The guy's not as rum-dum as you birds think," Al told them. "Know where Silver spends most of his time? Well, I'll tell ya—over on the fire department's training lot. He knows all these firemen. He hounds hell out of 'em. Go over to the lot some mornin' and you'll find Silver climbing ladders, scaling the tower with them big, long hooks, even jumpin' in nets. And he puts in long sessions at hand-ball. Tell you what; that there's punishment for a guy that's on the booze."

"Exercise's punishment even when a guy's not on the funny water," Carl Scott agreed. "But I guess you men, and Sylvester, can handle these alarms for the rest of the night. I'm due on the tenth-floor scaffold at eight in the morning. Good-night, gang."

MEANTIME, No. 7's thundering extension ladder—the piece of equipment that Silver Sylvester and the fireman had grabbed—had made its dangerous, cramped turn out of 3rd and into Market. Then, with siren and bell yelling for right-of-way, it roared west on that broad, four-streetcar-tracked thoroughfare. A half dozen blocks of that westward run and the long truck had gathered speed to spare—but the driver on the wheel up front wasn't sparing or dropping off any of that speed. This was an alarm from the hotel district, a district wherein hotels and apartment houses towered skyward through distances that reconciled themselves to no building-restriction limits. Fire had taken the city

once. The fire department will lay you any odds that it won't happen again. But to keep that standing bet covered, they make it a point to run when they run—an' no dam' foolin'. And No. 7's ladder was wheeling now. Wheeling on the very wheels of hell when she came down on the three-street junction where the equipment ahead was turning off Market in an almost-steady stream of flashing, splashing, swaying trucks of red paint and glistening brass.

Now, at all those three-street junction turn-offs, leading out of Market to the north and northwest, one street makes a ninety-degree angle—as any good street should—and runs directly north. But the other street that comes in at that point, or quits Market at that point, does so at a very easy angle. That is, it doesn't even split the ninety-degree angle equally. Fact is, the turn-off is so easy, so gradual, that a good driver can clip and crowd corners, put everything on the ball, then whirl out of Market and up one of the diagonals with hardly a reduction of speed.

So the extension ladder pounded down on that turn-off point. Three of 7's ladders were riding the left-side running-board. Silver and that other man were clinging to the off-side grab-rail. Silver's eyes were on the street ahead, part of the time, but mostly on the man who sat spread wide behind the tiller wheel. And what wouldn't Silver have given to be riding down on that turn-off point behind that big wheel! Man, that was life! Silver, no doubt, envied the guy on the job. And the guy on the job, as Silver knew, was a sub tillerman, for the regular tillerman was the fellow who'd grabbed the truck along with Silver, back there in front of the Marley.

This regular night man, standing there just ahead and below the tiller wheel, was barking quick, brief instructions to the relief man just as the driver up front began to make his easy, fast turn-off.

"Watch your tracks, kid! Lay on 'er! Lay on 'er, kid! Don't split that—!" and that was as far as the regular tillerman ever got with his warnings, warnings born of long experience.

Well, things happened then, and with such speed that no two could be found who'd agree on all details. Anyway, the driver up front had begun his turn. Naturally, with such a long swing behind him, he was counting on cutting 'er close. That is, when that tiller trailer's wheels finally cleared the street-corner curb, they'd clip it dam' close. She'd squeak through by inches, but she'd squeak—just as she'd always done the job before.

Then the front end was clear of the turn, and—All hell broke loose! The tiller wheels split the switch, split that switch where the streetcar tracks turn from Market into the diagonal. And the long, heavy rear end was out of hand, out of hand and whipping.

THE whipping swept the trailing overhang of the long ladder first to the left. Just ahead, on the left, the diagonal street was crammed with trolley cars laying to, end to end, stalled and waiting, throughout the short block's entire length. Silver Sylvester knew that the worst was happening when the ladder's overhang first struck the nearest of those stalled-and-waiting trolleys. There were yells and panicky screams, men rolling under the truck, and Silver knew that the rollers were the laddersmen from the left-side runningboard. Then, with a snap and a hump, the tiller wheels had quit the switch and the high flange of the frog; and the skidding momentum was hurtling the swing end to the right, to the right and down hard on a street corner that was packed with theatre-hour onlookers.

The swinging, lurching change of direction spun Sylvester free of the runningboard, tore the grab-bar from his grip, dropped him grabbing and slither-

ing almost under the oncoming tiller wheels. But Silver, free of the mighty juggernaut, kept to his feet—some way—and kept to his reaching and grabbing, too. He saw that other man, the regular tillerman, go off that runningboard when the tiller wheels hit and jumped the curb. He saw that other man pitch through the air. He knew that that fireman had answered his last alarm when the trail end swept past and left him there in the gutter.

And Silver, reaching and grabbing, had somehow managed to take a double handful of the ladder's shattered end. Then Silver was aboard again. Like a man gone mad, he was working his way up and ahead to the tiller wheel. Then, with the whipping, swaying equipment still running wild, Silver Sylvester was trying a queer thing. He was trying to take that big wheel out of the sub tillerman's hands.

Shortly after that, the fire trucks began to return down 3rd, indicating that it hadn't been much of a fire. With the return of the equipment that rolled southward, in due course of time, came Silver Sylvester. He came afoot. He weaved a bit, coming through the door, dragged a leg and limped heavily. Silver was what you'd call pretty-well-messed up. Closer inspection showed that his overcoat and pants were badly torn and bedraggled. The old felt hat was missing. There were signs of streaked blood on his face, a face that was bruised to a pulp. One eye was closing fast; and the other blinked nervously. Sylvester was cold-sober now.

"Give me a cig, Al," was all Silver said; and his extended hand shook. "A cig, Al."

Al Kaufman produced. "By hell, Silver!" he said, "You look like a guy that came out second best with a buzz saw." And, for the time being, Al said no more.

Snoose the Swede had come to his feet, circled Sylvester for a closer study,

then said, "Me guedness, Seelwes'er! Ya're van 'ell oova mess. Deed dey trow ya oof the trook, eh Seelwes'er?"

"Yeah, they threw me off, Swede," Silver said. "Sit down, Snoose. Keep t'hell outa my hair, Swede. Sit down!"

Silver pulled a few long, steadying drags on the cig; and he was sure jittery. "Hell, men," he finally mumbled, "she was a mess. You saw me do a stretch for No. 7's ladder, out front here, eh? Well, that sub tillerman, young Maloney, lost his wheel and let 'er run wild on him, up there on one of them crowded diagonal streets that angle off Market. We all hit the pave. Some dead, I guess."

"And where did you figure in, or get off?" Al Kaufman asked.

"Damned if I know," said Silver. "You know how I was when I left here, Al. That I should grab that wagon! What a dam' fool'll do when he's tight!"

"What'll they do to this sub guy?" Al Kaufman asked.

"Do?" Sylvester questioned. "Oh, nothin' they can do, Al. This guy—I've met him out on the training lot a few times—has a drag some place. Got a brother, I hear, that's some sorta ward-heeler out in the Mission. Captain Keech—he's in command at No. 7, and that ladder's 7's—told me, long time ago, that I could have this guy's job, if the givin' was in Captain Keech's hands. You know Keech—the big, gray-headed guy that eats here at the Home Cafe? He's a good john, Al——"

"But this young guy that let the swing get outa his hands—the guy just don't belong, Al. I ain't kiddin' ya, and I ain't knockin' him, but the guy's afraid to go off the ground. For a fact! He can't scale. He won't jump a net. He's jittery even on a tower climb. Now why in hell does a guy like that hang round a department?"

"It ain't that I want to rob the bird of his job, Al. Hell, even if I wanted to, I

wouldn't have a Chink's chance! I'm all washed up, 'sfar as department work goes, but any guy wearin' the uniform should be all set to put everything on the ball when an alarm comes in."

"Correct as hell, Silver," Al Kaufman agreed. "But you'd better get upstairs and look after yourself a bit. That nose looks bad. That Winchester gong'll sound off again and you won't be ready to run."

Sylvester laughed. He started for the Marley's one elevator. "You ain't kiddin' me, Al," he said. "I know I'm a sap, but the thing's in my blood. When they ring, I go. How about runnin' me up, Harry?"

Harry, the combination night clerk and elevator man, came from behind his small desk. He and Sylvester went toward the fourth floor.

Less than five minutes later, Harry had returned to the lobby. He stood down front talking with Al Kaufman and Snoose the Swede when two of No. 7's firemen came through the door. The taller of the two was Captain Keech.

"How're you?" Captain Keech said. "Say, isn't there a tramp fireman stopping here at the Marley? Fellow named Sylvester?"

HARRY the clerk said there was. "I just took him up to his floor," he added. "I unlocked one of the bathrooms for him; and he's in there now."

"All right," Captain Keech said. "Fine. I like to think that firemen, even tramp firemen, take baths. But listen. Did this Sylvester come in, just a while ago, pretty well messed up?"

Harry looked at Captain Keech. Then he stared at Snoose the Swede and Al Kaufman. Al Kaufman managed to put a heavy foot on the great big left foot of Snoose the Swede. There was much silence in that small lobby. And Captain Keech was the fellow who broke the deadlock.

"All right again," he said. "Let's start over. There was a bad accident on that

last run you men saw the department make. My ladder truck was swinging off Market, into O'Farrell. The man on the tiller wheel split a street track switch, or something. After that, hell broke loose. The swing clipped a car. Three ladder-men were crushed. One of 'em will die tonight. They were on the left running-board. Then the ladder swung across the street. Another of our men—Jack Beel—went off when it hit a mail box. He's dead.



"That much we know, and it's bad. But what we don't know is how bad the thing might have been if somebody hadn't popped up from no place and manned the tiller wheel as it should be manned.

"The driver, up front, only got one peek at the man on the tiller. He thinks it was this Sylvester, a tramp fireman he'd seen out at the training lot. You see, the driver was in a spot. He was running on wet car tracks, and in that driving rain. The block was packed solid with street cars standing-to, on his left. The gutter, on his right, was lined with cars filled with theatre parties; and the sidewalk, to say nothing of the gutters between autos, was crowded. Well, the driver couldn't brake 'er down till after half a block's skid. And if this man Sylvester hadn't popped up from God knows where, there's no telling what would

have happened on that sidewalk in front of the Grand! Then, when the driver finally pulled down to a stop, nearly at the end of that block, this man we think was Sylvester got t'hell down off that rear end and ducked away in the crowd. Yes, it must have been this Sylvester."

"How come the feller on the tiller—the guy who balled the detail—can't say who it was?" Al Kaufman asked. "Everybody out on the training lot must know Sylvester."

Captain Keech indulged in something approaching a laugh, and said, "One of our relief tillermen, young Maloney, was on the wheel. Close observers, including two crossing cops, claim that Maloney froze in his seat, fouling the steerage, utterly useless. And the same crossing cops claim that this Sylvester came up from nowhere, scrambled over the trail of the ladder, rocked Maloney's head back with a right hook, knocking him cold and free of the wheel. Now here is a thing I can't understand; one of those cops swears that your man Sylvester was on the off runningboard when the ladder came up Market."

"The bull's correct as hell," Al Kaufman said. "Sylvester and this fireman—the one that hit the mail box—swung aboard that ladder when it went past here."

"That's what I wanted to know," Captain Keech enthused. He glanced at the lobby clock.

"Look. We've got to be getting back to the house. Will you men see to it that Sylvester steps around to talk the thing over with me?"

AL KAUFMAN walked as far as the door with Captain Keech.

"Silver'll be right down, and all set to answer more alarms, just as soon as he gets out of the bath," Al laughed. "Wish you could see him. The guy took one hell of a beating, Captain. But I'll see to it that he hops right over to see you at 7. And say, Captain—not that it's any of my business, but do you think this little party might help Sylvester?"

"As long as I'm able to stand up before the Commission and argue," Captain Keech promised, "it isn't going to hurt him any, at least. Good tillermen are born, not made; and 7 needs a few good ones right now. Well, see that Sylvester comes over to see me. Thanks a lot; and good-night, men."

"Me guedness!" Snoose the Swede enthused. He was overly excited; and no little awed by the uniformed presence of the man who had just gone out. It was well past his usual early bedtime, too, and Snoose wasn't the man to stuff the lip unless he was going to get full, long-time benefit of the prime so deposited. But this was an occasion and t'hell with expenses. So Snoose the Swede tucked in a party-size pinch of Copenhagen and repeated, "Me guedness! D'ya tank as hoo Kap'an Kooch perhoops mean as hoo Seelwes'er get the job o' steerin' the big ladder trook from the wron en', Al? Me guedness! Yi vants t'tell ya as hoo Seelwes'er's yust the feller as can do it, ter."

"Me guedness!" Al Kaufman said. "Me hell! Swede, why don't you take a day off and decide who you're for or against?"

*A Feller Can Sometimes Take a Chance with a He-Killer and
Git Away With It, but the First Time He Gets a Mite
Frisky with a She-Killer, He's a Goner **



CONCLUSION

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"*

CHAPTER XI

WOMAN SIGN

BLIZZARD picked up his knife. He wiped it on the back of the dead cook's shirt, balanced it in his palm, and looked intently at Jake Rupper. Then he turned and went out quickly.

A few moments later, Badger heard horses moving on the hard ground in the yard. He edged his way to the door.

The muzzle of the rifle at the window bore steadily upon Jake, and the voice behind it said gruffly, "Ain't no danger, Badger. If one of 'em crooks a finger, I'll let daylight through Rupper damned pronto!"

"Git, all of you!" viciously barked Jake. "We know when we're licked. But you got somethin' comin'." He flicked a glance at the window and added, "Mistah, you done dealt yo'self a hand, and I'll shore as hell find out who you are."

A snicker answered him.

Blizzard's sharp voice cut through the silence. "Come a-runnin' you two! I got the door and winders kivered."

Badger slid backwards out of the kitchen. The moon was just peeping over the hills, and the horses were clearly visible. He ran toward them. At the same time, a small figure darted from the window to a pony near Belial. Blizzard stood by Solomon's head, rifle at his shoulder.

Badger swung into the saddle, and the stranger did likewise. He caught a glimpse of the laughing face beneath the black Stetson.

Red!

The instant they hit leather, Blizzard's Winchester cracked. A clatter of glass in the kitchen, a burst of flame, and angry voices told the story. During the next few minutes, Jake and his men would be too busy to give chase.

Red tried to laugh like a man. Badger sounded a rebel yell that rolled up the divide and carried far out across the prairie. The three fugitives sped away into the night, unpursued.

In silence and at a fast gallop, they covered the short distance to the place where the trail swept around the point. Then Red brought her pony down to an easy lope, and sang out, "What's our hurry?"

The Rangers slowed to her pace. Badger answered with a chuckle, "You han-kerin' to have lead a-whistlin' 'round yo' purty ears?"

"Wouldn't be the first time. But there's no danger of it tonight."

"How come?" Blizzard wanted to know. "Betcha them fellas is a-saddlin' up by now."

She laughed mischievously. "Unless

they fork each other, they ain't got nothin' to saddle."

"Huh? The big corral was full of ponies and Jake had a thoroughbred in a stall."

Red slowed down to a fox-trot, and they followed suit.

"Maybe so," she said complacently, "but not now. I sent every last one of those nags sky-tootin' down the valley."

Badger hunched his heavy shoulders and laughed all over. Blizzard snickered through his nose.

"How did you ever git by that there big niggah?" he asked. "I calc'lated he'd sleep in the stable."

"You mean Sunshine?" Red's white teeth showed in an impish grin. "Some time ago one of the C bar N boys told me about Sunshine, so I was on the lookout for him. He sleeps down there, all right, and I expect he's still asleep—maybe dreaming."

Badger chuckled. "Quit yo' foolin', gal, and tell us what deviltry you been up to."

The girl reined her pony to a walk, and slid her rifle into its scabbard. Riding on either side of her, the Rangers kept pace and waited for her to begin. Badger frankly studied her.

RED sat the saddle like one born to ride a horse, and the animal's movements displayed to the best advantage the slender beauty and flexible strength of her figure. With a careless little gesture, she shoved her hat to the back of her head. The moon caressed her face with the same loving fingers that gave to the forbidding hills and untamed prairie their wild, nocturnal beauty. It softened without reforming, a roguish face filled with broken commandments and innocent of any desire to repent.

Red lifted her large, restless eyes to Badger's. She laughed with a savage vitality suited to the primitive land through which they rode.

"Honest to God, fellows! This is the

most fun I've had since I was twelve years old and rode hell-bent behind Dad with Ma pounding leather alongside, and the law on our tails throwin' lead to beat hell."

"You got crazy ideas 'bout fun," drawled Blizzard; "but go on."

Red grinned shrewdly. "High Pockets, you ain't foolin' nobody. You're a heller yourself. Anyhow—I claim it's lots of fun to follow two bull-headed fools into trouble and help snake 'em out of it."

Badger didn't tell her that they would have got out, regardless. Instead he hastened to say, "We're shore much obliged to you."

She slapped him on the arm with a quirt. "None of that, Big Feller. Besides, this little rumpus wasn't hardly anything at all. Wait until you see me cut loose in earnest."

"Betcha the fur shore flies when you do," he conceded. "Right now I'm in a sweat to find out what-all happened to-night."

Red rounded up a lock of hair and tucked it under her Stetson. "Oh, nothing much. I knew you were busting into trouble when you came out here, so I followed. Gambling on Jake not starting anything before dark, I hung back and I pretty near waited too long. I knew that Sunshine would go to sleep in the feed bin as soon as he could, and there he was.

"So I went into the tool shed and got me a sledge-hammer; figured nothing short of a sledge would faze that big smoke. That damned hammer pretty near yanked me off my feet when I got her to swingin' good, but she sure felt sweet when she landed smack on Old Sunshine's kinky noggin. He didn't wake up, but he quit snoring. Then—"

Badger exploded with a roar that made the horses flirt their ears. Even Blizzard laughed aloud, headache and all.

Her care-free laugh joined theirs. "Now that I come to think of it," she

burst out breathlessly. "bet I did look funny—hammerin' on that nigger."

Suddenly Blizzard called a halt. He swung Solomon around and gazed back along the trail. "Let's us do a leetle figgerin'," he drawled. "We shore cain't afford to miss no bets."

His voice lacked its usual firmness.

Badger instantly detected the change. Bringing his horse around, he looked anxiously into his pardner's face. "Say, you old rascal! You ain't feelin' so spry. Light and stretch out for a short spell. I'll go back down the trail a piece so's to take keer of Jake and his coyotes, if they happen to come along."

Red was solicitous. She offered her services as either nurse or scout.

BLIZZARD put a stop to this kind of talk. "Shucks! I ain't a-fixin' to die on yo' hands. Got a misery in my head, that's all. But I'll tell you crazy young'ns what you can do. Red can mosey on to town with me, jest to keep me from fallin' off and gittin' et up by prairie dogs. And Badger can scoot back to Jake's jest as fast as that old plug of his'n can ramble."

That brought exclamations and questions from both of them.

The tall Ranger continued in a weak voice. "I been figgerin' that if a fella could do some nosin' 'round in Rupper's house while him and his men is a-roundin' up them ponies, he might ketch onto somethin'. Cain't tell. I'd go, but I reckon my pins is too wobbly."

Badger instantly got the idea. He knew that Blizzard felt he had to be careful how he talked before Red, and he thought he knew what to look for. Without another word, he left at a gallop.

They watched Belial shoot away like a black streak in silvery moonlight.

Presently the girl remarked in a tight voice, "Damn it, I should've gone with him! He may need help."

"Not him! That there jasper can take

keer of all that's left at the C bar N and never git a sweat up!"

Blizzard spoke in his normal voice. She jerked her eyes from the trail to him. He grinned. She glared at him.

"You slippery old devil!" fiercely exclaimed Red. "What in hell do you expect Badger to find back there?"

"Sign. Woman sign, more'n likely."

BADGER knew that he had no time to lose. If Jake and his men were out after the ponies, the sooner he got to the house the better; and if they hadn't started yet, he wanted to be there when they left.

So he swung away from the trail onto open prairie, and told Belial to ramble.

In practically no time, the C bar N buildings showed up ahead. Badger stopped to reconnoiter. No lights, and the only sounds he heard above the rasp of Belial's heavy breathing were faint yells that seemed to rise at a point far out in the valley.

Red knew what she was talking about. He chuckled. "A good-lookin' gal with brains is shore handy to have around."



Circling wide of the house, he made his way to the creek beyond it and tied his horse in the seclusion of the timber. In the shadow of a large sycamore he again paused to listen, then ran to the kitchen door.

It swung open to his touch. The mingled stench of kerosene, charred wood, and fresh blood rushed out to greet him. The moon crept through a window and lighted the face of a corpse. Cockeye! Badger cursed. Somebody had stretched

the dead man on the floor and left him there. Through half closed lids, those weird eyes fixed the Ranger with a malevolent stare. One aimed at his face and the other at the region of his belt.

He shook himself. "Be a hell of a long time befo' I git shed of them eyes."

Stepping across the dead gunman, he made his way through semi-darkness to the door into the front room. It was lighter in there, because there were plenty of windows and the blinds were up. For a moment, he wondered where to begin. Then the indistinct outline of the desk caught his eye. Badger made short work of dumping its contents onto the cloth which he took from the table and spread on the floor. One of the desk drawers was locked, but the stout blade of his knife quickly splintered the wood around the flimsy fastening.

He tried the door into the north wing. It was a heavy door, strapped with iron and secured by a large padlock. Mighty queer! He'd have to get into that room in spite of hell. Just a waste of time to examine its door into the patio, or its outside windows. The door would be fastened and the windows barred. So Badger dashed back to the kitchen, and risked a match long enough to find the pothook that had laid out Blizzard.

Before going to work on the padlock, he stopped by a patio window and listened. No more yells came from down the valley. Either they had caught their ponies, or given up the chase. They'd come piling back any minute. Maybe he was a damned fool, but—

With his two-hundred-odd pounds on the end of the pothook, the lock gave away with a crash that ripped through the silence.

"If they's anybody closer'n fo'ty miles, they shore heard that racket," chuckled Badger to himself.

He opened the door. The blinds were down and it was black inside. A rare odor greeted his nostrils, a delightful

scent, a heady perfume. It stopped him in his tracks. It made him want to slam the door and leave the place.

But Badger Coe was an officer of the law with an unfinished job on his hands. So he struck a match and held it aloft.

A woman's room! A bed with silk covering. A great, carved bureau with plate glass mirror. On the bureau, a large photograph in a gilded frame—the portrait of a man. A handsome face, but stamped with cruelty. Badger growled a mighty oath. For he knew that man. Some time ago he had shot that man. He stepped closer and glared into the percing eyes of Chickasaw, Cherokee Lou's dead husband!

There raced through his mind a procession of surmises, suspicions, conclusions, and convictions. So this was her hideout! In imagination he saw her coming here when all but a few of the trusted hands were out working the range, or had been sent away on some fool jaunt. He didn't know why she might come, but he knew this was the last place on earth anyone would expect to find her. Jake Rupper's woman? Hell no! She wouldn't have a man like Jake. But regardless—Cherokee Lou had made a damned fool out of him.

His rage mounted swiftly and he made no effort to curb it. His big hands itched to rip the place to pieces. Then he'd go to Blizzard and confess that he'd been a fool, and they'd cut loose and clean out the blasted country, and— Yes sah, they'd send Cherokee Lou to the pen where she belonged!

Somewhere behind him a board creaked.

One long step carried him to the wall beside the open door. He took off his hat and peered into the front room.

Less than five yards away, came the big Negro! Bareheaded and barefooted, his hands hanging below his knees, he shuffled along stooping like a great ape. And in his right hand he gripped an ax. He paused for an instant to test a board before settling his weight upon it. Light from a window struck his bullet head. His kinky

scalp was torn and an eye swelled shut, and the balance of his face wasn't cheerful. He looked powerful big. Badger wondered how Red ever knocked him out, even with a sledge hammer.

And he wished it was Jake Rupper instead of the Negro, coming after him with an ax. He was spoiling for another fight, but he didn't have anything against Sunshine. The poor cuss was just doing his job, trying to take care of his boss' stuff. It wouldn't be no trouble to fill that black hide full of lead before he came another yard. But what the hell! Jest like shoot-in' a buffaler. Might cripple him down, but Badger didn't like the idea of doing that either. Sunshine had been bunged up a-plenty already. So he concluded he'd gamble on how fast the big Negro could handle his ax.

The Negro wasn't far from the door now. Badger couldn't see him; but he heard him breathing, sorta like a pug-nosed bulldog.

Down at the stable an angry voice cried out, "Sunshine! Where in——?"

That was Jake! That changed the complexion of everything. Old Sunshine was due to ketch hisself some more misery. The kinky head showed up in the door. The barrel of Badger's Colt cracked down, cracked so hard it jarred his arm all the way up to the burr of his ear. Sunshine's great body oozed down with the ax beneath it.

A few moments later, Badger went through the front door with the tablecloth bundle under his arm. His recent discovery had left him in no frame of mind to run, but he sternly told himself that it was the thing to do. He had a job of work, and his job came first.

Keeping the house between him and the corrals as much as possible, he dashed to the timber. There he turned for a last look. A light flared up in the kitchen.

Swinging into the saddle, he told Belial a bit reluctantly, "Hell's due to pop back yander befo' long, and I'd sorta like to be

there. But we done gethered us a stack of death warrants, so we're on our way."

RED kept pace with Blizzard as they went slowly up the trail, but from time to time she cast an anxious glance over her shoulder. Once she reined in and listened.

"No need to worry none 'bout that there scamp," he assured her. "They ain't nothin' or nobody that can hurt him."

The girl rode on. "I ain't worrying, but I wish I'd had sense enough to go with him."

The farther they went, the more Red lagged. She kept an eye on the trail behind them, but Blizzard rode with his long nose pointing straight ahead—busy with his thoughts. When at length they reached the outskirts of Whirlwind, he suggested they separate and go into town from different directions.

Red turned her pony about, and looked for a long time down the trail.

"It's funny he hasn't showed up."

"Nice night, so I allow he's jest a-joggin' along lazy-like," drawled Blizzard. "Dreamin' 'bout a black-headed gal, more'n likely."

She flipped her quirt into Solomon's flank. The bony roan switched his tail, rotated an ear, and gave her a dirty look.

Blizzard grinned.

"I'm going back to look for him!" she snapped.

Blizzard admired her for it, but of course he didn't say so. "I calc'late that wouldn't no ways be a smart play, 'cause if you was to run into Jake the jig would be up. He'd be all-fired sartin you're a-workin' with us."

For more than a minute, Red sat still and listened. Then her firm little jaw set and she declared quietly, "I don't give a damn. It's a dirty shame to leave the Big Feller back there with that pack of wolves. I'm going!"

Blizzard shot out a long arm and grasped her pony's headstall. He spoke

with a drawl, but his voice had iron in it. "Jest you listen to me, gal. When three fellas is a-ridin' the range together, one of 'em has gotta be boss."

She showed fight. "Are you setting yourself up as my boss?"

He stood his ground. "Long as you ride with Badger and me, I'm yo' boss—yes'm. If he can stand it, I reckon you can."

For a moment she gazed hard at his stony face. Her mood suddenly changed. She reached over and placed a hand on his arm. "Don't pay any attention to me, High Pockets. I'm an little devil. But I'm worried about the Big Feller. Don't you think we ought to do something?"

That was a heap different. His voice took on its old, easy-going drawl. "Red, for years me and that there wuthless cuss has slept in the same blankets. Ever so often I make up my mind to shoot him, but I ain't never seen the time when I wouldn't go to hell for him. If I figgered he needed help, he'd git it."

Blizzard's confidence in a measure eased her anxiety. But she insisted upon waiting there until even he began to grow impatient. At length she reluctantly set off along the road that led to the livery corral on the west edge of town.

THE Ranger didn't go any nearer to the main street than he had to in order to reach the woodshed behind Grandma Carson's hotel. There he tied Solomon and walked quickly around to the front.

At the door he halted suddenly and muttered an oath. Over in a corner, at a table which served as a desk, sat Mary. And very near her, hat on the extreme back of his head and a wide grin on his face, sat Badger!

"Where in Sam Hill have you been?" he growled.

"Snipe huntin'!" snapped Blizzard. "And a heathen varmint left me a-holdin' the sack. Come here."

Badger winked at Mary, then followed him out to the rack.

"We gotta bush ourselves befo' Jake gits here," said the tall Ranger scarcely above a whisper. "Skeedaddle down to the corral and git yo' nag and the pack-hoss.

"You'll run onto Red down there or comin' this way. Tell her we're fixin' to stay onder kivver two three days, and for her to keep a eye peeled and a ear to the ground. Meet you at the hotel woodshed. Burn the breeze!"

Badger didn't stop to argue or ask questions. His pardner was deadly serious, and that was a-plenty. But his head was high and his feet light, and he fought down an urge to yell at the moon. To hell with South America! Old Texas was the place for him, when the pot was a-steamin' good!

A short while later, they left town at right angles to the main street and hit out across the open prairie. When at length Blizzard felt they were beyond the range of curious eyes, he quartered back toward the west-bound trail.

Badger profanely demanded to be told where they were going.

"We're a-headin' for Tecumseh Smith's," drawled Blizzard, "and I hope we git there befo' sunup."

"All I got to say is—I cain't live 'round that old t'rantler very long without squshin' him," rumbled Badger. "Where do we go from there? Chiny?"

"Never once thought of Chiny; but if you figger we can git there and back in three days, we'll shore hit for Chiny."

Then Blizzard changed the subject. "What you got tied up in yo' slicker?"

"Dynamite."

"Hell of a place to pack it."

"Last place anybody would ever think of lookin'."

"Mebbe you're right," admitted Blizzard. "I sorta calc'late they's dynamite planted all over this here Whirlwind country."

"Show me the fuse," growled Badger. "I got matches."

"We done teched off the fuse, and that's how come we're a-takin' to the bresh."

Evidently Badger figured he could prod his pardner into talking. "What call have we got to wring our tails and hit for the bresh? Why don't we bust loose and clean up and git out'n this damned country?"

"'Cause we ain't fixed to do no cleanin' up—yet," retorted Blizzard. "And soon as ever we cache ourselves, we upset sartin folks powerful bad. Them that's a-hankerin' to hang our hides on the fence will rear and faunch 'cause they cain't find us; and them that's skeerd for they own hides will be as flighty as green broncs a-packin' they fust saddles, 'cause they ain't got no idee when we'll light a-straddle of 'em and sink our iron into 'em. Onsartinty freezes a fella's guts a heap quicker'n hot lead or cold steel."

Riding like a man with something on his mind, Badger didn't have anything to say.

BLIZZARD watched him from the corner of his eye, and casually changed the subject. "Reckon you didn't find out nothin' much back to the C bar N. Figgered you wouldn't."

Badger came to life suddenly. "You're the six biggest liars in all Texas!" he exploded. "You knowed damned well I'd find out a-plenty, 'cause you' long nose ketched the scent of that theer perfume plumb through fo' inches of oak."

"Cain't eemagine it."

The broad Ranger jerked his old hat down over one eye and glared at his pardner. "Some day you'll git me riled! But I got it comin'. Right now I'll swear I'm the biggest fool that ever packed spurs."

Blizzard grinned down at his penitent friend. "Soon as ever a fella owns up to it, he ain't a damned fool no longer. I'm a-listenin'."

So Badger told him all about it, and the story lost nothing in the telling. The jovial rascal could take his medicine, and he did it.

He concluded by asking, "How come that there room?"

"That is sorta peculiar, shore enough," admitted the sergeant. "But we gotta recollect that she's mighty nigh as slippery as a eel. Likewise—she's a woman."

"What's that got to do with it?"

Blizzard tugged at the off side of his mustache. "Wimmin has got hide and hair and teeth and toenails, and so has men; but beyond that, they ain't noways like us. So they jest up and do things that we don't never expect no human to do. If a man had holed up at the C bar N, he'd have been plumb loco; but a woman does it, and she's plumb slick 'cause you'd never go there to find her."



They struck a faster gait and rode in silence for a while.

At length Badger remarked in a perplexed tone, "It don't seem natural for Cherokee Lou to do so many good things, and be as ornery as I'm commencin' to think she is. I jest can't git it through my head."

"Mmmm-huh," mused Blizzard. "But don't forgit that a woman is either a heap wuss or a heap better'n a man, and sometimes she's both of 'em simultaneous."

CHAPTER XII

THE PROFESSOR TAKES A WALK

CLOSING the book with a snap, Miss Constance tossed it onto the table beside her chair.

She frowned at it. "The damned little fool!"

A French book bound in heavily embossed Morocco, it told the story of a

famous courtesan whose life came to a disastrous end.

"They chopped her head off," mused the girl aloud, "and it served her right for being so dumb."

Continuing to frown, she sank back against the cushions. "It takes the smartest people to do the dumbest things, doesn't it, Ta-nah—and it's all because of their damned conceit."

Seated on a buffalo robe a few feet away on the floor, the squaw was beading a buckskin knife sheath. She said nothing.

In fact, she never answered when the girl addressed her in English.

Miss Constance arose. Her movements were lithe and quick. Plainly she was irritated by unpleasant thoughts. A full length mirror on the wall caught her eye. The soft light from a candelabra overhead was kind to her dark beauty, and the old rose silk she wore was the pride of a New Orleans modiste.

Slowly she turned this way and that. "I'm conceited and I know it, but I've got a right to be." She glanced scornfully down at the book. "That little fool didn't plan her get-away. I've always got one ready."

With a small, brown finger she traced the design on the cover of the book. "Ta-nah," she inquired in an Indian language, "am I too conceited?"

The squaw's fierce, black eyes transfixed her. "You are! Go back to lodges of your people. Wear clothes of your ancestors. You will live longer, I believe."

Cherokee Lou's face hardened. She looked haughtily down at the squaw.

There came a sharp knock at the door.

The girl nodded impatiently. Ta-nah answered the signal by sliding the bolt and opening the door a few inches. A man rudely brushed past her and stalked in.

It was Jake Rupper. His beady eyes burned in a face blackened by anger and smoke, and dust covered him from head to foot.

Miss Constance regarded him frigidly. He strode on to a chair.

"Wait!" she snapped. "Ta-nah, give him a blanket to sit on."

Color rose beneath the grime on Jake's face, but he said nothing; and he waited for the blanket to be thrown over the chair.

Sitting down he growled sullenly. "You won't be so all-fired snooty when you hear what's happened. Them—"

"I can guess what happened!"

"You jest think you can."

Scorn briefly touched her full, red lips. "Those two scoundrels made fools out of you and your bunch of half-wits. Now go ahead and tell me how they did it."

Jake winced, but he told her; and for a wonder he told the approximate truth. Of course, he didn't intimate that it had been his intention to rub out Badger as well as Blizzard. On the contrary he said they had planned to have Cockeye get the drop on Badger, aiming to tie him up and let him cool off. Also, he failed to tell her about the robbery of the house.

RUPPER concluded in a voice stripped of its customary arrogance. "I didn't forgit' what you said 'bout the big fella bein' fast, but who'd ever thought he was faster'n Cockeye and John Smith to boot!"

She sat like an olive tinted image dressed in old rose silk. She scarcely moved a finger. But her eyes were alive, very much alive. No move or expression of Jake's escaped them.

"I'm listening," she murmured softly. "You haven't told it all."

He shifted uncomfortably in his chair. He stared at his soiled Stetson, turning it around and around on his knee. "Yes I have, Connie. That's all they is to it."

Her voice was very gentle. "You're a liar! Those men went there to get something and they wouldn't come away without it. So I know you're a damned liar."

Accustomed to treating women with a

lordly air and having them fawn upon him, Jake wouldn't take that from her—regardless. In no sense of the word was he a coward. And he was an evil tempered brute, who, when angry wouldn't be buffaloes by the knowledge that she could ruin him.

"Jest you hold yo' hosses, gal," he drawled insolently. "When it comes to lyin', you ain't got no call to talk none. If I could lie half as fast as you can, I'd own mighty nigh all of Texas. What I didn't tell you, I kept under kivver so's not to cause you no more misery than I had to. But you're a-askin' for it, so you're due to git it."

Then Jake told her about the robbery, omitting no detail. He talked in a hoarse, jerky voice. She listened in utter silence. As he stumbled on, a change came over the girl.

All the fine vitality disappeared from her face, leaving it cold and emotionless and its bones more prominent. Her eyes lengthened and narrowed, and the sparkle of a quick wit and keen intelligence was supplanted by a dull gleam of implacable hatred. A change of souls, it seemed; the soul of a beautiful and charitable girl driven out by another, the soul of a ruthless savage.

Jake finished. She maintained a dangerous silence. He stumbled through another useless sentence. She sat still and stared at him, elbow resting on the arm of her chair and her cheek supported by the knuckles of a clenched fist.

He bungled an attempt to roll a cigarette.

She glanced at whisky and glasses on a stand near him. "Get a drink into you. You need it."

He helped himself avidly. She watched him gulp the liquor. A scarcely noticeable curl twitched at her lip.

The drink restored some of the courage that had oozed out of him. He ventured to ask, "What I can't understand is—if them fellas was after money, why in

hell did they take that there mess of books and papers out'n the desk?"

At last Cherokee Lou spoke. In astounding contrast to her appearance, her voice flowed along as soft as the sigh of a prairie breeze. "Don't you try to understand. Ask me. I'll tell you! It's blackmail. They want me to cut them in. They aim to get something on me and force me to do it. And Jake—you couldn't have helped them any more than you have—damn your soul!"

HE objected vigorously and profanely, but she cut him short.

"Be quiet, you dumb fool!" she purred. "Let's see if you've got brains enough to answer an intelligent question or two. That man at the window with a rifle, what did he look like?"

Rupper's thin, bony face was murderous; but he utterly failed to meet her unwavering gaze. "I—well, you see, I didn't git more'n a squint at him 'cause—"

"Because you were too damned scared to look! Was he big, little, or—?"

"He was a little fella," blurted Jake. "He had on a black hat and a black shirt and black gloves, and that's as much as you'd a seen if you'd been in my boots."

"What did his voice sound like?"

"Sorta funny. Kinda rough, and still it wasn't. I don't know what you'd—"

"You wouldn't know!"

He flushed a deeper red. Muscles knotted on his lean jaws.

Cherokee Lou got up quickly. She took a turn about the room, walking slowly—almost as if the floor were covered with dead leaves and twigs and she wanted to go silently. Before the mirror she paused briefly. Her eyes crept from the girl in the glass, to the book on the table. She shrugged.

Returning to her chair, she spoke softly—carefully spacing each word. "I want you to go find those two devils. Don't try to catch them. For God's sake—don't get any closer to 'em than you have to!

Shoot 'em and scalp 'em. Bring me their hair so I'll know you're not lying. Where are your men?"

He answered sullenly. "All but three of 'em has gone to lift that there band of Box J thoroughbreds you been a-hankerin' to git yo' hands on. I was a-fixin' to go with 'em when I spotted them two coyotes a-comin'."

She showed interest. "Good! I want those horses. Losing them will break Belle Ransom's heart. Besides, I've got a buyer for them. As fast as your hands come back, turn 'em loose to comb every inch of this blasted country."

Jake spoke up, "Mebbe them skunks has lit out."

"You are dumb," she breathed. "Buffalo and Pelican won't leave here until they get what they want, or go under trying like hell. Now listen to this. I'll put up five thousand to be split among the men who land those fellows."

"Both of 'em?"

Cherokee Lou sent him a vicious glance. "Of course! Both of 'em!"

A sudden change came over him. He seemed anxious to please her. "Well, Connie, we'll shore do the best we can. And I'm mighty sorry we—"

The girl stopped him with a contemptuous gesture. There was no change in her. She remained a savage. "You'd better! If you don't nail those fellows, I imagine the Professor will want to have a talk with you."

She paused to let that sink in. He dropped his eyes. Beneath his narrow mustache, his lips formed a thin line.

Cherokee Lou continued in the softest imaginable voice, "And, Jake, don't think you can get away from me. I've got enough on you to hang you a dozen times. Try to run, and I'll have every Ranger in Texas and every sheriff in the West on your tail inside of a week."

She settled back in her chair, watching him intently. Both cruelty and craft showed in his angular face.

The girl smiled mirthlessly. "You'd like to squeal on me, but you know you can't prove a damned thing and nobody would take your word against mine." She sat up and leaned slightly toward him. "And right now you're dying to kill me, Jake, but you're afraid to try it. You know I carry a little pistol that makes a nasty hole at this distance.

Rupper growled a vulgar oath. Getting to his feet stiffly, he left without another word.

TA-NAH closed the door behind him and shot the bolt into place. She came and stood over the girl. Her long arms in tight, black sleeves hung straight down from her square shoulders. Her small but knotty hands doubled into fists.

Her voice was harsh, but without inflection. "Go back to lodges of your people. No Rangers there. You should go now, I believe."

Cherokee Lou scarcely glanced at her. "And you should go bring me Anton," she murmured. "Go now!"

The Professor came promptly. Just inside the door he stopped and seemed to catch his breath. He stared at the girl. An instant later his magnificent composure returned. He took a chair facing her, not far away.

There was something vaguely eager in his calm voice.

"What is it, Connie."

She told him. She went over everything Jake told her, from time to time inserting clever surmises of her own. All the while she talked, his large, deep-set eyes never once left her face. At length she paused, apparently to consider something she was reluctant to say.

The Professor kept silent.

Sitting deep in her chair, her head tilted forward and her eyes half closed, Cherokee Lou continued in a meditative tone that indicated her thoughts were far ahead of her words. "I'm almost through here. I can see it now."

Anton's long fingers slowly closed on the arm of his chair.

"But they can't get anything on me," she mused. "I'll have a clean slate—Carlos, the Judge, Rabbit Jackson, Whitey Steele, and next—King Stannard and Jake Rupper. Yes, sir, Anton I'll leave a clean slate behind me."

"There's one thing you mustn't forget," he remarked quietly. "Your slate won't be none too clean with those two fellows at large."

He crossed one thin leg over the other. "Why do you reckon they broke into Jake's desk and that room?"

Through the screen of their long, curving lashes, her eyes burned with a sudden fire. She appeared to probe the man's mind, groping for his thoughts.

Very simply she asked him, "If you suspected they're Rangers, Anton, what would you advise me to do?"

His flexible fingers beat a noiseless tattoo on the arm of his chair. "I'd advise you to get ready and leave here."

"In a hurry?"

"Not specially. Take time to turn everything into cash. Don't throw anything away." For an instant it seemed that he might smile. "You'll have plenty of time before more Rangers come looking for these fellows."

For the first time since Jake brought the news, her eyes opened to their normal width. "If you were certain they're Rangers, would you still be willing to fight them?"

He answered calmly and with no change of expression, "Of course, to keep you out of trouble."

"Damn it! Anton—you're a man, all man!"

His fine head inclined ever so little. "I'm a Texan and you're a woman—that's all there is to it, Connie."

But the warmth that for an instant touched his pallid face and the tender undertone in his voice, made a liar out of him.

Momentarily she was a woman in the presence of a man who loved her.

THEN she became a savage again. "About the person who helped those Rangers—has that girl Red been here all evening?"

The Professor's glance wavered an instant. "N-no, Connie. She came in just a little while ago."



Cherokee Lou studied him slyly. "I see," she mused. "Red's been getting chummier and chummier with those fellows, and she's awful jealous of me."

She smiled in a manner that made him look away. "Don't you worry, Anton," breathed the girl. "There are some things I wouldn't expect any real man to do."

Her glance darted to Ta-nah. The squaw looked up from her work, and down again. On the point of her needle, she expertly impaled a red bead.

Cherokee Lou resumed. "I'll get busy. I have buyers for everything I want to sell. I wish you'd drop a word in the ear of every man we can trust. Turn 'em loose on the trail of Buffalo and Pelican. Tell 'em there's five thousand dollars in it. Where would you go to look for them?"

"Here," he answered instantly. "Right here in this room. And I'll do my sleep-in' on that sofa until they're rounded up."

Her teeth found her underlip. The hand in her lap rolled into a tiny brown fist with white knuckles. She glanced at the book, and away quickly.

"What makes you think they'll come here?"

"I know 'em—know how they work."

That lifted her erect in her chair. "You know—Buffalo and Pelican?"

The Professor's somber features showed a flash of humor which looked out of place. "Can't say that I know Buffalo and Pelican, Connie. But I know a couple of Rangers by the names of Blizzard Wilson and Badger Coe."

She dropped back against the cushions. "I'll be damned! How long have you known them?"

He folded his arms. "Never saw them until they came here, but I've known a lot about them ever since they ran down and killed my best friend—Fancy Chase."

"He was a friend of yours? I never saw you in the old days where Fancy hung out."

"He had a big business, and I was bossing this end of it."

She regarded him thoughtfully, a little doubtfully. "Why did you keep still when I lied to you about those men?"

He answered respectfully and without hesitation. "Sort of figured it was your business, Connie, and you had a right to say whatever you wanted to say."

Having found the man deeper than she thought him to be, the discovery brought both irritation and additional respect for him. She stood up. "You're a mystery, Anton, but I like mysteries. And you've got brains—most men haven't. Any suggestions?"

The Professor slowly arose to his unusual height, and looked intently down at her. His voice carried a note of anxiety. "Yes, Connie. You leave here now, tonight, and don't come back until we've planted a couple of Rangers."

"Of course you know I won't do that."

He nodded. "Yes, I knew it. So as I said, I'll have to sleep here until we get 'em. I'll get the boys started, then I'll have a little talk with King Stannard."

Maybe Red was lying, but it won't do any harm for me to talk to him."

The Professor almost grinned. "King knows so much, he can muss up anybody's clean slate."

HE bowed slightly and turned to the door. Her eyes were fixed upon his lean, straight back. A kind of fierce affection touched her savage face without softening it in the slightest.

"Anton!"

Hand on the knob, he faced about.

"Have you been to South America?" she inquired gently.

"Yes, I have."

"Did you like the country?"

"No, I didn't."

Her lithe body bent slightly toward him. "But—Anton, we're going there!"

"Then I'll—Connie, I'll like South America."

He closed the door softly.

She frowned down at the book on the table. "Damned little fool! No getaway. They chopped her head off."

As the Professor walked down the hall there was the suggestion of a spring in his step, and he held his back a little straighter, his head a little higher.

He went to his room and buckled on his cartridge belts. Around his sinewy thighs he tied the buckskin thongs attached to the bottoms of the holsters. He dropped first one hand and then the other to the handle of its gun meticulously adjusting belts and holsters until they rode at exactly the proper height and angle.

They were plain guns of blued steel with cedar handles, probably whittled out and fitted by the Professor himself. Their front sights had been filed down until there was no possibility of interference with a quick draw. Knurls on their hammers were partially smoothed away so they would slip readily beneath a thumb. These Colts looked as if they received the scrupulous care of a finished

workman who took pride in the tools of his trade.

He emptied the cylinders and reloaded them with ten cartridges from a box that had never been opened. In fact, he inspected the box before breaking the paper that sealed it. Then he holstered his guns and went leisurely downstairs to the dancehall.

After pausing at the door to scan the crowd, he sauntered unobtrusively about the place. From time to time he stopped and spoke quietly to a man. Each of these men evidenced first, cautious surprise then suppressed excitement. A few of them left immediately.

The tall gunman went through the front door with one, remarking as they separated, "You can't do anything tonight but you can ramble out to where you're going to work, so as to get started early."

FROM the Wild Rose, the Professor wandered aimlessly down the sidewalk toward the courthouse. The sheriff's office was brightly lighted and through the window Deputy Burr Sanger could be seen, sitting at Stannard's desk. The gunman went in and exchanged a few words with the deputy, then left and crossed the street. Sanger took a Winchester from the corner, blew out the light, and headed for the livery corral.

The Professor paused to glance through the door of the hotel, continuing on to the Canadian a short distance away. Again he moved through the room, occasionally taking a man aside for a few quiet words with him. The performance at the Wild Rose was duplicated here. Surprise, excitement, and often greed showed on the faces of the men to whom he spoke. Some of them hurried away.

After the Canadian, he visited the Pecos, the Prairie, the Longhorn, and such other places as were open. At each of these establishments the same things transpired. His progress up and down the street was marked by the furtive

whisperings of excited men, and the purposeful departure of silent men.

In addition to having a message to deliver, obviously the Professor was looking for someone.

As a matter of fact—after he left the Longhorn, Shorty Stark whispered to Slim Diffin, "Wonder who in hell that there jasper is a-scoutin' for. Shore glad it ain't me."

At the Rio Grande Bar the gunman encountered King Stannard. He bought the sheriff a drink and himself a cigar. They chatted for a while, the Professor more sociable than usual and King frankly pleased by the taciturn gunman's friendly attitude. At length Stannard said he had to go, a lot of paper work to do.

The lean gunman stood at the door and watched the soft, chubby little sheriff walk briskly to the Canadian; then he ambled along to the Wild Rose, situated diagonally across the street. He sat down on an empty bench on the porch, and rolled a cigarette. From there he had an unobstructed view of the window in the sheriff's office.

The hectic night life of the town whirled about him, leaving him undisturbed. Men and women passed him, stole a glance at him, and went on. Riders pulled up at the rack before him and hurried in to the bar. Others staggered out of the door, crawled into their saddles, spun their ponies in the dust, and went swaying and whooping down the street. But apparently he saw none of this. He smoked on with utter composure, waiting with profound patience.

Presently Stannard left The Canadian and went directly to his office. A moment later that dark window became a square of light in which were framed the curly head, round face, well-padded shoulders of the sheriff. He lit a cigar, picked up a pen, and fell to writing.

The Professor flipped his cigarette into the dust beneath the rack. He arose leisurely. Arm-in-arm, two cowboys came

weaving down the sidewalk before the courthouse. They stopped and opened the sheriff's door.

The Professor sat down again.

During the space of a minute or so, the cowboys exchanged loud banter with Stannard. He laughingly ordered them off the earth, so they slammed the door and went on their way.

The Professor got to his feet quickly.

Striding through the Wild Rose as though bound for the second floor, he went out of the back door instead. He kept to the shadow of the building and moved swiftly to the corner on the courthouse side.

The square of light and King Stannard were still there. The curly-headed sheriff took the cigar from his mouth, lifted his round face, and puffed smoke rings at the shaded lamp on the desk before him. Smoke curled lazily above his paper. He looked through it and laughed to himself at something he had written.

The window was wide open and the sidewalk was empty at the moment.

The bark of a gun in the middle of the night was a commonplace sound.

The Professor looked through the smoke.

The square of light and the curly-headed sheriff were still there, his round face buried in his arms like a man asleep at his desk.

The Professor turned leisurely away.

CHAPTER XIII

OLD RATTLER KEEPS ON A-SETTIN'

SOME time back, Auntie Smith had concluded that Tecumseh had worked long enough; so she persuaded him to sell the Box J to Handsom Ransom. When the deal was made they had enough money to keep them in luxury, regardless of where they might decide to spend the balance of their days. But the two old folks had lived on the frontier forty years or more and it never occurred to

them to leave it. Accordingly—they invested safely, selected a pleasant spot about ten miles north of ranch headquarters, and built themselves a home.

Situated near a big spring less than half a mile from some mighty fine timber, it was a staunch little T-shaped cabin with walls of peeled logs and a roof of hand-wrought, cedar shingles. A living and bedroom comprised the front, a kitchen and woodshed the wing. There was glass in the windows and sawed lumber in the floor, which was covered by a brightly colored rag carpet with a layer of moss beneath it. Tecumseh built the loom and whittled out the shuttles, and Auntie cut and sewed the rags and wove the carpet. The old man also built a rock fireplace in the front room, and he made it large enough to lose himself in. However, Auntie didn't do any cooking at this fireplace. Out in the kitchen she had the latest thing in wood-burning cook stoves. Tecumseh swore grub hadn't been half as good since she got it.

The spring was covered with a tight log house, windows on either side. Inside it there was a trough through which water trickled continuously around the crocks, jars, jugs, and other receptacles containing perishable foods, including milk, cream, and butter. For into a country crawling with cattle, Auntie imported two milch cows from East Texas. Night and morning, rain or shine, she milked them herself. Old Tecumseh flatly refused to do it; swore he was neither a calf, nor a thief who would steal from a calf.

But he would do his own butchering, boasting that he made the best meat in Texas. So he built him a smokehouse. From time to time he bought hogs and cured fine bacon and hams, a large part of which Auntie gave to others who needed the meat worse than they.

A short distance behind the cabin, he built a log stable with a small stockade corral attached. Tecumseh often pro-

fanelly declared that his wife made him sell off all his cows, but he'd never see the day when he didn't have a horse or two around.

So the old folks jogged along—Auntie Smith keeping herself happy by doing her level best to make others happy, and Tecumseh amusing himself by telling Trinity Joe Slocum how to run the Box J, and telling everybody the lies that had made him famous for a hundred miles around.

DAY was breaking when the Rangers arrived. Old Tecumseh came to the door in his shirt-tail, with a hat on his head and a pipe in his mouth. He damned them for rousting a hard-working man out of bed at that ungodly hour, ordered them off the place, then told them to water their nags at the spring branch while he crawled into some clothes.

When Blizzard made it known that they were on the dodge, the little old timer's leathery face brightened perceptibly and he forthwith took precautions for keeping them under cover. He hid their alforjas and rigging beneath hay in empty mangers, and said he knew a place over in the cedar brakes where they could stake out their horses in the daytime and they'd never be found.

Auntie called breakfast before the men finished puttering around at the stable. Tecumseh dropped everything.

"We gotta split the breeze," he said dryly. "Auntie is plumb pizen when her biscuits is a-gittin' cold."

Auntie Smith was one of those snappy old ladies with bright blue eyes and snow white hair, and a brand of courage that didn't know when it was licked. She was as plump and jolly in appearance as Old Tecumseh was sour and stringy. The Rangers took an instant liking to her and she fell for Badger right away, probably because he fussed over her as if she were twenty rather than sixty.

Auntie didn't talk as much as Tecumseh, but she said a lot more. One of the first things she said was that Trinity Joe Slocum was like a son to them, since they had no children of their own, and that she and Tecumseh would risk every-



thing they had and fight tooth and toenail to help save the Box J.

With his knife and fork Badger expertly sopped half a biscuit in the pan gravy on a platter of fried veal, and told her, "Don't you fret none, Auntie, 'cause me and Blizzard is a-fixin' to bust this here gang wide open. Jest you give us a day or so to sorta ketch up on our eatin' and sleepin', then watch us tarn ourselves loose and make this here country so daggoned peaceable you cain't stand it no more, and I ain't talkin'."

IMMEDIATELY after breakfast, Old Tecumseh forked his buckskin and hit out for town to get the news. Auntie made it known that she was in a mood to bake a turkey, if she had a turkey, and that antelope steak would be a relief from tame meat. Badger lost no time in setting forth with his Winchester, faithfully promising Blizzard to stay under cover.

The tall Ranger repaired to the barn, and eagerly went to work on the papers Badger collected at the C bar N. In short order he found evidence to prove that Miss Constance owned the outfit, but the devil of it was—he couldn't send her to the pen for that. A daybook wherein Jake Rupper kept a crude record of receipts and expenditures proved to be very interesting. However, it was too obscure

to be of value as evidence. Entries that might have been submitted in court, carried only the initials of the payee; for example, over a period of time there were a number of payments to "S." Blizzard would gamble that this was King Stannard, but he couldn't prove it. Only one entry was conclusive! A three hundred dollar payment to Frio, proving to his satisfaction that the Box J spy had been on Jake's payroll.

Sitting with his back against the wall of the feed bin and the papers scattered on a tarp before him, Blizzard summed up the situation. He was forced to admit that they had unearthed no evidence of a hanging nature. But, in his own mind, he was positive who deserved to be hung. He knew that Cherokee Lou was the big boss. He knew that the Professor was her killer, and that the man should be hung for shooting Judge Partridge if for no other reason. He knew that Jake Rupper was what a fella might call her raider. He knew that Sheriff Stannard was getting a rake-off from Cherokee Lou, and no doubt from any other bad man who undertook to establish himself in that community. He didn't exactly know where Fatty Kopf stood in all this, but he was inclined to believe that the marshal had more sense than people gave him credit for having.

This situation was not unique in Blizzard's long experience as a Ranger. He knew how to handle it, as a last resort. Another man might have lacked the courage to go ahead and administer justice without the aid of legal machinery, but not Blizzard. In order to bring peace to the community and to protect the lives and property of its honest citizens, these guilty parties must be disposed of one way or another. And he proposed to see that they were disposed of, if they didn't get him first.

The day wore on. Badger returned with a fat gobbler, and the choice cuts of an antelope wrapped in its hide. At

dusk the Rangers went into the cedars and brought their horses to the stable so as to have them convenient. Shortly thereafter Tecumseh returned. The buckskin was in a lather, but the wiry old man swung to the ground with no sign of weariness. On the contrary, he seemed to feel mighty frisky; but he didn't have much to say until supper was over and they went to the front room to smoke.

After getting his pipe to going good, he cut loose. "You two jaspers is jest as good as done for right now."

Badger loosened his belt a notch, winked at Auntie, and said painfully, "Wouldn't be at all surprised. But git-tin' foundered on good grub is the way I allus wanted to die."

Tecumseh Smith nodded with great satisfaction. "Yes sah, you fellas is goners. Men, wimmin, and chillun—the City of Whirlwind has r'ared up on her hind legs and she's a-howlin' for yo' hair."

Blizzard wanted to know how come.

THE old man creaked out of his chair and folded up on the carpet with his knees under his whiskers and his back against the wall. "Well, you see it's like this. They got so durned many things agin you, I forgit most of 'em. But fust off—Jake Rupper swears you come a-rampsin' out to his place and prized up a heap of hell, a-killin' three of his best men and a-tryin' yo' durndest to burn him out. Then you top it off by robbin' him. That's a-plenty to git you hung twice, mebbe three fo' times."

Tecumseh wound up as if there wasn't any more to tell. Blizzard commanded him to come out with the balance of the bad news.

The old timer sort of rolled his words on his tongue as though they tasted good and he hated to part with them. "'Pears to me that Jake is a right clever fella. He up and allows yo' carcasses is wuth all of five thousand dollahs to him, and

jest to prove that he ain't foolin' none, he sashays into Andy Black's store and puts the five thousand in Andy's safe."

Tecumseh glanced sharply at each of the Rangers, and continued, "Course Jake don't do this hisself 'cause he's out some'ers a-scoutin' for you, but he leaves word with the Perfesser to do it and the Perfesser shore does it."

His gnarled fingers wandered through his beard and scratched a spot on the nigh side of his neck. He looked hungrily at the Rangers. "What with dry weather and the price of beef and sech like, five thousand is a heap of money in this here Whirlwind country."

Badger chuckled and Blizzard grinned.

The old man looked thoughtfully across at Auntie. Presently he allowed, "Come to think of it, if we was to git our hands on five thousand dollahs you could go buy you that new churn you been a-whinin' for."

Auntie's blue eyes danced, but she kept her placid old face every bit as straight as his. "More'n likely, the first thing I'd do with five thousand dollahs would be to buy me some new clothes. Then I'd see if I couldn't catch me a new man."

Badger let out a laugh that was positively dangerous, coming from a man in hiding. Blizzard snickered. Old Tecumseh cackled himself into a fit of coughing.

"Fellas," he said when he got his wind, "for better'n fo'ty year she's been a-threatenin' to do that soon as ever I got a leetle older."

Although hungry for facts about the situation at Whirlwind, Blizzard knew it would be a waste of effort to try to limit the old timer to pertinent essentials. So he quietly urged him to go ahead, and sat back to enjoy it.

Since Tecumseh seemed a bit reluctant to continue, the lanky Ranger concluded he had discovered something that didn't set very well.

At length the old cowman drawled, "Course Jake done the best he knowed

how when he put up all that there money, but the thing that made you jest as good as dead men was somethin' Miss Constance done."

Badger spoke up quickly. "What's that?"

"We-l-l," said Tecumseh hesitantly, "somehow or other the word gits around that she's done some investigatin' her ownself, and she's sartin that Blizzard is the coyote that stuck up the stage and shot the jedge. So she jest naturally shoves her thousand dollahs reward into the pot with Jake's."

Blizzard looked hard at Badger. Badger stared into the fireplace.

The old timer worked with his pipe until he got it to going good. "Wouldn't be surprised if the onliest friend you got in Whirlwind is Rattlesnake Runnels."

"What did he do to make you think he's our friend?" inquired Blizzard.

TECUMSEH settled back and coiled his stringy arms about his knees. "In all my bawn days, I never seen the beat of it."

He slowly rotated his head from side to side. "What does that there old wildcat do but come a-rackin' into town all in a lather, a-packin' two sixshooters and a Winchester, and a temper fit to scorch the prairie for fo'ty rods on both sides of him. Fust off—he busts into the Rio Grandy and gethers him a few drinks and a two-gallon jug of cawn. Then he goes to Johnny Drake's hardware store and gits hisself a armful of ca'tridges."

Tecumseh paused like a man at a loss for words. "If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I'd swear it couldn't never happen. Befo' long that old tarant'l'r comes a-tearin' outa Johnny's and in two jumps he lights smack in the middle of Main Street.

"And right there and then, Old Rattler up and declared hisself. He says—sez-ee, 'Them two hoss thieves is as unnercent as unbawn babes, and I'm here

to whup hell out'n any man or men that allows they ain't!"

Badger chuckled. "Old Rattler shore is a neighborly cuss."

"He's a durned fool!" snapped Tecumseh. "And jest to prove it, he stands out there a-darin' the roarin' city of Whirlwind to crook her leetle finger. Likewise, with tears in his eyes he begs for a fight—two men or twenty, don't make no difference to Rattler. And all the time he's a-oratin', he's a-h'istin' the jug. Fact is—the longer he orates, the less time they is 'tween h'ists."

For the life of him, Blizzard couldn't decide whether the old scamp was lying or telling the truth. He wouldn't have put it past Rattlesnake Runnels to do something like that.

Tecumseh fell silent for a moment. He cackled at memory of something he had seen or heard. "But they ain't nobody a-honin' to take him up, 'cause everybody knows that Rattler is the best durned rifle shot in West Texas and he's shore hell and repeat with his short guns. Time goes on. As the jug gits lighter, his bar'l gits heavier and his legs gits wobblier. So what does the old sidewinder do but set down. Yes sah, gents! He sets down right smack in the middle of the street."

"It's a wonder he don't git tromped on," suggested Badger.

The grizzled cowman scowled at him. "That jest goes to show how much you know 'bout us old time Whirlwind men. Don't nothin' never tromple us. Why so help me—soon as ever Rattler starts in to settin', it's jest like puttin' up a mile-high stone wall across Main Street. No sah! Ain't nobody or nothin' can git by us old time Whirlwinders."

Badger kept a straight face, but his eyes brimmed with laughter. "What did they finally do to the old scalawag for tyin' up the town thataway?"

"Do to him!" exploded Tecumseh. "You better bend a ear to what he does

to them. Most everybody has got sense enough not to try to git past Rattler, so he jest keeps on a-settin' and a-tiltin' the jug right frequent, and a-tellin' Whirlwind what he thinks of her. Purty soon here comes a skinny leetle freighter by the name of Bucky Storms. Bucky is a-whackin' fo' yoke to a empty wagon, and Bucky's a cantankerous cuss that they ain't nobody can git along with. So everybody sorta ketches holt and hangs on, 'cause they figger hide and hair will shore fly when them two fightin' men lock hawns."

TECUMSEH had the story teller's trick of stopping at a critical point. He fussed with his pipe. At length he continued, "Well, as I was sayin', Old Rattler bellers for Bucky to stop. Bucky bellers back that he wouldn't noways stop for Satan or Gen'r'l Grant. So that old Lazy R wildcat tilts his jug again. He rams the stopper home good, then he ups with his Winchester and sets in to bouncin' bullets off'n them bulls' hawns."

The old cowman wisely shook his head. "Fellas—after mighty nigh fifty year a-workin' stock, I'm here to tell you they's *some* things a bull won't never put up with. And that's one of 'em."

Again the old rascal went to work on his pipe.

"Did them bulls jest sorta beller to him to stop his foolishness?" blandly inquired Badger.

Tecumseh gave him a sour look. "Huh!" Them critters h'ists they tails as straight and stiff as broomsticks, then they cut a half circle in the street so druned fast you couldn't see nothin' but a streak of bull and wagon. A-comin' 'round, they rip the whole front end out'n the Pecos. Likewise, they tear up 'bout five rod of hitchrack befo' they git lined out with they rumps to'rds Rattler and they snouts a-pintin' for the Pacific Ocean. By dogies! I done seen some runnin' in my day, but I ain't never seen

nary critter that could keep close enough to them bulls to sniff they dust. Bucky, he makes a grab for the tailgate as it goes a-whistlin' past. The last I seen of Bucky, he was a-hangin' on a-streamin' out behind, sorta like a pony's tail in a high wind."

Badger somehow managed to ask, "What was Old Rattler doin' all this time?"

"A-settin', jest a-settin' there."

An old clock with a wooden case and glass doors, ticked merrily away on the mantle.

Tecumseh thoughtfully consulted the clock. "Mmmmm, lemme see. That was mebbe five-six hour ago."

His sharp eyes twinkled. "Betcha hell's a-poppin' in San Francisco by now."

Auntie dabbed at her eyes with the corner of her apron. Badger was speechless.

Blizzard inquired breathlessly, "What did Rattler do next?"



Tecumseh dragged blissfully at his pipe and hugged his knees. "He jest set. And he swears he'll keep on a-settin' until he gits him a fight. Durned if I don't believe he'll do it, too. Unless some pore cuss commits suicide to accommodate the old grizzly, I wouldn't be at all surprised if he jests keeps on a-settin' until they's knee-high feed in Main Street. No foolin'! Us old Whirlwinders is settin' fools."

Everybody laughed, even Blizzard. Tecumseh joined in with the enthusiasm of a story teller who appreciated his own art.

Presently he added, "I was so dag-goned upshot 'bout what's due to happen

to Main Street, I mighty nigh forgot somethin'."

"What's that?" asked Blizzard.

"Well sah, gents, we ain't got no more sheriff than a rabbit."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Badger. "Did things git too hot for King Stan-nard?"

"In a manner of speakin'—yes," allowed the old man. "Too hot."

"Any idee where he went?"

TECUMSEH SMITH stroked his beard with an air of caution. "I ain't shore. He got hisself shot."

Badger shot a suspicious glance at Blizzard. The solemn Ranger said nothing, but he looked hard at the old timer.

"It's a fact," declared Tecumseh. "With a fo'ty-five, 'bout two inches back of his right ear. It shore killed him a-plenty."

"Bushwhacked?" asked Blizzard.

"'Pears so. Mighty nigh everybody figgers you fellas done it. I heard tell they was a heap of talk 'bout the county kittyin' a thousand or so for re-ward pu'poses."

Badger scratched his curly pate and tried to look worried. "I shore hope you ain't got no more bad news."

The old cowman hid his face behind a cloud of smoke. "Well sah, I did clean forgit somethin' else. And all the boys swear it's the wust thing that could have happened to Whirlwind."

"Huh!" grunted Badger. "Let's have it."

"Josephus done disappeared!"

"Bully!" exclaimed the big Ranger. "Never did like that there tomcat. Hope he got bushwhacked and fed to the coy-otes."

Tecumseh glared at him. "It's mighty nigh sartin that Whirlwind will pin another thousand onto the bounties on yo' hair, 'cause everybody 'ceptin' Rattler figgers you done away with Josephus."

"What does Rattlesnake Runnels think?"

"Knowin' that Josephus is a frustrate gunsmoke prophet, Rattler allows he has cached hisself ontill the dust sorta settles. But me—I got ideas of my own."

The old timer blew smoke at the roof. "'Bout seventy mile south of town, they's a mighty fine lookin' pussy cat."

After asking a few more questions, Blizzard concluded that Tecumseh had told everything worth while. In the old scamp's pack of lies, he discovered enough truth to surprise him at the extent of Cherokee Lou's preparations to get them; and he quickly decided they had no business in that cabin. He let a somber glance wander about the little home, and he looked thoughtfully from Tecumseh to Auntie. Fine old people, the salt of the earth. Worked hard to build their home, mighty proud of it, and probably figured to keep it as long as they lived. No two ways about it, he and Badger would have to fight their way out of a tough situation and he didn't want to see the battle roll over that little cabin. So he casually allowed that they'd better pull their freight just as soon as they could saddle up and get out. Badger got the drift and heartily agreed.

But the proposal brought a storm of protest from Auntie as well as Tecumseh. The old lady's eyes flashed when she said in substance, they'd take it as an insult to their courage. She told the Rangers that she smelled gunsmoke before either of them was born, and she added with a touch of humor that she sort of liked the scent of it. Neither Badger nor Blizzard could get a word in edgewise.

TECUMSEH clinched the argument, declaring with an earnestness that was unusual for him, "Jest you listen to me, you—you paralyzed polecats! Me and Auntie is pappy and mammy to

Trinity and the Box J. We brung 'em up, both of 'em, and they's our young'uns. That settles it! Be still!"

So Blizzard gave in against his better judgment. But as far as he was concerned, from that point the conversation lagged. He found himself straining his ears to catch the faintest noises outside the cabin. The song of a mocking bird, the hoot of an owl, the yapping of a coyote, the wail of a wolf—he listened to them all, burdened by the conviction there were other sounds he should have heard and didn't. A nervousness closely approaching actual dread took hold of him, a sensation strange to Blizzard whose steel nerves ordinarily were proof against such disturbances. From time to time he went to a window and looked somberly out into the night.

It was early. A full moon swaggered over the horizon, jest a-spoilin' for a fight. He sorta r'ared back and got all set, a-fixin' to show the earth what happened to Old Man Darkness when he turned hisself loose. He made a million stars look kinda peak-ed when he told 'em to git out from under foot and give a fella room to onlimber his artillery.

He socked a gang of sorry lookin' clouds and they hit out for tall timber, a-wringin' their tails and a-scratchin' gravel to beat hell. Old Moon laughed fit to kill. Then he took out after shadows and sent 'em skytootin' here and yander, a-divin' for kivver wherever they could find any kivver. They piled up behind every last thing that Old Moon couldn't punch a hole through—stable, corral, springhouse, woodpile, smokehouse, and everything. Even a skinny old jimson weed that was havin' a devil of a time stayin' on its feet in the wind, had a fool shadow a-hidin' behind it, a-slippin' and a-slidin' and a-sweatin'—and a-shiverin' in its boots fit to shake its daggoned spurs plumb off.

Blizzard didn't like those piles of shad-

ows. Too many of them were big enough to hide a man.

But he found some comfort in the thought, "Anyhow, we got damned good shootin' light."

THE cabin faced the south. Standing by the only window in that side of the living room, he heard something he hadn't expected to hear—the pounding of flying hoofs!

This rider was alone and Blizzard knew that no enemy would come so openly; nevertheless, he spoke sharply over his shoulder, "Put out the light and be still. Somebody comin'."

The horse soon came into view. Its rider clung to the horn with both hands, swaying in the saddle. A moment later the Ranger recognized that blazed-faced pony. He went through the front door at a stride.

The horse staggered to a stop in the yard. Red! Blizzard wasn't greatly surprised. She slid limply from the saddle, and he caught her before she collapsed.

Badger was right behind him. "God Almighty!" he burst out. "Gal, are you hurt bad?"

Red's hat was gone. Her face and neck were scratched and bleeding in a dozen places. A sleeve of her shirtwaist had been ripped away, and the torn legs of her divided skirt told the story of a reckless dash through murderous brush without the protection of leather.

Clinging to Blizzard, the girl stayed on her feet. "I'm not hurt—much," she gasped. "They're—they're—Jake and a gang are coming!"

"How far back?"

Red seemed to take hold of herself. She stood alone. "I'm not sure. Pretty close I expect. They left town ahead of me, but I rode like the devil and cut through the brakes."

They took her into the house. She hung to Badger's arm and walked with a limp. A genuinely religious woman who

didn't consider herself too pure to mother a girl like Red, Auntie Smith threw an arm about her and led her to a comfortable chair. Then she ordered the men to fetch water and cloths and pillows and things. Blizzard rolled her a cigarette. Completely exhausted, the girl sank back and hungrily filled her lungs with smoke. Auntie bathed her face and neck, fussing over a wicked gash in her arm and another in the calf of her leg.

While waiting for Red to get in shape to talk, Blizzard strode to the door and looked out. The sorrel stood on the bare ground of the yard, its sides heaving, its legs wide spread and trembling. He listened. The song of the mocking bird arose above the harsh breathing of the horse. The voice of the night held no disturbing note. If danger were near, it moved silently. He turned eagerly back into the room, for Red was speaking.

"I hate to be such a baby," said the girl unsteadily. "But I hurt my knee when I jumped through the window, and I got a shaking up when I rode through the brakes at a run."

"At a run!" growled Tecumseh. "It's tough enough to ride them brakes at a walk."

Auntie sat on the arm of her chair, brushing curls back from Red's forehead. "Take your time telling about it, Little Girl."

Red tossed her cigarette into the fireplace. "This has been one hell of a day." She bit her lip. "Oh! Auntie Smith, please excuse me."

Auntie placed a palm on her forehead. "From the looks of you, Little Girl, I'd say you *have* had one hell of a day!"

BADGER thought, "Fust time in her life Auntie ever used that there word, I betcha." He looked from the girl to the old lady. A lump tightened his throat. He swallowed hard.

Red's voice was husky. "Thank you, Auntie."

She closed her eyes for an instant, then opened them wide. "It's that squaw! The way she looks at me gives me the creeps. I live in a little house with another girl. Before we got up this morning, I caught that squaw trying our door. She's been at my heels all day. I'm afraid of her. I've always been afraid of her!"

"Don't blame you a durned bit!" growled Blizzard. "I'm a-skeerd of her my ownself."

Red breathed heavily for a moment. "Late this evening Fatty Kopf came to the Wild Rose looking important. Jake Rupper was there. They got their heads together, over by an open window. I slipped outside and listened. Fatty remembered that you fellers talked to Tecumseh for a long time the day you came to town, so he suspected you might be here. He watched this place through a spy glass and saw Badger. Jake said he'd get his men and light out for Tecumseh's. I knew I had to travel, so I got back to my house as quick as I could and changed into my riding clothes."

Red seemed to have difficulty in continuing. She was unnerved, almost hysterical at times, utterly unlike her usual confident self. "As I was leaving the front door, I met that squaw! She whipped out her knife. I turned and ran to the back door with her after me. The key stuck in the lock and I couldn't get it open.

"I didn't dare to use my derringer, 'cause everybody would hear it. So I dodged Ta-nah and dived head-first through a back window which happened to be open. Jake and his gang left on the fly, quite a while before I could get my pony from the corral."

Her voice rose. "They'll be here any minute!"

"No doubt about it," snapped Blizzard, "so we'll go meet the skunks and lead 'em away from here."

"You durned tootin'!" growled Bad-

ger, turning to the wall where his guns were hanging. "Let's us ramble."

Red reached out and caught his sleeve. "Listen, Badger! I've put two and two together and I—I know you're Rangers." She tried to smile. "I'm kinda glad of it."

Badger took her hand. He laughed. "Gal, so am I!"

Tecumseh hooked his fingers into Blizzard's belt and hauled him to a stop at the door into the kitchen. Then the two old folks lit into the Rangers hammer and tongs.

They showed their spirits in no uncertain manner. They had more at stake than anyone else, and they demanded the chance to fight for it.

At length Blizzard interrupted them. "Listen!"

Apparently he was the only one who heard anything, and the others told him so.

He picked up his rifle and levered a cartridge into its chamber. "Don't make no difference what you-all cain't hear," he retorted grimly. "They done got us corralled!"

CHAPTER XIV

"YOU'RE TOO TOUGH FOR ME."

THERE followed a moment of utter silence. The moon poured its beams through a window, lending to the room a ghostly light peopled by the strained faces of men and women intently listening. The song of the mocking bird ended with the screams of a catbird, repeated from the sky as the little fellow sailed away.

"Stand clear of the winders!" snapped Blizzard.

An instant later the silence was split by the crack of rifles and the crash of six-shooters. Bullets smashed through every window in the house. Glass shattered and lead thudded into the log walls, or ricocheted dangerously from

them. But the volley ended as suddenly as it began.

On the heels of the echoes came a booming voice from the vicinity of the smokehouse, fifty yards northwest of the kitchen—Jake Rupper's voice. "Hi-yi there, Tecumseh Smith! We ain't after you. We want them skunks Buffalo and Pelican. Send 'em out and we'll let you alone."

Before anyone could stop him, Old Tecumseh dashed into the kitchen. He roared through a window, "Go plumb to hell!"

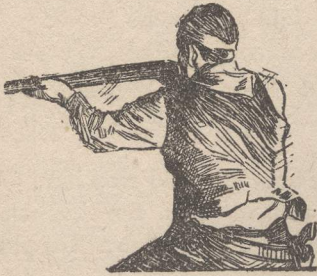
Blizzard's thoughts clicked into place, clearly, rapidly. Should he and Badger give themselves up, nothing would be gained. Cherokee Lou would figure they had told Tecumseh, Auntie, and Red about her, so these three would meet the fate of others who knew too much. He cursed viciously under his breath. No way out of it, they'd have to finish the job they started.

The suddenness of the attack had not surprised him. Upon hearing stealthy movements outside, he instantly surmized that the presence of Red's sorrel would let the attackers know the house had been warned. No doubt they hid their horses in the timber and came the balance of the way on foot. He damned himself for not going on a scout the moment Red arrived, instead of waiting to hear her story. In every way, Blizzard held himself responsible for the dangerous predicament with which Tecumseh and the two women were confronted. A profoundly conscientious man, this feeling of responsibility bore heavily upon him.

The cold-blooded officer of the law merely performing his duty, became a ruthless fighting man—cornered, with the odds against him.

He stirred into action. It seemed natural that he should take charge of things. In a crisp but calm voice he issued orders.

"You wimmin git in the fireplace. Tecumseh, you take the bedroom. Badger stay here. I'll take the kitchen." At the door he called over his shoulder to Bad-



ger, "Some of 'em is in the springhouse. Heard 'em kick over somethin' befo' the fun started."

Another volley answered Tecumseh's challenge. It seemed that the very air in the room was alive with lead. For a wonder no one was hit, moving about as they were.

Red was slow to obey Blizzard's command. Auntie took her by the arm and said in a voice as steady as the Ranger's, "Don't be a fool, little girl! Come on. The men folks don't need us yet."

As she and Red crouched within the partial protection of the great, rock fireplace, the old lady actually laughed. "Crawlin' into the fireplace to get away from hot lead! This is like old times."

MOVING with the agility of a man twenty years his junior, Tecumseh took his Winchester from its rack above the mantel and hurried into the bedroom. He stood close to the wall beside the west window, the muzzle of his rifle resting on the sash from which most of the glass had been broken, his clear, calm old eyes alert to catch the flash which would provide him a target. Perhaps he too, recalled the days of his youth—desperate battles with Indians, and white renegades worse than Indians.

Blizzard chose the kitchen because he considered it the most difficult and dangerous to defend, and because he be-

lieved Jake Rupper to be at the smokehouse, which could be seen at an angle through the west kitchen window. The room had a door and window in its east wall, and a door at the rear which opened into the woodshed. From the east window he had a view of the springhouse and the springbranch, and by standing well to one side of this opening he could see the stable and corral.

The redheaded Ranger held no illusions with regard to the job on their hands. Jake Rupper was a slippery scoundrel. Blizzard felt that all this promiscuous shooting through windows was not the principal danger he had to look out for. He knew that before long Jake would spring something tricky, but he didn't have any idea what it would be.

"Jest git shed of Jake and the balance of 'em will throw up the sponge," he thought. "Damned if I ain't gotta do it, somehow or other."

In the living room, Badger had his hands full. With a window in the south wall and another on the north side, about three feet from the east wall of the kitchen, he was in an exposed position when covering either of these openings. And to make matters worse, the front door in the south wall would not stop lead. The men on that side were hidden in a motte of trees a hundred fifty yards to the south. Although the timber stood out clearly in the moonlight, it was impossible to distinguish men in the shadows. All he could do was to watch for flashes and cut loose at them with his rifle, recklessly exposing himself in order to do so. Both Red and Auntie scolded him for his carelessness, but he laughed and told them he was having the time of his life.

While he stood by the south wall, a bullet ripped diagonally through the north window, glanced from a beam overhead, and seared a welt along his jaw. It stung his quick temper into life. Growling profane threats under his breath, the big

Ranger whirled back to that window and took a stand where he had a clear view of the springhouse from which he assumed the shot to have come. Moonlight glanced from a rifle barrel at the springhouse window. Badger's Colt snapped up.

The room shook to the reverberations of the five shots he sent into that window with a speed which few men could equal. The rifle barrel disappeared. A crash of crockery told the story of a man going down.

The brisk north breeze whipped gun-smoke back into the room. Badger coughed, reloaded his sixshooter, picked up his Winchester, and returned to the south window. The good natured grin had left his face. His shock of curly black hair stood out all over his head, and his big jaw was set. Auntie and Red never once took their eyes away from him. They looked as if they might be a little bit afraid of him.

FROM the bedroom came the occasional crack of Tecumseh's rifle, but not a sound had come from the kitchen. For Blizzard was one of those finished riflemen who considered it a disgrace to waste a shot. He stood beside the west window, stern and cold, his narrowed eyes riveted upon the smokehouse. A box-like building of logs, it had a solid door and no windows. The door was tightly closed, so he figured that Jake and one other man were behind the house. From time to time a gun flashed through the projecting logs at a corner and a bullet swished through the window by which he stood. The lean Ranger neither flinched nor fired at flashes. Figured it'd be an accident if he hit anything doing that. He just stood there and waited. Give 'em time and don't pester 'em none, and folks are shore to get careless. At length a gun barrel slid cautiously across one of the logs. The man behind it took time to aim. He had taken

his hat off. His forehead was a patch of dull white, surrounded by shadows.

Blizzard's rifle came up as smoothly and rapidly as the fastest gunman could draw a Colt. The instant the stock touched his cheek, he pressed the trigger. A man staggered from the shadows. He fell on his face in the moonlight.

"Damn it, that ain't Jake!" thought the Ranger.

A bullet came through the window behind him and spanged into Auntie's dishpan, on the wall not three feet from his head. He didn't flinch. He listened for a moment to the jar of shots in the other rooms, and to the rattling fire of the enemies surrounding them. He thought of the two white-haired old folks. He thought of the nervy little red-headed girl who figured it was smart to be tough, and wasn't half as tough as she thought she was. And Blizzard inwardly flinched.

Jake was a-waitin' for somethin', jest a-waitin' for somethin', and he wished to hell he knew what it was.

From somewhere down on the springbranch opposite the southeast corner of the house, a rifleman was patiently cutting the front door of sawed lumber to pieces. From neither window could Badger get a shot at him. So the big Ranger did exactly what might be expected of him under such circumstances. He unbarred the door, swung it open a couple of feet, and stepped back into the room. Behind a shallow bank seventy-five yards away, the rifleman made a mistake. He chanced a shot through that open door. Badger emptied his six-shooter at the flash. The man jerked to his feet, swayed, and toppled backwards.

Badger closed the door, but he forgot to bar it!

In the bedroom, Tecumseh's Winchester cracked twice. Mighty fast, thought Badger. And while peering at the motte of trees, looking for something to shoot at, the young Ranger caught himself hoping that he'd be as good a man as Te-

cumseh—if he lived to get that old. He fired a glance at the bedroom door. Something happened in there. Sounded like a cough, or a grunt, or—sounded bad!

Auntie heard it too. She left the fireplace with a half smothered cry, "Tecumseh! Oh Lawdy!"

Red followed at her heels. They ran into the bedroom, slamming the door behind them. Badger growled an oath. But he stayed where he was. He had a job to do.

On the floor beneath the window, lay the old man. His silvery hair and white beard looked ghostly in that dim light and swirling smoke. Auntie dropped to her knees beside him without a sound.

RED groped about for his rifle. It wasn't inside. She threw up the sash and looked out. The rifle lay beneath the window. Stretching across the sill, Red tried to reach it. She couldn't. Over at the woodpile, a gun barked and a bullet clipped away one of the curls that tossed in confusion about her head. The girl didn't hesitate. She swung her supple body through the window and dropped to the ground. Bullets tugged viciously at her clothing and thudded into the logs behind her. One grazed her shoulder. Another burned a welt on her neck. And a third ripped through the fleshy part of her thigh. She retrieved the rifle, shoved it into the room, and scrambled through after it. For a few moments Red lay prone on the floor, dragging air into her lungs, and pressing a small palm to the wound in her thigh.

Auntie's anxious voice came from where she knelt at the old man's head. "Did they get you too, Little Girl?"

"Not much—a scratch on my leg," gasped Red. "Is—is he dead?"

"Thank the good Lawd, he ain't," said Auntie. She laughed softly, hysterically. "Jest nicked', he'd say. He'll be all right in a few minutes."

Red got uncertainly to her feet. She ripped a strip from a sheet on the bed, and bound it quickly about her thigh. Then she knelt beneath the window with the rifle over its sill, took quick aim at something, and pressed the trigger. The hammer snapped on an empty cartridge. She cursed, and worked the lever.

AUNTIE ran to the door and called Badger. He came and picked Tecumseh up. Red stopped him while she searched the old man's clothes for cartridges. Then he carried the cowman to the fireplace and left him there with Auntie.

Returning to the south window, he listened to the pounding of the girl's Winchester. And he said to himself, "By God, yander's a gal for this country! A man's gal—by The Eternal!"

Confident that to get Jake was the way to win out, Blizzard maintained his patient watch for the lanky killer. No more shooting from the smokehouse, but lead continued to smash through the door and window on the opposite side of the room. He had been scratched and gashed in half a dozen places, but he stubbornly stuck to his stand by the window. A glimpse, just one glimpse of Rupper was all he wanted.

Since there had been no firing from the east side of the kitchen and but very little from the north window of the living room, the men at the springhouse and in that vicinity were getting careless. Glancing over his shoulder, Blizzard saw one of them crawling toward a stump that would afford a direct shot at the kitchen window. In a stride he crossed the room, whipped up his rifle, and fired as if by instinct alone. The fellow doubled into a knot, grotesquely rolling and twisting on the ground like some misshapen animal at play.

So Blizzard didn't see Jake Rupper when he darted from the smokehouse across the few intervening yards to the stable.

A few moments later, the north wind flung into the kitchen the unmistakable odor of burning hay. Blizzard strode to the east window and boldly looked out. A bullet gnawed at the sill, and a splinter slashed his cheek. He didn't feel it, numbed by what he saw. The hay stacked against the north end of the stable was burning.

Solomon, Belial, their packhorse, and Tecumseh's buckskin were tied in those stalls!

Blizzard cursed, low, scarcely above his breath, repeatedly. He leaned his rifle against the wall. He wouldn't need it. Speed was what he needed. Armed only with the knife in his belt, the tall Ranger went swiftly through the kitchen door.

A man at the springhouse yelled. That yell brought Badger to the north window. For a fleeting instant, he was stunned by what he saw. Flames leaping and dancing in the wind, lapping at the stable where his horse was tied. Blizzard crouching low and covering ground in great leaps toward the fire. Flashes at the springhouse and along the springbranch, hurling death at his friend.

He whipped out both six-shooters. Firing them alternately, Badger Coe shot faster than he had ever before fired a gun in all his experience as a gunfighter. He didn't look to see if Blizzard was down. He didn't have time to look. And he didn't want to look. He cursed hoarsely, and sucked great draughts of smoke into his lungs, and worked his guns until they were empty. Then he stole a glance.

Blizzard was nowhere in sight!

As though to seek safety in the company of its own kind, Red's sorrel had gone to the corral when the fighting commenced. Now it danced about outside the stockade, tossing its head and lashing its tail, its small ears pointing rigidly toward the stalls.

Encouraged by the wind, the flames

enveloped the haystack and licked at the stable. But they didn't at once take hold of the log structure. They danced over, upon, and around it, touching it and darting away like hungry devils tantalizing their appetites while cavorting about a delectable morsel. Their constantly changing reflection cast strange shadows and lent weird shapes to things, wrapping real things in red and orange mantles of unreality.

Down Badger's drawn cheeks rolled beads of sweat. Years ago he had seen a horse burn to death. God Almighty! He beat on the window sill with the barrel of an empty gun. Torn between responsibility to those in the house—his job as a Ranger, and love of his horse—he cursed like a madman. As if what he saw wasn't enough, a procession of thoughts sped through his mind—thoughts that made it plain hell to stay there and look on and do nothing.

In imagination, standing full in the orange glare with flames winding about him, he saw Belial—a sleek, frisky little colt with slender legs and big joints, a curly little tail that jest wouldn't be still, silky little ears that a fella jest couldn't keep his hands off'n, and a velvety little muzzle that would pick a goody out'n yo' palm and tickle and maybe take a leetle nip of hide if you didn't watch the pesky cuss. And again he saw that other horse burn to death—heard it, too!

During that instant of torment, Badger forgot everything but his four-footed pardner; forgot Blizzard; didn't notice that the firing on his side of the house had ceased; and utterly failed to see the dark figure that darted around the corner of the woodshed into its door!

SUDDENLY the big Ranger let out a mighty yell—hoarse, yet vibrant with savage exultation. Out from behind the stable, into that circle of fire staggered two men—tall, lean, and sinewy, locked and tangled like gigantic spiders in mor-

tal combat—one brown, the other black. Blizzard and Rupper! Course that slippery Blizzard wouldn't try to get the hosses out until he found the skunk that started the fire. Badger's voice boomed out in another yell, then he clenched his jaws and strained his eyes to catch every move of the struggle.

Twisting, weaving, staggering, breaking apart, crouching, standing erect, springing or slithering this way and that, spidery arms darting in and out, blades flickering like tongues of flame in the firelight, slashing, thrusting, parrying—details of the struggle blurred into a confusion of frenzied motions, they moved so fast.

A terrific crash inside the stable—an animal beating at the bars of its prison. Out of the smoke and flames arose a scream unlike any other sound—a terrified horse.

The black fighter lurched away. On top of his long thin neck, a bony face with sunken cheeks and twisted lips was thrown back. Firelight danced over it, painting shadows. A spidery, brown arm darted out. A blade flashed in the orange light. It flickered across the stringy throat, leaving a dark line behind it.



Jake Rupper wilted to the ground, rolled onto his back. He lay still.

The rifles about the house were silent. Perhaps they were leaving; or perhaps they couldn't believe their eyes, for Jake had been a famous knife fighter.

Blizzard ran to the corral gate. He swung it wide. Then he dashed to a door in that end of the barn, opened it

slowly, and walked in. Badger could almost hear him talking calmly to the horses. Takin' a hell of a chance on gittin' killed. A crazy hoss was a heap wuss'n a knifer. Fire now bathed the roof and spilled off the eaves like burning oil. The big Ranger's fists rolled into lumps of bone and straining tendons. He held his breath.

A black demon of a horse shot out backwards from beneath the flames. Belial threw up his beautiful head, glared insanely around, then made a lunge for his stall—back into the fire! Badger groaned. Blizzard loomed suddenly in the smoke. He cut Belial across the face with a double of a rope—once, twice, three times. The giant horse reared, struck at the Ranger with a shod hoof, then whirled and plunged through the open gate.

Badger tried to yell. He couldn't. Something filled his throat. Jest like Old Blizzard to git his pardner's hoss out fust!

It seemed but an instant before Solomon backed out, turned and shot through the gate. Tecumseh's buckskin and their packhorse followed shortly. Badger measured the progress of the fire. He concluded that Blizzard might have time to save their rigging and things, since he could leave by way of the door in the end not yet reached by the fire.

THE big Ranger heaved a sigh of relief, then ripped out an oath. Behind the kitchen window near at hand, a light suddenly flared up. He caught the smell of kerosene, and fire! The next moment he was in there, blinking and coughing in the acrid smoke. Flames were already gnawing at the floor, shelves and the curtains over them, and the exposed shingle roof. Smoke rolled through the door to the woodshed, which held a supply of dry kindling. Whoever had started the fire had found Auntie's coaloil can in the woodshed and made a

thorough job of it. For an instant Badger just stood there, prey to an overpowering feeling of helplessness. Not a chance of putting that fire out, even if he had water. Blizzard's rifle caught his eye. He picked it up and went quickly into the front room, closing the door tightly behind him.

Sitting in the fireplace with Tecumseh's head in her lap, Auntie glanced up with the suggestion of a smile. She inquired in an even, quiet tone, "I reckon they aim to burn us out, don't you?"

Badger inclined his head. He was afraid to trust his voice.

The old lady ran tender fingers through Tecumseh's thin, white hair. "Well, it won't be the first time. My man is comin' around, so we won't bother about the cabin."

Badger said nothing. He couldn't tell her that he wondered how in hell they'd ever get out of there in the teeth of all those rifles. Above the crackle of fire in the kitchen, arose the bark of Red's Winchester. Good gal! Better go see her, and find out how she was getting along, and maybe tell her about the fire if she didn't already know.

As he took his first step, something crashed against the front door hurling it from its hinges into the room. A log dropped to the sill and two men came plunging through—the mammoth Nebraska and Waco Charley, the breed.

Badger whipped out his Colt. The hammer fell on an empty cartridge. He dropped the gun and lunged in time to catch the big man's arm before his six-shooter left its holster. Nebraska's great bulk kept Waco from getting his gun into action. Badger gave the arm a twist that would have broken the bones of a smaller man, and the Colt clattered against the wall. They clinched.

The crash at the door brought Red. Just inside the room she snapped her rifle to her shoulder. Its blast rattled

broken windows and shook a forlorn picture frame on the wall. Its bullet flung the breed twisting backwards into the yard.

She stepped forward with the barrel of her Winchester raised to strike. Badger lifted Nebraska clear of the floor. He threw out a hand and grasped the top of a heavy, old-fashioned cupboard that had belonged to Auntie's grandmother. It toppled forward. Red dodged, tripped over Badger's gun, and went down on her face. The cupboard fell. A sturdy rocking chair broke its fall and kept it from going all the way to the floor; but it pinned the girl down. Her rifle fell beyond her reach. She lay there, beating on the carpet with her fists, screaming encouragement to Badger and curses at his antagonist.

NEBRASKY, the barroom brawler, was one of those vicious fighters who shun weapons whenever possible, employing their strength to maim or kill or cripple for life. A head taller and fifty pounds heavier than Badger, he had a distinct advantage in the confines of that small room. Neither owned any degree of man-made science, but each had more than his share of that natural science which is the heritage of all savage creatures that are born to kill. Nebraska's fingers bit into flesh like steel pincers, and Badger feared for his eyes. Nebraska feared nothing.

The Ranger jerked an arm free. He whipped his knife from the back of his belt.

"Cut his heart out!" hysterically screamed Red.

Nebraska parried the thrust by a downward slash with a fist as hard as iron. It struck Badger's wrist before the blade went home. The knife twisted through the air and lit within a few inches of Red's face. Her hand closed on it convulsively. She cursed and

stabbed it repeatedly into the floor. The combatants staggered close to her. She slashed at the calf of the big man's leg, cutting through his boot top and laying the flesh open.

Above the explosive breathing of the fighters, arose the crackle of flames. Resin bubbled on the kitchen door. Fire gnawed at the partition above the log wall that divided the kitchen and living room. Sharp, inquisitive tongues of flame crept slyly through cracks, or darted in and out. The fire sent its smoke to mingle with the gunsmoke that swirled in the peak of the exposed roof. A mouse ran frantically along a beam. It paused, squeaked plaintively, and looked down—redeyed and wondering, at the struggling giants beneath it.

Auntie Smith untied her apron, folded it, and gently placed it under Tecumseh's head. Then she came out of the fireplace, looking serenely determined. She took the knife from Red. The fighters were now locked, rolling about on the floor, snarling like wild beasts in mortal combat. Stooping and holding the blade ready to strike, the old lady went close to them and calmly waited for her chance. Suddenly Nebrasky kicked out with a leg like an oak limb. It knocked her half way across the room. She lay there for a moment, gasping and holding her side. Then she painfully got to her hands and knees, picked up the knife, and crawled slowly back toward the fight. A red ember fell into her white hair. She dashed it away, and crawled on.

In the meantime, Nebrasky succeeded in clamping his hands about Badger's throat. They closed like an iron band. Pain screeched and pounded inside his skull, and his senses reeled. He felt himself going fast. He buried his steely fingers in the flesh beneath the big man's floating ribs, and ripped outward with the strength of desperation. Something

gave way, cracked. He felt it, and he felt a tremor course through his massive body. The iron band around his throat loosened a fraction. He jerked his neck free.

The combatants rolled apart. Badger sprang to his feet. Nebrasky came up more slowly. His body bent over to one side, and his mouth hung open.

"Bust him!" screamed Red. "Tear him apart!"

FIRED by primitive savagery, the Ranger thought only of the weapons nature gave him. He forgot the empty gun in his holster, the one at his feet, the girl's rifle near by, and the knife slowly creeping across the floor in Auntie's hand. Instead he launched a blow with his fist, a blow with every ounce of his two hundred odd pounds of bone and hard muscle behind it. The fist landed with a crunch on Nebrasky's chin. It might have killed another man. It dazed and staggered the giant outlaw. Badger sprang at his man. He slipped an arm through his crotch and heaved him from the floor. Nebrasky's fingers groped desperately for his eyes, tearing the skin on the bridge of his nose, ripping the flesh from his cheek. The Ranger buried his face in the heaving paunch beneath it. With all his strength, he rammed the big man head foremost into the jagged rock wall of the fireplace. They went down together. Badger stood up quickly. The body at his feet jerked once, then lay still.

Red fainted. Her face sank to her arms.

The mouse ran down the wall, and leaped through a window.

"Reckon I was a mite too late," said Auntie. She got to her feet with difficulty and hobbled to the fireplace.

For a short moment Badger stared about him like a man waking from a dream. He shook his head and felt of his throat. He had the taste of blood in

his mouth. The smoke and terrific heat almost stifled him as he fought to drag air into his lungs. Over the partition, fiery snakes weaved and nodded and reached out into the room; and they crawled along the room almost directly above his head. He caught sight of the girl. With a hoarse cry, he heaved the cupboard away and picked her up. Her head lay supinely against his shoulder.

At that instant, Blizzard strode through the door with somebody's rifle in hand.

"Git outa here quick!" he exclaimed. "They're gone."

No time was wasted upon useless conversation. Badger ran outside with Red and laid her on the green grass near the springbranch.

In the meantime, Tecumseh sat up groggily. He rolled his head and cursed. "What the—?"

A blazing board fell into the room. It set fire to the carpet and the moss beneath it.

The old timer staggered to his feet. He took one look around and roared, "Where in hell is my pipe?"

Auntie urged him out of the door, hobbling along beside him.

Blizzard gathered their weapons, saddlebags, and bedding rolls, and tossed them into the yard. Then he dashed into the bedroom and dragged out Auntie's trunk. Badger came in to help him, but they had no time to save anything else. Part of the partition fell blazing to the carpet behind them as they left through the front door.

By the time they finished moving the things to a place of safety at the springbranch, Tecumseh and Red were up and around.

"Howdy gal!" heartily exclaimed Badger. "Shore you ain't hurt bad, no bones broke or—?"

"No, I'm not hurt much—that way," she interrupted with a tired little gesture. "But—that terrible fight!"

His strong, white teeth flashed in a wide grin.

She caught her breath. "Why—you're laughing!"

He chuckled aloud. "Might jest as well."

RED brushed her hair away from her face. She stared wide-eyed at Badger, timidly, a little fearfully. He was naked to the waist. His hairy, heavily muscled body was covered with dust and soot and blood. His face was scratched, bruised, bleeding, and blackened by smoke, and both eyes were badly puffed. But his grin lengthened.

"Guess I ain't as much of a man as I thought I was," said the girl brokenly. "I'm cured! I—Big Feller, you're too tough for me!"

Her eyes were moist and her lips weren't any too steady.

Big hearted as he was, Badger thought what a hell of a time that little redhead had had. Been through enough to kill most women. And he was mighty glad he heard Blizzard tell Tecumseh that she was due to collect a big slice of the rewards.

Somewhat awkwardly, for he was ill at ease, Badger took her small hand in his broad palm. "'Course you ain't no man. You're a daggoned putry leetle gal."

He let go of her hand, and laughed to hide his embarrassment. "Reckon I'm too tough for any civilized gal. Chances is, I'll have to ketch me a squaw."

Red didn't respond to his attempt at humor. She continued to stare at him. As he turned away, he heard her murmur, "Smashed his head like an egg shell. God! And you can laugh about—"

He didn't hear the rest of it.

But he did hear the old timer flatly refuse to let the Rangers stay there and take care of them. "You fellas has still got a hell of a job on yo' hands, and it's gotta be done all-fired quick. Jest you

round up yo' packhoss and my buckskin. They's a old set of chain harness in the ambulance over yander. We'll git along frustrate. If you scratch them nags of your'n a-plenty, I reckon you'll hit town befo' any of Jake's coyotes show up, 'cause they shore won't be in no hurry to git there. Now slope!"

Blizzard bent down and spoke softly in Tecumseh's ear. "If anything happens to us, make shore to write Cap'n Hank what I told you 'bout Red and them rewards."

As the Rangers turned to leave, the roof of the cabin fell in with a shower of sparks. Auntie laid her head on Tecumseh's shoulder. She cried a little, whether from grief at the loss of her home, a nervous reaction, or relief at the recovery of her husband—no one could say.

The old man bashfully patted her head. "There, there Auntie! Quit yo' sniffin'. We got us enough money to build a millyun cabins, if we was to want a millyun of 'em."

He winked slyly at Badger. "Shore hate to lose my pipe, but I'm powerful glad to git shed of that there cook stove."

CHAPTER XV

TO THE LODGES OF HER PEOPLE

THERE was something furtive in the way Miss Constance parted the drapes and looked through the window. It was a west window. Off in that direction lived Tecumseh Smith.

"Why the devil don't we hear something from Jake?"

The Professor answered from an arm-chair facing the front door, "It may take time to kill a couple of Rangers."

Carefully closing the curtains, she faced about. She listened intently. The toe of her slipper noiselessly tapped the rug. "What's the matter with this damned town? It's as quiet as a graveyard."

The saturnine gunman smiled indulgently at her, with his eyes alone. He said nothing.

The girl prowled about the room. She stopped at another window and looked



out cautiously. "Not a soul in sight. Where in hell is everybody?"

"Out hunting, or inside—waiting."

"It's light as day."

"Fine night for hunting."

"I can see Boot Hill from here."

The Professor lit a cigarette.

She twitched her bare shoulders irritably. Again she carefully closed the curtains and swung about abruptly. "Are the musicians all dead? Why aren't they playing?"

Nothing seemed to disturb the Professor's even calm. "There isn't a man in the hall, and the girls said music makes 'em nervous tonight."

With short, quick steps she went to the mirror. Her reflection frowned back at her. Like a man trying to conquer a fear by oiling a weapon that didn't need it, she had gone to extremes to make herself beautiful. Her red silk gown was the most expensive she owned, the most extravagantly designed. In contrast to her usual good taste, she wore a fortune in jewelry.

From each ear she removed a huge diamond pendant. "I look like a damned gypsy!"

"You're beautiful!"

"I'm not. I look like a gypsy, I tell you!"

The gunman said nothing.

Miss Constance turned her back to the mirror. She carelessly tossed the diamonds onto a table. Cross-legged on the floor near by sat Ta-nah, busy at her eternal beading.

The girl looked angrily down at her, then spoke in her native tongue. "You shouldn't have let Red get away."

The Indian woman showed no resentment. If anything, her coal-black eyes lost some of their fierceness and her voice was less harsh than normal. "And you should go back to lodges of our people."

"Bring wine!"

The squaw left silently.

Frowning and biting her under lip, Miss Constance watched the older woman cross the floor and disappear into an adjoining room. "Ta-nah never had a child of her own, and she's worshipped me since the day I was born. I don't want people to worship me!"

"Some of 'em can't help it, Connie," he remarked dryly.

She petulantly shrugged her shoulders.

He added in a casual tone, "No need to worry about Red. When this excitement is over, she'll marry that Concha County beef baron—Tom Darton. He proposes to her every time he's in town. Then she'll keep mum about her past life."

MISS CONSTANCE went halfway to the west window, then halted suddenly. "Ta-nah! Hurry up with that wine!"

She resolutely returned to the sofa, sat down, and lit a cigarette. "And there's that little devil of a Mary Carson. I found out that she gave the Rangers a letter from Trinity, so she knows too much."

The Professor spoke as he might have spoken to comfort a sick child. "When you leave here and things settle down, Mary and Trinity will get married.

Young married folks don't go around making trouble for other folks."

The girl filled her lungs with smoke, then crushed out her cigarette. Momentarily she sat rigid, listening. "Why didn't you get half a dozen men to help you watch this place, instead of trying to do it alone?"

The gunman patiently shook his head. "And have those half dozen fellows blackmailing you, if the Rangers get hurt when they come to get you? That wouldn't do. If Badger and Blizzard come, leave 'em to me. I'm the only one you can trust."

He smiled faintly. "Besides, I'm not alone. Fatty is waiting for them down at the stable with his shotgun, loaded with buckshot."

"He is? Thought he went with Jake."

"Fatty is too slick to take chances," said the gunman. "He knows he's bound to get part of the reward for finding those fellows, even if Jake does wipe 'em out. And if Jake misses, he figures they'll come here. Somehow or other he found out they're Rangers and knows what they're after."

"Then you'll have to talk to Fatty when—when—"

She hesitated and he completed the sentence for her, "—when I've talked to Badger and Blizzard."

Ta-nah brought the wine. He poured a glass for the girl and one for himself. She drank deeply of the heavy port. He sipped it.

Miss Constance lit another cigarette, sank back against the cushions, and gazed intently at him through the smoke. "Anton," she began in her strangely gentle voice, "have you ever been afraid of anything or anybody?"

"Yes, I'm always afraid of a man with a knife or gun."

She nodded impatiently. "Naturally, but I mean any one person or thing particularly."

The Professor crossed one thin leg over the other. "Right this minute, I'm afraid of Badger Coe."

The girl sat erect. "Why?"

The lean gunman's voice was as calm and unperturbed as if they were discussing the weather. "He could kill me with one lick from his fist, or he could break my neck with his bare hands. And in a gunfight, I'm not at all sure that I won't be the slow man."

Her fingers unconsciously twisted and crushed the cigarette. "I don't think so; but if you're doubtful, aren't you afraid to meet him?"

"Yes, I'm afraid," he answered simply. "But someone has to get him out of your way, and I'm the best man for the job."

She jerked to her feet with a vicious oath. "I hope Jake cuts their damned throats from ear to ear!"

SHE took a short, aimless turn about the room. Her eye fell upon the book on the table. She picked it up, looked it up, looked at it front and back, and dropped it. Over in a far corner, a giant clock solemnly tolled the hour. The girl shot a startled glance at its face.

"Midnight! Hell! Why *don't* we hear something?"

There came a sharp knock at the door!

The Professor sprang from his chair—a flash of black and white, both hands at his guns; unbelievable that one so languid in appearance could move so fast.

Transfixed to the spot, Miss Constance stood rigid for an instant. She stared at the door as if trying desperately to look through it.

"Who is it?" demanded the gunman.

"It's Pansy," answered a girl's voice.

"News!" exclaimed Miss Constance, her face beaming. She nodded to the squaw.

The Professor relaxed, but he didn't sit down.

Ta-nah carefully placed her beadwork aside, arose effortlessly, and walked silently to the door. She slid the bolt and turned the knob. As though swung by some mighty, unseen force, the heavy door struck the gaunt squaw full in the face, hurling her halfway across the room. She fell heavily over a chair and lay gasping for breath on the floor.

In the doorway stood an apparition—a bruised and battered caricature of a man with wide shoulders, a great chest, tremendous arms, and big hairy hands that instantly disappeared in bursts of smoke!

The Professor's guns leaped from their holsters. One fired at the ceiling, the other into the floor. As if by magic, two little black holes appeared in the breast of his white silk shirt. He reeled away, twisting. A third black hole materialized in his side, below his left armpit.

He fell on his face.

Through the smoke of Badger's guns came Blizzard. Cut, bruised, and burned, his face looked fully as cruel and ruthless as the knife in his right hand. His left shot out. His fingers fastened upon Cherokee Lou's wrist as she whipped a derringer from her bosom. A wicked jerk sent the weapon spinning and wrenched a broken cry from the girl.

"Git back to the stairs!" he commanded Badger.

The big Ranger left on the run, dragging the girl Pansy with him.

Blizzard's long, bony fingers closed tighter on Cherokee Lou's delicate wrist. His lips scarcely moved. "You damned killer!" he snarled. "Are you goin' to talk here, or have I gotta take you where I can make you talk?"

In the remorseless grip of the one thing she feared, Cherokee Lou was struck dumb by stark terror. The pupils of her eyes dilated. Color left her face. The muscles of her throat worked, but no sound passed her lips.

Blizzard's mouth closed into a thin,

hard line. He lifted his knife to a point level with her eyes. Then over her head, he caught a glimpse of the mirror on the wall. Like a flash he jerked his sinewy body to one side. Steel flickered past him.

It buried itself in the girl's soft, round throat!

Cherokee Lou sank to the floor—a crumpled little figure in red silk, momentarily supported by one bare arm.

Blizzard stepped back.

Ta-nah stared past him as if he wasn't there. Deep in her eyes there burned some strange, black fire. Then she ran to the girl and bent over her, making no sound. With infinite tenderness, she laid her on her back, straightened her limbs, and smoothed her dress.

Blizzard coughed in the smoke.

The squaw arose to her commanding height. Her long arm shot out, pointing to the door.

"Go!" said Ta-nah.

BLIZZARD stalked down the hall. Pursuing him, clinging to his clothes, was the insinuating odor of the perfume that betrayed her.

He met Badger at the top of the stairs. Blizzard gripped his arm. The young Ranger opened his mouth to speak, stared in amazement at his partner's face, and turned back without a word.

They left in silence, unobserved. Passing the stable, they scarcely glanced at the body of Fatty Kopf. They swung into their saddles, secure in the conviction there would be no pursuit before they reached the Box J. The enemy was now without a leader.

Blizzard sat straight and stiff, gazing somberly into the night—listening. His thoughts sped back through the years.

He stood at the door of a tepee. On her knees he saw an Indian woman—fat, greasy, and filthy. She rocked from side to side, moaning over the body of her baby. He saw her plunge a knife into her heart. And he heard her death cry.

He waited.

From beneath the blanket of silence that had descended upon the town, there arose a wail—muffled, prolonged, hopeless.

They rode away.

Blizzard muttered aloud, "It's hell to be a Ranger!"

THE END



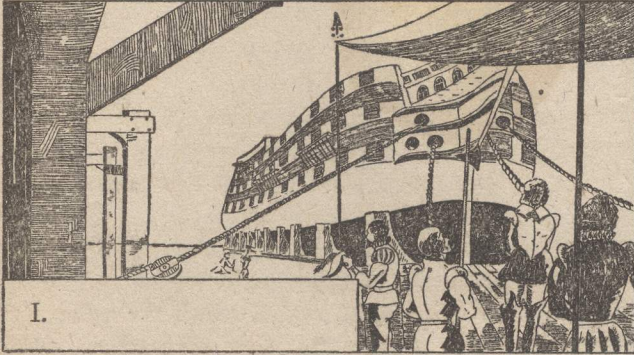
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SHIPS AND SEAS



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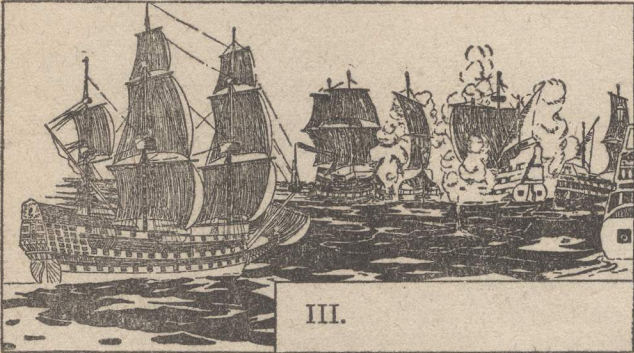
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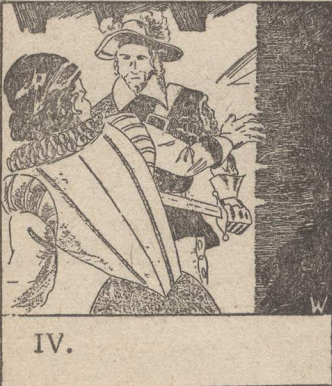
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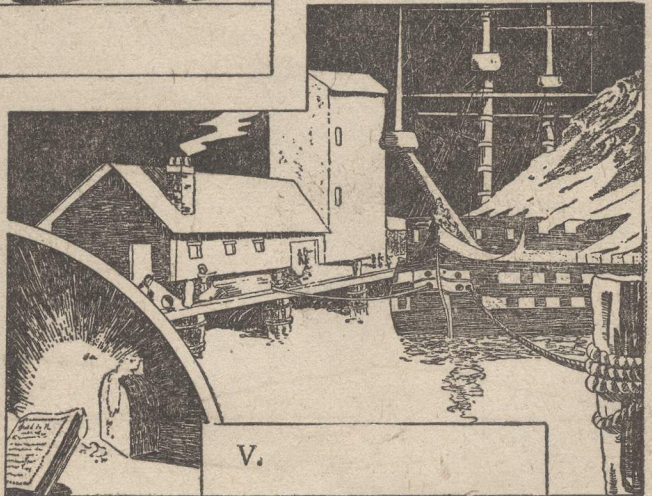
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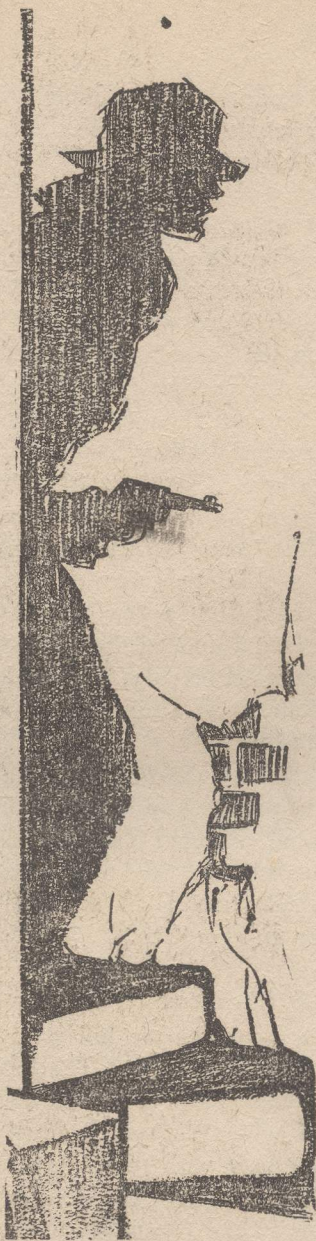
V.

I. The ROYAL SOVEREIGN stuck on the ways at her launching when King Charles I was to christen her. II. Before the next date for the ceremony a terrible storm arose and the ship was launched in an emergency. III. A huge 100-gun ship, she was the pride of the navy during the Dutch wars. In the great battle in which van Tromp was killed, she withstood five of the enemy. IV. In August, 1673, Captain William Reewes was killed aboard the ROYAL SOVEREIGN, during a fierce action with de Ruyter. V. January—1696. The ROYAL SOVEREIGN was laid up at the Medway to be overhauled. A forgotten candle of the watchman set the great ship afire, and destroyed her.

REBATE

By ROBERT H. RHODE

Author of "Trailer Trail,"
"Chinaman's Chance," etc.



Joe would have cut himself deep into that. But the fact remains that assets in sight at demise consisted of a five dollar bill, three ones, two quarters, one dime and one nickel.

Frisking decedent, I listed no stocks, no bonds, no mortgages, no jewelry; no personality whatever except one blue serge suit with a couple of holes alongside the left lapel. The eight sixty-five was all he had on him.

And still, Nickersmith's, Inc., certainly did put Joey under in bang-up style. The rites were run off in the gray of milk-time, zipped through as fast as a newsreel in a movie grind house because of a certain pressure for privacy. But aside from the rush, Joe had everything the best. Gerry Brown told me to see that he did, and believe me there wasn't one coach charged on Nickersmith's long itemized statement that didn't actually follow the hearse.

All those shiny, empty hacks included, the planting cost \$1,008.65—and with a former C. P. A. supervising, I'm here to tell you that \$1,008.65 can fetch a hell of a lot of service even from a gyp like Nickersmith. I take a bow on it; Joe Quate, no question, had as handsome a funeral as ever rolled out to Potter's Field.

IT WAS a nice funeral. Considering that Joe Quate's discoverable estate grossed eight dollars and sixty-five cents and the clothes he dropped in, and that Joe passed on one hundred percent friendless and unmourned, a very neat funeral indeed.

Of course Joe Quate had big money holed away somewhere. Less than a month before the obsequies his mob tapped the Sterrett National Bank for forty-seven thousand, and a rugged individualist like

SA^ME as with Dillinger, who may have got a bigger press than Quate but never was any harder, it was a woman that turned Joe in. If she repented after she squawked she kept it to herself. To

us she was just a voice on the F. B. I. wire, a mad voice talking fast. When she hung up that was the last of her. She took no part in the funeral personally or financially.

The solemn little four-eyed guy that smoked Joe down was not present, either. He was back at his desk in Washington. Nickersmith was there, and I was there, and counting out the mob of black-gloved hackies; we two were the whole gallery until Gerry Brown came out to see the earth patted smooth over the late Mr. Quate and pay off the mortician with spot cash graveside.

Gerry was a little mournful; not by any means on account of what had happened to Quate, but entirely because of the way it happened. I could sympathize with him, for he had very naturally figured that tip from Joe's ex-girl friend as a direct and personal answer to a petition he'd had on the ether ever since Joey rubbed out Special Agent Hugh Blashfield with a Thompson s. m. back of Waukesha.

A hundred agents would have given their right arms to have brought Quate in, up or down, but prima facie it was fitting and proper that the job should go to Gerry. On known fact his claim was incontestable; and when fate plugged in Quate's soured sweetie on Gerry Brown's own line nobody who had seen Gerry struggling the last many months to run two families on one salary could have called it anything but poetic justice at last operating.

No—nor wondered, either, that Gerry's face all but showed the marks of the slap when he teletyped Washington he had Joe Quate practically in the bag and got back a prompt, flat order to hold everything until a swivel-chair strategist named Sanford arrived by plane to organize the collar.

Not the Chief himself, mind. Just this minor Brass Hat Wallace Sanford that none of us assigned to Gerry's office had ever laid eyes on, a paper-work wizard whose recent services to the Bureau had

consisted exclusively of shining his pants on a seat beside the Throne.

Gerry Brown was bitter. He said things he was sorry for as soon as he said them. But even while he was frothing he was rapid-firing on the phone, and in not more than twenty minutes he had yanked in half a dozen agents and was racing off to put a plant on the farm-house downstate indicated as the current Quate hide-out.

It was ten a. m. then and past two p. m. when unwanted Wallace Sanford lit at the airport, where I was waiting with a geared-up bus. He didn't look like much. Desk-huddler was written all over him. He was a thin, pale, mute, spectacled, dead-pan bird—but a few minutes away from the field I noticed the dead pan slip when I squeezed between two trucks with the speedometer at a hundred even. Sanford didn't like it.

"Fool chance!" he snapped. "I'm not here to get smashed up in an accident."

I told him, "Right! I'll be careful." And then I boosted to 105 and afterwards passed a Greyhound on a blind curve, spiting the guy for Gerry.

IN THE third county out we swung onto a roller-coaster hill road where Gerry Brown flagged us. The long wait hadn't sweetened him any. He was about as cordial with Wallace Sanford as he would have been with Joseph Quate.

"The house is just over the next hill," he told him, "and Quate is in the house. He hasn't seen us, but we've seen him. He's alone. Now that *you're* here, is it all right to go ahead and take him out?"

Four Eyes shook his head. "No," he said. "It's my chance. I'll take him out. If he bolts, stand by to nail him."

Gerry reddened up. He snapped, "Quate's no mope, Sanford. He's dynamite. That's one thing. Another—he knocked off Special Agent Hugh Blashfield last year. Remember?"

"Very distinctly," Sanford said. "I have Blashfield in mind. That's why—"

He started to turn away and Gerry caught his arm.

"You listen!" he gritted. "That same Blashfield happened to be my best friend. Also, he was my sister's husband—and she, poor kid, she's half dead herself grieving for him. That ought to leave it up to me to handle Joe Quate my own way. Damn right it ought to! However, my orders read that you're in charge. If the credit means so much—"

Sanford blinked behind his big round black-rimmed cheaters. He echoed, "Credit!" and cracked a wincy smile. Then he said, "Bosh!" and walked on up the hill. We couldn't hold him.

At that minute Quate must have been opening the hide-away door. In the barn behind the farmhouse he had an old coupe and he was heading for the car, bound God knows where, when he saw that skinny goggled figure coming over the rise.

He stopped and looked; took a couple more steps and stopped again. Sanford didn't stop at all. He walked steadily down-hill, not fast and not slow. Then he turned through a break in a wavy fence and made straight for Bad Man Quate.

THERE wasn't twenty feet between them when Quate got the idea. He popped out a pistol—but that was not the gun we heard at the hilltop. A pen-pushing hand had been quicker than Joe's and Quate was horizontal on a landscape suddenly sprouting Federal agents all around him when Gerry Brown and I broke cover.

Down there in the farm-yard Sanford was blinking at Joey as if he couldn't quite believe it himself. His face was sweaty and there was mist on his glasses when he swung them to Gerry.

"Yes—Hugh Blashfield!" he said, his voice all off the ratchet. "It couldn't be allowed to happen again. I couldn't let it happen. *Couldn't* sit there in Washington and let somebody else walk into Quate. The same day Blashfield went I told the

Chief I couldn't. Since that day I haven't had a decent sleep, hardly have been able to live with myself."

Joey's automatic had dropped close to him and even with the death-fog in his eyes he was groping for it. I jumped and kicked it out of his reach, and that way I missed something else that Sanford said. I saw Gerry Brown staring at him.



"Quate? Your—*what?*"

"Client," Sanford said. "Long ago. Down home in Texas, my first year out of law school. He was a punk kid hijacker, in a bad jam over a shooting at a gas station."

Gerry exploded, "Abilene! That jam?"

"That one. Yes. First and last time Quate was ever caged. If he'd got what was coming to him then he'd have been out of circulation all this time. Would've been in prison yet and for years to come. I was just a cub attorney, understand. Criminal law was only a game to me—part chess, part racket. And I needed money, needed it like hell. Quate had friends then, money men.

"Poor Blashfield! His blood is on my head! I was Quate's defense counsel in the Abilene case. I beat the rap for him, tricked an acquittal by bullying witnesses and emoting to a dumb-bell jury.

"Oh, a glorious victory! I'd earned a big enough fee to marry on. I was high, I tell you—but my own girl took me down. She saw things that I hadn't seen, refused to step into a home that crooks' money had furnished, finally had me feeling like a crook myself.

"I promised her that night that I'd never defend another man I didn't hon-

estly believe innocent, never as much as buy myself a necktie out of my fee for turning a tiger loose. And I haven't.

"We've lived in single rooms and cooked on gas plates, sometimes been damn close to having nothing to cook at all. Yes, until I made F. B. I. it was tough sledding. But not a red cent of Joe Quate's money have I touched to this day. I don't want it. I'm turning it back to him—*now!*"

Searching Quate just in case he might have a second gun and a parting thought, I had uncovered the eight sixty-five by that time. And right then there was a last minute accrual. Sanford stood by me ripping open a worn envelope and a shower of bills floated down around Joey's

little pile. They were hundred-dollar bills—ten of 'em.

Gerry Brown looked at Sanford and then he looked at Quate. He had stopped being sore. His voice showed it.

"Joey's gone—but he's got the rebate, Sanford. It's off your chest. *His* money! And eight sixty-five plus a thousand—that should bury him pretty. Say, why not?"

So that's how come Gerry Brown and I stood by Joe Quate's grave a couple of mornings later at Potter's Field and watched the spades patting. When I heard Gerry whisper, "Rest in peace!" I knew that wasn't for the guy down under. He meant it for Hugh Blashfield—and I think in quite a bit of part for Wallace Sanford too.

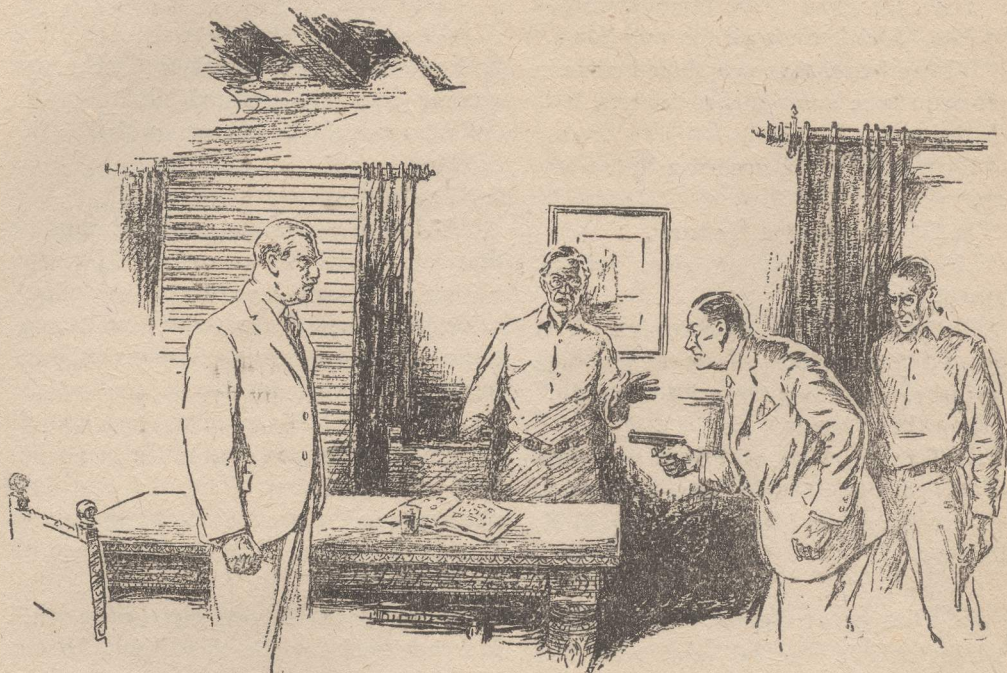


CURIOUS FISHING SUPERSTITIONS

Kenneth P. Wood

IN British Columbia the Indians ceremoniously go out to meet the first salmon, and in flattering voices try to win their favor by calling them all chiefs. Every spring in California the Karaks used to dance for salmon. Meanwhile one of their number secluded himself in the mountains and fasted for ten days. Upon his return he solemnly approached the river, took the first salmon of the catch, ate some of it, and with the remainder lighted a sacrificial fire. The same Indians laboriously climbed to the mountain top after the poles for the spearing-booth, being convinced that if they were gathered where the salmon were watching no fish would be caught. In Japan, among the primitive race of the Ainos, even the women left at home are not allowed to talk, lest the fish may hear and disapprove, while the first catch of fish is always brought in through a window instead of a door, so that other fish may not see.

Morrissy of the New York City Police Opined that the Police of Haiti Had Done a Good Job Since the Marines Left



STOP SHOOTING AT ME

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "Diamonds on an Island," "The Murderer's Left Hand," etc.

THE sun was blaring red, and airport officials were muttering something about floodlights, when the plane finally did appear.

The plane swung over the Cul-de-Sac, circled the city, and came down, fan-shaping the water in delicate white. It turned, taxied toward the dock. Negroes in row-boats prodded it into exact place. Other Negroes ran out the light steel, bridge-like gangplank.

There were three passengers. The first two were local businessmen. The third was John F. X. Morrissy, who was big, impassive, assured, handsome, with almost

white hair, an almost white mustache neatly clipped, and immaculate clothes. His cheeks were pink, his eyes were blue like the blue eyes of a sailor. He moved slowly, with dignity, but not ponderously. He weighed close to two hundred, but he wasn't fat.

A smallish dapper fellow in the uniform of the Garde d'Haiti clicked heels together, bowed.

He had a beautiful black mustache. His manners were perfect, his English nearly so.

"Capitaine Morrissy of New York, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Know me, huh?"

"Everybody knows of Capitaine Morrissy."

"Yeah, it's great to be famous. Sorry I'm late. Head winds all the way down."

"It is an honor that you should come in person to take away this prisoner. It is a high honor!"

"Well, I thought I needed a little vacation."

The Garde extended his hand.

"Lieutenant Senac, at your service, Capitaine."

"Glad to meet you, Lieutenant. You boys did a nice piece of work, grabbing that baby. You deserve a lot of credit."

They shook hands.

"Shall we, perhaps, go first to my home and have a little drink?" Senac suggested.

"Now there's an idea," said John F. X. Morrissy.

THEY sat on a veranda, sipping something which was tall and cold and made of rum. Morrissy would have preferred beer but he was too polite to say so. He realized that he should treat these Haitians with great respect. After all, they had pinched Skitty Cather, out of a clear sky, when half the cops in the States were running around looking for him; and they'd had sense enough to take his fingerprints and wire their classification to Washington, to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which had promptly passed on the information to New York.

"A nice piece of work," Morrissy said again. "Somebody tipped you, I suppose? That's the way it usually is."

Senac nodded gravely.

"A tourist. He telephoned. He said he had seen a man who was like the pictures he had seen of Monsieur Cather just before he left the United States. He said the man was in the back room of the Army Bar talking with another *blanc*."

"Huh?"

"Talking with another white man."

"Oh."

"He would not give us his name, this

tourist who called. And we did not press him to do so."

"Good idea."

"We went immediately to the Army Bar and as we arrived Monsieur Cather was coming out. We arrested him."

"Who was the guy he was with?"

"Monsieur?"

"The other *blanc*?"

"Ah! Him we did not find. It must be that he heard us arresting Monsieur Cather and went out quiet by a back door."

Beyond the wall the street sounds continued—natives shouting their wares, beating their burros, frantically tooting the horns of their *lalignes*. But there was silence on the veranda, and in the house behind the two men. The red sun had plunged into the sea, and it was very dark. The air was thick with the fragrance of bougainvillea.

"Well, it was a nice piece of work," Morrissy said for the third time. "From all I hear about you boys, you certainly know how to run things here since the Marines got out."

"The United States Marine," Senac said precisely, "did much good here—ah, yes! The Marine organize the Garde d'Haiti. We owe much to them. Very much."

"Well, they seem to have organized you right. This rat Skitty Cather is about as nasty a little crook as I've ever known. He was always a hard man to get anything on. But when he got surprised in an apartment job a couple of weeks ago, and bashed in the lady's skull to keep her from screaming, he must have got panicky. He left us a practically perfect set of prints. Not like him at all. Yeah, he must have got panicky."

"He had very little money. Thirty-four dollar. And there was no more in his room at the Grande Hotel."

"And you never found out who it was he'd been talking with?" Morrissy crushed out his cigarette, finished his drink. "Well, anyway, we've got Skitty. Which is the important thing." He rose. "That was a

swell drink, Lieutenant. Now let's get over to the hoosegow. I'm sure Skitty'll be glad to know I'm here."

INSIDE the house a telephone rang. A white-coated servant appeared and said something in Creole. Senac excused himself, after an impeccable bow. He went into the house with neat, dandified steps.

Morrissy heard him talking for a minute, but he talked in French of which Morrissy understood not one word. The lieutenant seemed excited, Morrissy lighted another cigarette, sighed, strolled over to veranda rail and stood there looking down at the dim, shadowed flowers.

Presently Senac returned. His face was very grave.

"Monsieur le Capitaine, that was a call from the Commandante of the Garde d'Haiti."

"The big shot himself, huh?"

"Monsieur, the Commandante has a request to make of you, and I am asked to make it for him."

"Well," Morrissy said cautiously, "I always like to help out, wherever I can."

"Capitaine Morrissy, you are a very famous detective. You have captured many, many murderers, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Morrissy shrugged.

"Well, I've caught my share. But remember, we've got a lot more murderers in the first place, up in New York."

"Ah, true! And so you, Monsieur le Capitaine, have a great experience with them. You know what to do. Here in Haiti we can handle our own people, yes. When they steal, when they kill, we arrest them. But racketeers we do not know."

"You're lucky. What's all this about anyway?"

"Monsieur, have you ever heard of Ellsworth A. Edgar?"

"Can't say as I have. American?"

"Ah, *oui!* But he lives here in Haiti, in a big mansion on the road to Petionville. He is a very, very rich man."

"Uh-huh?"

"*Mon Capitaine*, a half hour ago Monsieur Ellsworth A. Edgar was brutally murdered!"

Morrissy blew smoke through his nose, flicked ash off his cigarette, stared out over the garden. It wasn't a pose. Murders never startled John F. X. Morrissy, hadn't for years. He had no interest in them except when they were in his city.



"That so? Sorry to hear it. If this place is anything like the States, I know what it means for you boys when a rich guy gets bumped. It means everybody will be blaming the cops."

Senac bowed. It seemed to Morrissy a silly thing to do.

"Monsieur le Capitaine, I have been instructed by the Commandante to ask you if you will not lend us your great experience and skill so that we might—"

"Now wait a minute! You mean you want men to help you in the investigation?"

"Ah, yes!"

Morrissy said, politely but with firmness, "Ah, *no!*" He caught his cigarette on a long, well manicured forefinger, and snicked it into the garden. It fell with a tiny shower of sparks. "I don't like to be disagreeable, Lieutenant. You guys have been swell about this Cather business, and I want you to believe that I'm grateful. But taking over a murder investigation is another matter."

"But with Monsieur's great skill—"

"In the first place, I haven't any authority to stick around here at the expense of the City of New York. I've got to take my prisoner and fix up extradition and clear out. In the second place, hauling me into the case would make a lot of local sleuths sore. And you can't blame them! They'd get all the work and I'd get all the glory, no matter how it came out. And in

the third place, that stuff about my great skill is nine-tenths baloney. I'm not modest—I think I'm good, as far as my own job is concerned—but I'm no Sherlock Holmes. You know yourself, Lieutenant, that police work's a local matter. Here in Haiti I wouldn't be a bit of use. I don't know French, I don't know Creole, I don't know my way around. The dumbest rookie you've got in the Garde is better equipped to work on this thing than I am."

He shook his head.

"No. If I really thought it would help you out, I'd be glad to look things over. But I know it wouldn't. My job here is to get Skitty Cather. So let's beat it over to the jail, huh?"

"There is a second matter, Monsieur."

"Yeah?"

"It seems there was another murder committed only about an hour before Monsieur Edgar was killed."

"Oh-oh! Tough day for cops, isn't it?"

"This man killed was a member of the Garde d'Haiti, a jail warden. The Garde has charge of all the jails here, you understand, Monsieur? This warden was stabbed to death with a kitchen fork and his uniform was stripped from him and he was found in an empty cell. The prisoner in that cell, the murderer, had escaped. An hour later, maybe less, somebody broke into the home of Monsieur Ellsworth Edgar. Monsieur Edgar was dressing for dinner and the servants were all out. He must have heard an intruder, for he was found only half dressed. There was a projecting nail on the sill of the window through which the intruder entered or left or both. There was a shred of khaki cloth clinging to this nail. It smelled of the same disinfectant we use in the jail."

"So?" muttered Morrissy. Then, suddenly alarmed, he grabbed Senac's arm. "Say, you're not telling me that——?"

"The prisoner who escaped, Monsieur, was, I regret to say, Skitty Cather."

There was a long silence. Then Lieu-

tenant Senac, leaning closer, asked very softly:

"Would Monsieur le Capitaine care to change his mind and go with me to the home of the late Ellsworth A. Edgar?"

Morrissy positively snorted.

"Hell, yes! And right now!"

IT WAS a show place, resembling, a little, Mount Vernon — but Mount Vernon in an incongruous setting of date palms, coconut palms, breadfruit trees, poinciana, tuberose, and brash orchids. Dramatic in itself, it was also situated dramatically. As you went toward Petionville the road curved sharply right, and you supposed, unless you knew better, that you were going to go straight up to Ellsworth A. Edgar's mansion. The driveway, that is, looked like a continuation of the road itself—and in fact it was a better piece of pavement.

So the house stood there, large and white and handsome, awesomely arrogant, sure of itself, on a hill. Tourists had it pointed out to them and they were told who Ellsworth E. Edgar was. No resident of Haiti needed to be told this.

He had been handsome and arrogant too. Even though he was dead, and upside down, even though his face was smeared with sticky, drying, blackening blood, he looked cruel and strong, a man who would take no back-talk from anybody.

Yet certainly it was an unlovely corpse. It occupied the top six or seven steps of a formal Colonial staircase, in full view as you entered by the front door. The head was down, the feet up. The corpse was clad in a dress shirt, no collar, no trousers, black silk socks, bedroom slippers. One stud was in place, but there was no collar-button and the cuffs contained no links. The top of the head was mostly blood. The eyes were open. One arm extended lower than the head, and on the step below this hand there was a blood-smeared, steel, heavy golf club.

Members of the Garde stood all around—the staircase was wide, showy like the house itself—and one of them was dusting fingerprint powder on the handle of the golf club with a small camel's-hair brush.

Morrissy went up the steps as far as the golf club. He stood on that step, fists on hips, and rubbered out his lips while he stared for perhaps a full minute at the body. He did not touch it. He turned and went down the steps again, and Lieutenant Senac went with him.

Morrissy said, "All right. Now where's this piece of cloth torn off on a nail?"

Senac spoke in Creole to a guardsman, who led them into the large square library. There was a woman there, young and very lovely, seated, staring at nothing with eyes which were no longer wet. A guardsman stood on either side of her. Morrissy paid her no attention but went directly to the window.

The window was open; it had been jimmied. The piece of torn khaki too was evident on the nail. It was small, a long triangle in shape, pointed outward.

"This hasn't been touched?"

"No, Monsieur. Only sniffed at. Two wardens from the jail have sniffed it, and they both swear it is the same disinfectant they use in the jail. So far as anybody knows that disinfectant is not used anywhere else here."

Morrissy shook his head.

"Skitty Cather never jimmied that window. That's an amateur job, and Skitty's one of the slickest crooks in the business. The way that cloth is, it looks as though it was torn while somebody was going out. *That's* conceivable. Skitty might have got panic-stricken, the way he was after bumping off that dame in New York. But he certainly never opened this window."

"Possibly he lacked a proper tool?"

"Skitty," Morrissy said decisively, "could raise a window like this with his fingernails, and never leave a mark."

Senac suggested, "He needed clothes and money, so he broke into what anybody could see is a rich man's house."

"If he wanted to do that, he'd break into the first house he came to. He was a white man, dressed in a Garde d'Haiti uniform. He'd have to move fast, whatever he did. Do you mean to tell me he'd take the chance of walking all the way out here? Why, this must be three miles from the jail!"

Two Garde officers entered the library and started to question the woman. They were polite about it, but insistent. She didn't look at them. She answered their questions briefly, in a listless voice.

MORRISSY drifted over, listened for a while. Or rather, he watched. They talked in French which he could not understand, so he simply watched the woman. She was lying, he decided. She was trying very hard to seem at ease, unruffled. She leaned back in her chair, and her hands were limp in her lap. But she was pressing her feet down hard on the rug; Morrissy could see the muscles of her calves standing out as a result of the pressure.

Senac whispered, "It is Mrs. Ellsworth A. Edgar. The widow."

Morrissy only nodded, still watching the woman. She lifted her eyes, saw him.

"You look like an American? Perhaps you can tell these men that there's no sense in asking me all these questions over and over again, because I've told them everything I know."

"What have you told them, for instance?"

"Simply that I was in the living room, the other side of the entrance hall over there, with Mr. Chartey and Mr. Bond. My husband was upstairs, dressing. At least, I had *supposed* that's what he was doing. But then suddenly we heard ^{that} if yell something—I couldn't tell ^{any} ^{busi-} what—and we heard him yell ^{so} ^{vvy?}"

—I couldn't tell you just what—and we heard him thump down on the stairs. We rushed out to the hall, but we didn't see anybody else—nobody but poor Ellsworth and he was already dead.”

“Who else was in the house?”

“Nobody. I'd given the servants a day and night off because of the fete in the city. Some kind of native holiday.”

“I see. Now the man who killed your husband—do you suppose he ran out by way of the front door?”

“He couldn't have done that or we would have seen him. We were standing at the far end of the living room—it's just like this room only on the other side of the house—and from there we could see the front door.”

“If you happened to look.”

“But we *did* look! As soon as we heard Ellsworth shout we all three of us whirled around and stood staring in the direction of the hall. We didn't run out there, as we should have done. We were too startled.

“But certainly we would have seen anybody who left the house by way of the front door.”

“Is there a back door that could be reached from that hall?”

“Not from the hall, no.”

“Then the murderer must have either come in here and exited through that window, or else he went upstairs?”

“He didn't run upstairs, because Fred—Mr. Chartey—ran up there himself a few moments later, and he searched it thoroughly. The windows were all open, the way they always are up there, but none of the screens had been touched.”

“Who is this Mr. Chartey, by the way? And this Mr. Bond?”

“Friends. Guests. Mr. Chartey is an Englishman. Comes from Jamaica, but he visits Port-au-Prince several times a month on business. Mr. Bond is a gentleman I met in Miami last year. He is to be visiting Haiti, just sight-

“They house guests?”

“No-no. Just dinner. Mr. Chartey's staying at the Rex and I believe Mr. Bond is too. Not together. In fact, they only met one another here this afternoon.”

“I see. Thank you,” said Morrissy. “As for the questions these boys ask, I'm afraid I can't help you there. Asking questions is a habit cops have when there's been a murder.”

AS THEY turned away, Senac said in an undertone, “She did not tell you that she and her husband had been quarreling lately. It is an open secret. A week ago they had a loud and violent argument at a function at the American Club, which embarrassed everybody.”

Morrissy only grunted. He was making for the hall.

“Also I understand,” Senac whispered, “that Madame has no money in her own right. But Monsieur, of course, had much.”

“She could have killed him,” Morrissy admitted, “but she probably didn't. A golf club isn't the sort of thing a woman would pick as a weapon—unless she snatched it on the spur of the moment. That stick with which Edgar was conked is a short heavy No. 8 niblick, probably the best one in the bag for that purpose. It's the kind of thing an amateur prowler might pick up for an emergency. I mean, if he knew something about golf.”

In the hallway Morrissy almost collided with a smallish but very heavy-set man in a tan Palm Beach suit. This man had a thin twisted mouth, almost bloodless lips, a nose waxen and very thin, and furtive eyes. He was cocky, smart, sleek, citified.

Morrissy said softly, “Well, I'll be damned! So *you're* the Mr. Bond from Miami?”

Bond's mouth twisted, his eyebrows got very low.

He snarled, "What are you doing here?"

"I'll ask questions, not answer them." Morrissy's voice was icy. "And when I find a filthy little rat of a private detective who's nothing better than a crook—when I find him in a house where somebody's just been murdered—"

Bond got close, thrust his face almost into Morrissy's.

"Say listen: If you start telling these local boys—"

"I don't have to tell them anything about you. I'll give them the name of my friend Sergeant Morton of Miami, and *he'll* tell them what kind of a reputation you've got in your home town. After that they can do what they like about it. Now get your mongrel's face away from me. I never did care for haliatosis."

"So you think I'm up to something crooked?"

"When were you ever up to anything else?"

"Now wait a minute, Captain. This is perfectly straight here. I met Mrs. Edgar in Miami Beach a year ago. She was staying at the Roney, and visiting friends. She lost some jewelry, or thought she did, and she called me in. Before I even got over there she'd found the stuff again.

"It had just fallen behind something. So as to make up for my trouble she offered me a drink and we sat around and talked for a while. I said Haiti was a place I'd always wanted to see, and she said if I ever did go there to look her up. And the other day I found myself a little ahead of the game, so I came here for a vacation. Got in yesterday. I called Mrs. Edgar and she invited me here to dinner tonight. Well, I'd come, and she'd introduced me to this Englishman, and we were standing in the other room talking, just the three of us, when her husband got clouted. I *didn't* see who did it."

Morrissy said passionately, "Boosh-wah!"

LIEUTENANT SENAC hovered nearby, and Garde officers were crossing and recrossing the hall and going up and down the staircase at the head of which the body of Ellsworth A. Edgar still sprawled grotesquely upside down. Bond sank his voice.



"That's absolutely all, Captain, except I'd like to tell you one or two things I happened to notice. How 'bout stepping back underneath these steps, at the end of the hall?"

"Why not tell me right here?"

Bond's eyes moved back and forth. There was always a cat-like quality about this man.

"Some of these babies might hear it and get me wrong. Some of them can understand English, you know."

"You haven't got anything real to tell me," Morrissy said, "but I'll go with you just out of curiosity."

Nobody followed them, and in the small windowless room underneath the staircase nobody could see them.

"I *have* got something to tell you," announced Bond. He held a small keen thin knife so that its point was no more than an inch from John F. X. Morrissy's large pink throat. "And that is that if you don't keep your nose out of my business I'm going to use this. Savvy?"

Morrissy was astounded. Certainly it was not like Everett Bond to carry a knife, of all things. Morrissy later learned that the thing was a letter opener which belonged to the Edgars. Bond had picked it up unthinkingly. But it was sharp, and bright, and it was breathlessly close to Morrissy's throat.

Morrissy started to laugh.

"Well, that's more than I'd expected you to tell me. So you really have got some game here, and you're afraid it'll be spoiled by the presence of an American cop who knows the way you punks operate? Well now, that's very interesting. I'll have to remember that. Meanwhile, put that toy away before you hurt yourself with it."

"I'll put it away when I'm good and ready, after I've told you—"

"I haven't got time to listen to any more crap from you."

Morrissy stepped backward, dodged to one side. He kicked Bond in the shins. Bond squealed, doubling. Then Morrissy punched him in the jaw, a long, full-bodied uppercut. He was something close to fifty years old, was John F. X. Morrissy, but he hadn't forgotten how to hit.

Bond straightened, swaying. Morrissy punched him again, a straight right-hander to the point of the chin. And Bond went down.

Guardsmen came hurrying. Lieutenant Senac was especially solicitous.

"Shall we arrest him, Monsieur le Capitaine?"

"I wouldn't. He's constitutionally incapable of telling the truth, but he's got enough cheap cunning not to lie in the same way twice. You'd never get anything out of him." He wiped his hands, then carefully put the handkerchief back into his breast pocket. "Let's have a little chat with this other baby."

FRED CHARTEY was emphatically English. He was a good-looking fellow — peaches-and-cream complexion,

sandy toothbrush mustache, stiff sandy hair perfectly combed. He was tall and well set-up. He was perhaps thirty years old. Though he wore a white linen suit, it seemed, on him, to be tweed. He had blue outraged eyes and his mouth, too, wore a perpetually hurt expression.

He spoke only English. This was perhaps because he knew no other language; but whatever the reason, he gave the impression that it was because he considered it beneath his dignity to speak anything else except on strictly informal occasions.

"Now see here. I suppose you chaps know your business and all that, but you might show a little more feeling for Mrs. Edgar. The poor girl has suffered a terrible blow."

Morrissy asked quietly, "Do you know Mrs. Edgar well?"

Chartey stared at him, disapproving eyes wide open.

"Known her for years. Her husband too, poor chap."

"Did you know this man Bond, of Miami?"

"I was presented to him this evening. I had never met him before that, no."

"Had you ever heard Mrs. Edgar mention him?"

"Not that I recall."

Morrissy dropped out of the questioning for a while, and Garde officers continued it, Senac being the interpreter. Morrissy, however, came in once more, briefly.

"Mr. Chartey, do I understand that you were invited here to dinner tonight?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you."

It was necessary for Senac to remain, but Morrissy said he wanted dinner, a shower, a change of clothes. Also he wanted to be alone for a while. He refused Senac's invitation to stay at the lieutenant's house. "I keep crazy hours. You wouldn't want me around." But he accepted an offer to use Senac's car.

He turned at the door for a last grim look at what until recently was Ellsworth A. Edgar. The corpse had not been moved. It still rested precariously on the upper steps, as though the slightest nudge would send it tumbling and bumping to the bottom. The right arm was still extended and seemed to appeal for assistance.

On the veranda steps Morrissy encountered a mild-faced, mild-mannered little man with nose glasses and an "Oh, dear!" look of bewilderment and concern. The man had just scampered out of a Ford roadster. His pale face gleamed with perspiration.

"Is this true, that Ells Edgar has been murdered?"

Morrissy nodded his head gravely.

"Couple of hours ago. In fact, just about seven o'clock."

"Horrible! Horrible! *Seven o'clock?* Why, I was in here myself talking to him not much before that time. Around half past six."

"That so? You knew him?"

"Oh, intimately. We used to play golf together, and he used to save stamps for me. I'm a stamp collector, you see." He smiled apologetically. "Ells frequently got letters from different parts of the world, in connection with his business, and he used to save the envelopes for me if he thought there was anything I might be interested in. In fact, that's what I stopped to see him about this evening on my way back from the Club. Only he insisted upon talking golf all the time."

"Oh, he talked golf?"

"Yes. His bag was right there in the hall, and I suppose that suggested it. He'd just come in from the course and was going up to dress for dinner. He was cursing his wife for letting the servants have a day off. There was nobody to carry his bag upstairs, and he took that quite seriously." The little man smiled that apologetic smile. "You know, here in Haiti we get so accustomed to

having servants fetch and carry that we never dream of doing anything like that ourselves."

"What did Mr. Edgar say about the clubs?"

"Why, he was telling me about some new ones, and he insisted that I swing one of them to see for myself. I forget which one it was."

"Was there anybody else around at that time?"

"I didn't see anybody. I heard two or three people talking in the living room, but I couldn't distinguish any particular voice."

"That so? Well, you'd better go in and tell the Garde about that. They might be interested."

"But can't you tell me about poor Ells Edgar first? How did it happen?"

"I'd better let them tell you that. I'm not really official here. Just an outsider."

Morrissy nodded, smiled briefly, went on down to Senac's car.

THE Hotel Rex had no hot water, its electric wiring was not concealed, the doors were flimsy, the ceilings peeled, the help was virtually half-witted. Nevertheless, it was one of the best hotels in Port-au-Prince. It did have nice balconies; and John F. X. Morrissy, about midnight, sat on one of these, smoking a cigarette. He had showered and shaved and dined, and he sat there in black pajamas, enjoying the scent of flowers he couldn't see.

Chartey and Bond were both stopping at the Rex. Chartey indeed occupied a room next to Morrissy's; the American could hear him moving around.

A little earlier Senac had telephoned. The Garde had been working hard but getting nowhere. Chartey, Mrs. Edgar and Everett Bond, who never were really under arrest, had been released. The Edgar servants had all been located and questioned, and finally they too had been released; they all had ironbound alibis.

Only smudged fingerprints, useless for purposes of identification, had been found on the murder instrument.

A description of Skitty Cather had been sent all over the Republic. The harbor, the airports, the Dominican border, the road to Cape Haitien, all were being watched. Garde officers were searching the brothels and late drinking establishments. They were questioning fishermen, on the chance that Skitty might have chartered or tried to charter a smack in which he could escape.

"He must be here, Monsieur! In Port-au-Prince we should find him easily. And if he goes back into the hills, he will be conspicuous as a white man, and one of our outposts will hear about him."

"H-m-m," said John F. X. Morrissy. "By the way, did an excited little fellow with glasses come into the house just after I left?"

"Ah, *oui*. He is a friend of the Edgars. He has been seven-eight years here and all the *blancs* know him. His name is Jeffrey Farjeon. He is an American, quite rich."

"What does he do in life besides collecting stamps?"

"Nothing, Monsieur. Stamps are the great passion of his life. He has a famous collection. He has traveled all over the world."

"All right, Lieutenant. Keep after Skitty."

"We will catch him, Monsieur! Never fear!"

"H-m-m," said John F. X. Morrissy.

He went back to the balcony window. He heard Chartey leaving his room; but Morrissy, though he intended to make an unauthorized search of that room, waited for a time, thinking about things.

SKITTY CATHER, he knew, could be a very wraith, a fast-moving, fast-thinking, usually cool-headed fugitive who knew all the tricks of the game. Yet it seemed impossible, as Senac had said,

that he could escape. Getting out of Port-au-Prince is not like getting out of New York or Chicago.

There had been others in the house when Edgar was murdered. Mrs. Edgar, for example. She was lying. But it would not be advisable to press her too hard. She was intelligent, level-headed, determined. She was the widow of a rich man, and had influential friends.

The three of them told the same story. Bond and Chartey had been invited to dinner. Confronted with the reminder that there were no servants in the house and so how could they dine there, they shrugged and said they knew nothing about this. Mrs. Edgar, with no apparent loss of self-possession, had said that she forgot this fact when she invited Bond and Chartey, but remembered it before they arrived, and had decided that the four of them would dine out. Where? She did not know. No, she had made no reservation anywhere. She had thought to leave it up to Bond, who as a newly arrived tourist would presumably be eager to see some of the sights.

Fishy, undeniably. But she was not to be shaken from it.

There were other queer things. Why should a woman like Mrs. Edgar invite a notorious private detective like Everett Bond to dinner?

Also, why weren't the guests dressed? Mrs. Edgar herself had been wearing an evening gown. Ellsworth Edgar, at the time he was killed, had been getting into dress clothes. It was possible, even probable that Everett Bond did not own dinner clothes; but it was inconceivable that Fred Chartey, that scrupulously proper, that shriekingly correct Englishman, would show up for dinner clad in linen and a bright-colored necktie. He would as soon appear in swimming trunks. A possible answer was that Chartey, who had come from Kingston by plane the previous day, had wished to economize on baggage.

There would be little sense in asking Chartey this question direct. Chartey probably would tell him to go to hell. So Morrissy had decided to make a search of Chartey's room. He would learn whether the man had brought evening clothes. He might learn something else. It couldn't do any harm. And he was curious about this tall handsome young Englishman with his damn-you-sir stare.

Chartey passed under the balcony, a dim white figure. He strolled out through the gate. He moved like a man who has no errand, who is simply taking a walk.

John F. X. Morrissy kicked off his slippers, went out through the window. He climbed to the balcony outside of Chartey's room. It was risky.

The room was dark. Morrissy intended to keep it that way. He would search with his hands rather than his eyes. He moved slowly, never making a sound. He arms were outstretched.

His right hand touched the back of a man's head. There was a low short grunt. A chair scraped. Morrissy, stepping backward, could not see the man he had touched, but in the dim light from the window—the room was large—he caught a gleam of metal. His leg touched a taboret. He picked it up, threw it to his left, at the same time jumping to the right.

A gun crashed three times, and the taboret was splintered. Morrissy, on hands and knees, saw the flashes, even saw the pistol kick. He could not see the man who held the gun.

A fourth crash followed, but it was not wall-shaking like the others. It was the slamming of a door.

Morrissy was alone in the room.

Downstairs somebody was shouting. Somebody was hammering on something. Somebody was running along the hall.

JOHN F. X. MORRISSEY went back over that space between the balconies with much more speed than he had

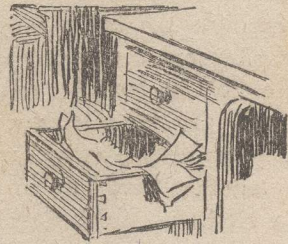
shown before. This time it was a decided risk, but he had to take it.

Half a minute later, in pajamas and slippers, he was opening the door of his own room and shouting, "What's going on here, anyway?"

The excited manager, who had heard that Monsieur le Capitaine Mor-ris-see was a celebrated detective in the United States, asked him as a special favor to examine Monsieur Chartey's room before the arrival of the Garde d'Haiti. And Morrissy obliged.

He couldn't, of course, search Chartey's personal effects, as he would have liked to do; but he did open, as though by mistake, the closet door, and one of the things he saw there was a dinner coat.

Chartey himself, who had heard the shots down the street, was furious with



indignation when he returned on the run.

"See here! You've got no right to be searching my room!"

"Correct," said Morrissy. "I just thought I'd take a little look around before the Garde arrives."

"Well, see here! You get out of here instantly, sir!"

Morrissy, with tantalizing deliberation, started to examine three bullet holes in the opposite wall. They looked big.

Everett Bond, who was in the doorway, in company with most of the other guests of the hotel, chuckled.

"Always the sleuth," Bond cried. "Find any cigar ashes to analyze, Captain?"

Morrissy paid no attention.

Chartey, boiling with rage, stalked

across the room, grasped Morrissy by the shoulder, whirled him around. Morrissy was a big man and strong, but so was Chartey.

"See here! Haven't I told you that you can't—"

Morrissy took the hand off his shoulder. His grip was steel. He sidestepped, and twisted. He got the Englishman's arm in a hammerlock. Chartey went pale, gave a tiny squeal of pain, and then was silent. He knew that if he struggled his arm would be broken. His eyes blazed.

"Cut it out," Morrissy said. His voice was low and slow. "You may be absolutely right about an Englishman's home being his castle and all that stuff, but I'm not going to have somebody shooting off artillery right next to where I live. Cool off, kid. Nobody's going to violate your privacy."

He pushed the man away and turned again to examine the bullet holes. He heard a gasp, started to turn. He was just in time to catch Chartey's fist on his left ear. It stung. Chartey was no weakling. To give the man credit, he had not done what many another would do in the circumstances. He had not picked up a chair. He had charged without warning, it is true, but his only weapons were his fists.

Which was all right to John F. X. Morrissy.

For perhaps three full minutes they had a grand old time there in that large and sparsely furnished room. There were no rugs upon which to slip. There was very little to get in their way.

Everett Bond cheered sardonically. The other guests yelled for them to stop. The manager danced around them, danced away, waving his arms, screaming for the Garde.

The Garde came—had in fact been coming all the time.

Morrissy caught with a clean one, a full one he brought up almost from the floor. It got Chartey flush on the jaw. Chartey staggered back, hit the bed, teetered. His

feet came up. He went right over the bed, right over backward, and thumped to the floor on the far side. He lay still.

Morrissy turned, panting, sweating, his fists clenched. He had not been so sore in years.

"Tut, tut, Monsieur le Capitaine! It is not etiquette, here in Haiti, to knock men over beds. Especially Englishman. They can make so much trouble."

Morrissy forgot his rage and grinned into the friendly, handsome *café au lait* face of Lieutenant Senac.

"Sorry. I guess I lost my head." He waved carelessly. "Clear things up, won't you, and then pop in next door and have a drink while I tell you about it?"

THEY sat there, an hour or so later, when Chartey had been pacified and all was quiet. They sat in the semi-darkness of Morrissy's room. It was pleasant. It had rained a little, and the air was cooler. Morrissy had found some real German beer, while Senac sipped rum and water.

"With your help, Monsieur le Capitaine, we will soon clear up this matter. It is of great importance to the Garde d'Haiti. It is our first truly big murder mystery since the Marines left and the Occupation was ended. You understand we are eager to show the world that we can handle it?"

"Sure, I get that. Only why not cut out that 'Misseer le Capitaine' stuff. What my friends usually call me is Johnny."

"I am honor—Jawunny. I— My first name is Pierre."

"Okay, Pierre. Now listen; there are still a lot of things I want to know about certain people, and you boys are the ones to find out for me. Listen—"

He talked at some length, outlining the next day's work, charting the investigation. This was what Morrissy excelled in. An excellent manhunter, and untiring, he was best at administration. Give him the right assistants, they used to say, and he'd clear up anything.

"So you see?" he finished.

"I see, Monsieur — I mean, Jawunny. And it will all be done."

"Swell."

Morrissy, who had been bending far over, tapping out his points on Senac's knees, stood up. And as he stood up, the top of his empty mug went "chick." A piece of glass flew from it. On the far wall a tiny hole appeared, and there was a fine white drizzle of plaster.

Morrissy pushed the lieutenant so hard that Senac fell backward. Morrissy himself dropped to the floor. There was an instant of silence. Then Senac rose, his face blackening with rage. Even after he had recently seen how Morrissy could fight, he would have tackled the American, almost twice his weight, right then and there.

"*Non, non, non, non!* Other men you may punch like that, Monsieur, but not Pierre Senac!"

He started toward Morrissy, who cried: "Get down, you fool! Somebody's shooting at us!"

"But—but there was no sound!"

"Somebody's using a silencer. Must be out near that garden gate."

The rage Senac had shown before was mild compared with this. A man had fired at his friend Jawunny while he talked with an officer of the Garde. It was doubly an insult. An insult to Pierre Senac personally and to the organization which he represented.

"I'll kill him!"

He drew his revolver, and before Morrissy could stop him he had run out the French window and vaulted the balcony rail to the soft garden earth beneath. Morrissy ran out on the balcony, yelling a warning; but by that time Senac was at the gate.

Morrissy muttered, "A good kid, that kid."

Morrissy never really had believed that there would be a second shot. He simply had been opposed to taking unnecessary

chances. Now he went back into his room, studied the hole in the plaster, dug at it with a penknife, prised out a small chunk of lead.

"Twenty-two. And from the marks of those lands and grooves, it was probably a pistol. Uh-uh! Bad guys they have around here."

When Senac returned, fifteen minutes later, panting heavily, still flushed with anger, he found John F. X. Morrissy making measurements. Morrissy was calm, exact.

"I found nobody, Jawunny!"

"I didn't think you would. Whoever it was, took the one shot and ran like hell. The thing chipped the top of my stein just as I was standing up. That must have been right about where my head had just been. Our friend, whoever he is, isn't a bad marksman"

"I cannot see how he could get away carrying a rifle!"

"He didn't have a rifle. He had a pistol. A man standing at that gate with a rifle might be conspicuous, even at this hour. But he could pause there, on the sidewalk next to the gate, and put a pistol over his left forearm, and take the shot—and then to anybody who happened to be around it would only look as though he had stopped to blow his nose or something."

"But you cannot put a silencer on a pistol!"

"Oh yes, you can. Not on an ordinary revolver or automatic—that's impossible. A silencer would blow a gun like that to pieces. Or at the very least it would burn off the hand of the man who held it. But a single-shot target pistol," Morrissy went on, "is different. There's no chamber to turn, giving the hot gases a chance to escape backward. There's no ejector apparatus, like on an automatic. I would say, from the looks of the slug, that this one was a Harrington and Richards. That ought to make it fairly easy to find. There can't be many pistols like that in a town

this size, and I suppose you boys keep pretty careful track of firearms?"

"Ah, *oui!* But of course we cannot know of them all."

"Naturally. But sportsmen who go in for target pistols usually are fussy about their ammunition. And maybe if you haven't got a record of the pistol itself, you might have one of somebody who is buying cartridges for such a gun. Right?"

"*C'est bon, Monsieur!* I mean—Jawunny! We will trace everything, and it may be that this scoundrel who wishes to kill you will have delivered himself into our hands when he took that shot!"

"Maybe. It's worth trying anyway. You go to work on that, Pierre. I'll get in touch with you first thing in the morning."

"Meanwhile, Jawunny, you will be careful?"

"Sure. I'm always careful. Take it easy on the way home now."

They shook hands.

Afterward Morrissy made sure that his door was locked, with a chair in front of it. He slid his revolver under the pillow. He closed and locked the storm windows. And then he went to sleep.

AT SEVEN o'clock, fortified by hastily gulped breakfast coffee, he started to work. Vacation? Hell, it was practically like being in New York! The same sort of labor—the same unexciting business of checking this, checking that, checking everything else. There were so many details; and a good cop shouldn't take anything for granted. Some people, Morrissy knew, thought that murder investigation was thrilling. They were nuts. There was no more thrill to it than to digging ditches.

There were only two things which made this day's work notably different from the work of investigating a murder in, say, Harlem. One was that when he snapped a question at somebody he was likely to get for answer "Pardon, Monsieur?" to

remind him that he was, after all, in a foreign country. The other was that somebody was trying to kill him.

With Senac he was in constant communication. Senac was working as hard as Morrissy himself. Harder, perhaps. Morrissy had managed to get at least a few hours of sleep, but Senac had had none at all. They met at dinner, in the Berliner Hof. They were dead tired, drenched with sweat. They grinned a little, knowingly; but for some time they didn't say a word to one another. It was twenty-four hours, almost to the minute, from the time John F. X. Morrissy had landed in Haiti; and he had done a week's work. Now he drank beer, gratefully, in great impolite gulps. Senac sipped a cocktail. He was still sipping it, daintily as a woman, when Morrissy ordered his third mug of beer.

Across the Place L'Ouverture a setting sun, not visible from the Berliner Hof, hurled smashes of red light against the astounding whiteness of the President's Palace.

After a while Morrissy said, "Well, it's been quite a day."

"Ah," said Senac, and smiled a little.

"Now tell me what you know," said Morrissy. "All the stuff you couldn't tell me over the telephone."

"Ah, *oui.*" The Lieutenant reached into a pocket. He drew out a ball of absorbent cotton with a small chunk of mashed lead in the middle of it.

"The ballistics man says you were right. This was fired from a .22 caliber Sportsman's Special, a single-shot target pistol put out by the Harrington and Richards people."

"Uh-huh. Very interesting." Morrissy picked up the slug, took another from his pocket, held them close. "Exactly the same."

Senac's lethargy vanished. He leaned forward.

"Jawunny! You have been— That man has been—"

"All right. All right, Kid. He didn't hit me. That's the principal thing. He didn't hit me. Two misses for him. Next time I'll do the shooting."

Senac started to talk in Creole. He was too excited to use English. Morrissy shrugged, put both chunks of lead into the cotton, handed it back.

"Cut it out, Pierre," he said wearily. "You know I can't understand that stuff."

"We will go now and arrest him! We will go without delay!"

"No, we won't."

"*Mais oui!* He will shoot at you again! He will kill you, Jawunny! We will go there *immédiatement!*"

"Now listen, Pierre. Are you running this case or am I?"

"But Jawunny—"

"Keep your shirt on. We will *not* go there right away! After we've had some grub you check out of here. I stay for a while. Then, when I'm ready, I check out. You watch me."

"But—"

"The reason being—in case I haven't made myself clear—that I think I'm being tailed."

"*Comment?*"

"I mean, I think somebody's following me. Clear? I go out, this baby goes after me, you go after him. That way, kid, we'll really find out things."

It was difficult for Pierre Senac. His Jawunny was in danger, and that was all he cared about. It was difficult for him to take orders. But John F. X. Morrissy had a way of getting what he wanted. And after dinner, Senac left.

John F. X. Morrissy sat there for some time, smoking cigarettes, thinking about things. Up in the Champs de Mars there was somebody watching him; and Morrissy, though he never appeared to look in that direction, was thoroughly aware of this fact. He seemed only disgusted, tired. He yawned and lighted another cigarette.

It was dark when he rose, yawning

again, and paid the bill, and sauntered away. *Lalignes* hailed him, but he shook his head. He would walk.

JEFFREY FARJEON himself came to the door. He wore sloppy seer-sucker trousers, a sloppy white shirt, no coat. He wore also that expression of apologetic worryment Morrissy had seen on his face the previous evening when they'd met on the steps of the Edgar mansion.

"No servants? Don't tell me today's a holiday, too?"

Farjeon smiled.

"I always let them off after dinner," he explained, "unless I'm expecting guests. Come in, Captain. You see, I know now who you are. It's a pretty small white colony here, and things get around."

"Yeah," said Morrissy.

He followed the little man into a very large, very dim living room. On a table in the center of the room were several stamp albums, one of them open. There were some loose stamps too.

"I'm still at it, you see."

"Yeah," said Morrissy.

"Sit down, Captain, and tell me if you are getting anywhere in this murder business. Nasty, isn't it?"

"Yeah," said Morrissy.

"May I get you a drink, Captain?"

"Why not," said Morrissy.

When Farjeon returned from the kitchen, Morrissy was standing at the table, gazing curiously at the stamps.

"You know," Morrissy said, "it's funny about stamps."

"It is," Farjeon admitted. "I wonder at it myself, sometimes. After all they're nothing but little colored pieces of paper. And yet men who are otherwise sane, like me, will go mad on that one subject."

"Yeah," said Morrissy.

He paid no attention to the drink which Farjeon placed on the table within his reach. He continued to stare at the stamps.

"When they have inverted centers," he

said after a while, "they're supposed to be worth a lot more, aren't they?"

"Rather!"



"And yet all it means is that some dumb cluck made a slip and put the colors on upside down, isn't that right?"

"Yes. But it means everything in the world to a collector."

"It must have given you a big thrill, for instance, when you went into the post office here a week or so ago and bought a fifty-centime avion, and found it had an inverted center?"

"Say! Why, I'd put the thing on my letter before I—" Farjeon stopped. He stared at Morrissy. "Say, how did you happen to know about that, if I may ask?"

"It's a pretty small white colony here, and things get around."

Farjeon smiled.

"Well, then you know about the bitterest disappointment I've ever experienced. But of course, not being a collector yourself, you really won't be able to understand it."

"I could try."

"That was one of the greatest moments of my life—when I looked at that stamp I'd just put on a letter, and saw that it was an inverted center avion. I swear I almost died from excitement! The first thing I did was ask the post office clerk for the rest of the sheet. That particular stamp comes in sheets of one hundred, and I had bought only the second one—the one I'd put on my letter. So naturally I bought the other ninety-eight immediately."

"Naturally."

"I even inquired about the first one sold, thinking I might try to get that too, so that I'd have every stamp of that kind in the world. The clerk remembered who it was he'd sold it to."

"Yeah," said Morrissy, "it was Mrs. Ellsworth A. Edgar. Now go on to where you had your coat burned in a gasoline fire that afternoon and lost every single one of those ninety-nine stamps."

"Captain, I can't understand how—"

"It's my business to find out things, Mr. Farjeon, just the same as it's your business to collect those little hunks of paper."

"I don't remember telling anybody about that fire. However, if it comes to talking about stamps, I'll do that till the cows come home. Yes, it's true about the fire. I discharged my house boy because of it, but that didn't make me feel any better. I had lost ninety-nine rare stamps, the only ones of their kind—except one."

"So to get that one became the whole aim of your life."

"It certainly did! I was ready to offer any price for it. I was ready to do anything to get it!"

"So you went to Mrs. Edgar and offered to buy it. Why wouldn't she sell? Did she explain?"

"Well, Mrs. Edgar acted very strangely about that stamp. At first she said she couldn't remember what she'd done with it, and then she said she'd lost it. But she was lying."

"Yeah. So you decided that she still had it, and for reasons beyond your comprehension she was hanging on to it. And you decided, after she'd turned you down repeatedly, that the only way to get it was to steal it. Not having any experience in burglary, you made up your mind to hire a professional. The real mystery to me was how you ever happened to contact Skitty Cather."

"Captain, are you drunk?"

"Nope." Morrissy was still standing there looking down at the stamps. He

spoke casually, as though what he said didn't matter much. "Well, we'll skip that part of it. Anyway, you had a conference with Skitty in the back room of the Army Bar, and you asked him to steal the stamp for you. He needed the money you offered. But when he went out of the place he walked right into the Garde. Some tourist, it seems, had recognized him from his pictures in the American papers. You heard the fuss, and you very wisely ducked out by the back door."

MMORRISSY looked up for the first time.

"And don't tell me you didn't, because we have three witnesses who will testify to having seen you in there."

It was a lie, but it worked. Farjeon cried fiercely:

"All right! I *was* in there. I *was* talking to that man. But I didn't know who he was. And all this talk about me hiring him to steal that stamp is absolutely crazy!"

Morrissy went on, slowly, with no expression:

"Skitty knew it meant the chair, once we got him back. So he broke jail. And then where should he go? Why, right to the home of Ellsworth A. Edgar! You had described the place, given him the layout. He knew how much you wanted that stamp. He was going to get it for you, and then he was going to make you pay—besides the money, he was going to make you get him a new outfit of clothes and to harbor him until the chase cooled. He could make you do that if he had the stamp. He could make you do anything. It was a pretty wild hope, but it was the only one Skitty had. So he went to the Edgar house and broke in.

"Of course, Skitty broke in nicely—not the way you did. Skitty knew his job, while you were a bungling amateur. You had figured that Skitty never would be able to work for you, so you'd finally decided to take a shot at that burglary job

yourself. Boy-oh-boy! When you chumps go nutty about stamps, you *do* go nutty, don't you?"

"Captain," Farjeon said earnestly, "please stop talking gibberish and get out of this house."

"Skitty was in the place when you got there, and he'd been fanning the lady's bedroom. Of course he didn't find the thing. She didn't have it. But he overheard some conversation in the living room which told him where the stamp was. Meanwhile, you had busted in clumsily."

"Ellsworth Edgar heard you, came after you. And you lost your head and went bang-o with a number 8 niblick.

"Well, Skitty came on the run, saw what had happened, and got you out the only way he could in view of the noise. He got you out by way of the window you'd come in by. And he tore his pants in the process, which was something he never would have done if he'd been alone.

"Then, of course, Skitty had you. You *had* to take care of him, because if he was arrested he'd tell who killed Edgar."

"Captain," Farjeon said slowly, "you're a very smart man."

"Going back to the house immediately after the murder was a dumb play," Morrissy said. "Don't you suppose we could figure that one? You wanted to find out how much we knew, and you also wanted to cover yourself in case anybody had seen you in that neighborhood. What was even more important, you wanted to protect yourself in case your fingerprints were found on that niblick."

"I repeat, Captain, you're a very smart man. But not quite smart enough. Don't you realize that I've taken a pistol out of this table drawer, and that I've got it pointed at you?"

MMORRISSY glanced contemptuously at him.

"Sure I realize it. I also realize that there aren't any cartridges in it. I took

them out while you were mixing the drink."

"Oh."

"Speaking of guns, one reason I came here tonight was to tell you to stop shooting at me. I suppose Skitty made you do that? Skitty's scared of me, always has been. I suppose he figured he never would be able to escape from this place, even with your help, as long as I was on the job. So he told you to bump me off or else— Is that the way it was?"

"There's no reason to tell you anything, Captain. You know everything already."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. There are still a few things I want to learn. For instance, what have you done with Fred Chartey?"

"Don't you think we've had enough of this?" asked Everett Bond, walking into the room with a huge Colt automatic in his fist.

"Hello, punk," said Morrissy. "So you've switched jobs, huh? Can't you ever play straight with anybody at all? Mrs. Edgar was a fool to send for you in the first place and she was twice as much of a fool to tell you about Farjeon here trying to buy that stamp."

"That's right," said Bond. "I figured I might as well collect at both ends. All she ever wanted was the letter. She didn't give a damn about the stamp on it. I could have that."

"It must be a pretty hot letter?"

"It was. It's burned now. I give my customers satisfaction."

"Did you get more for it than Chartey was trying to hold her up for?"

"That's my business. What I want to know is, why were you so dumb as to come to this house alone?"

"What makes you think I did come alone?"

"Because I've just fanned the grounds and there isn't anybody in sight," said the master crook, Skitty Cather.

He entered from the kitchen. He carried a revolver in each hand. He didn't

point them at Morrissy, simply held them at his sides. He was a mean-faced fellow, wizened, monkey-like. He stood spread-legged.

"Howdy, Captain."

"Hello, you dirty little louse. How are you?"

"In answer to yours of recent date in re Chartey," the crook replied, "would state that he's upstairs right now, all taped and gagged. We'll let him go later, maybe. After we've polished you off, Captain. You know, I've wanted to bump you or see you bumped for years. This is going to be the happiest day in my life."

Farjeon cried, "Now see here! No more murder!"

Skitty said, "No? I suppose you want to let this dick walk out of here, so that you can get yourself pinched for tapping old man Edgar's skull last night? I suppose you like the prospect of spending the rest of your life in a nice cockroachy Haitian jail? Well, it's different with me. They got the death penalty up in New York. Get that silencer out again."

He grinned at Morrissy.

John F. X. Morrissy, in that hot room, felt a trifle cold. He had not expected Bond. Bond, he knew, had been waiting for Chartey the previous night in Chartey's room—waiting with a gun, prepared to hold up the blackmailer and take back the letter. That was when Morrissy himself had walked in on him, spoiling the plan.

What they had done was have Farjeon, a personal friend, telephone to Chartey and ask him over. They had figured, correctly, that Chartey would have the letter on his person, not daring to leave it anywhere in his hotel room which might be searched. And when he came, they had jumped him—Farjeon and Skitty.

BUT Bond's arrival disconcerted Morrissy. He had known that Bond was trailing him, but he had supposed that Senac understood he was to arrest the man

as he started to enter the Farjeon house.

Where the devil *was* Senac? Skitty Cather, who had the eyes of a cat, had said there was nobody outside. So John F. X. Morrissy felt a trifle cold. But he smiled. He was a large, distinguished-looking man, and he had a charming smile. His white bank-president's mustache lifted, and he showed hard white teeth.

"So you're going to do it yourself, Skitty?"

"Darn tootin' I am. Farjeon, get out that little gat and the silencer. We've had too much talking around this dump already. Now we're going to catch a little action."

He moved until the table separated him from John F. X. Morrissy. He placed his two revolvers on the table. He took the Harrington and Richards target pistol from Farjeon's trembling hands, and very carefully he screwed a long silencer into place. He shook the thing, to make sure that the silencer was firm.

Morrissy just stood there. There wasn't anything else he could do. It was horrible to be killed like this, without a chance to fight. But Bond had him covered with the Colt, and there wasn't a possibility that Morrissy could get to his own gun in time. A man clings to every second of life. So Morrissy just stood there.

"So here it comes," said Skitty Cather.

There was a window which showed out to the vine-screened veranda, behind Morrissy. It was a large window, and when it was smashed it made a loud noise. But that noise was swallowed instantly in the banging of a revolver.

Skitty Cather probably never knew what happened. He went right over backward, his breastbone broken, two chunks of lead in his heart and a third somewhere in the muscles of his back.

Everett Bond opened his mouth. He probably yelled something, but nobody heard it. He fired twice, the big Colt kicking viciously. Then he dropped the Colt,

and turned around, and fell on his face. He didn't crumple. He fell full-length, like a tree.

Jeffrey Farjeon went for the two revolvers on the table. Of the four men in the room he was the slowest. John F. X. Morrissy, moving only his right arm, had shot him before he even got a hand on the butt of one of those revolvers.

The silence was very sudden, and somehow wrong. The room smelled abominably of gunpower. It was close, seemed airless. The echoes of the shots were beaten before they started.

Morrissy, lowering his gun, said, "Okey-doke, Pierre."

"Comment?"

"I said let it go. That's enough cannonading. The situation is well in hand. And incidentally, what kept you so long?"

"You are not hurt, Jawunny?"

"My feelings are hurt, that's all. Didn't I tell you to pick up that louse Bond before he had a chance to come in here?"

"Ah, *non!* *Non, non, non, non, non!*"

"You mean I *didn't* tell you that?"

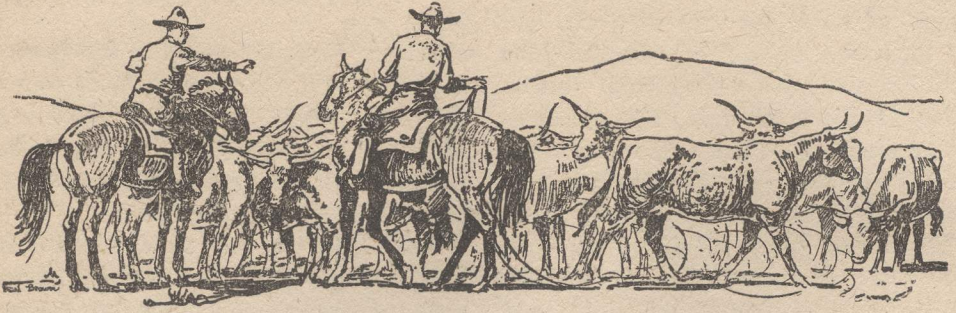
"*Absolument non, Jawunny.* So I didn't not know what to do. And while I was out there thinking, out comes the man Cather, moving oh-so-carefully! and looking around. So I climbed a tree."

"You climbed a—"

"I had heard, Jawunny, that men who seek something seldom look above the level of their eyes. So I climbed a small mango tree. And the Cather man walked right underneath me without looking up. Then he went back into the house. I climbed down, and took a look through a window. I started right away to shoot."

"Hell," muttered Morrissy. "I certainly meant to tell you to pick up Bond. Must be getting old, Pierre. I forgot things." He sighed. "Well, let's snatch a telephone and set Chartey free and start getting this mess cleaned up. I don't know about you, kid, but *I* want a couple of beers before I go to bed."

A whole book condensed for your enjoyment



DILL

THE 101 RANCH

By

ELLSWORTH COLLINGS

In collaboration with

ALMA MILLER ENGLAND

INTRODUCTION

THE buffalo and longhorn are gone from the prairie of Oklahoma. Modern cities rise where the tepee of the Indian once stood. The West of romance and adventure has passed from the American scene. The early day West has passed but it has not perished. Its spirit lived on in the great 101 Ranch, whose vast expanse of 110,000 acres was devoted to perpetuating the atmosphere of the days when courage and self-reliance were in-born in those who rode the plains.

George W. Miller, the founder of the 101 Ranch, came to Oklahoma when great herds of wild buffalo roamed at will on

the great fertile plains. He lived to see these magnificent animals wiped out by the hands of white settlers who came flocking into the territory when the Cherokee lands were thrown open to the white settlers. Mr. Miller had already established his ranch at that time; as a cattleman, he operated on a large scale. He had lived through the days of the old West, and he saw them fast passing under the encroachments of modern civilization. But the old order still persisted on the 101 Ranch.

When Colonel Miller died in 1903, the ranch passed into the hands of his three sons, Joe, Zack, and George, who determined to make it a monument to their father's love for the West of pioneer days. The longhorn cattle, so familiar in the

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early days, were fast passing out of existence, their place being taken by thoroughbred cattle, which type was favored by the meat packers. The Miller brothers saw to it that a herd of the rangy longhorn steers was carefully preserved on the ranch. And the old time cowboy with his picturesque costumes — all of these were as much a part of the new ranch as the old. The Miller brothers kept the ranch as the only spot in the country where the spirit of the old West lived on in its true atmosphere.

And the new 101 Ranch was not merely a show place. Huge herds of pure bred cattle grazed on its fertile plains where once the longhorns roamed, crops were diversified, oil wells spouted wealth, lights twinkled in a hundred cottages, and the 101 Ranch was noted as the greatest diversified farm in the world. The Miller brothers toiled early and late to bring to fruition this change from the old order of the cattleman to the new order of the diversified farmer. They saw the broad and rolling prairie scarred with farming tools, the cow camp of the plains crumble into decay and the modern home supplant it, the fractious long-horned steer exchanged for the scientifically bred and blue-ribbed type of cattle, the fodder shock replaced by the silo, and the blue stem plowed under that the harvest might be reaped to sustain life in the new order of things. And this transition from a cattle range to the greatest diversified farm in the world is the story of the growth and development of the 101 Ranch.

From my boyhood days, I have known the 101 Ranch on the Oklahoma plains, and during all this time I have continually read, studied, observed, and wondered about its vast enterprises. As in thousands of other boys, it kindled in me an everlasting interest in the romance and adventure of the West of the old days. To me, the 101 Ranch is a "thing of beauty and a joy forever."

—ELLSWORTH COLLINGS.

• I

UP THE TRAIL WITH TEXAS LONGHORNS

THE beginning of the cattle raising industry on the continent of North America dates from the sixteenth century when the Spanish conquistadors on their voyages of discovery brought livestock into Mexico. Great ranches were established and the surplus stock gradually migrated to the north into southern Texas, California, and the vast range country in between, which is now divided into Arizona and New Mexico. The herds of cattle spread out over Oklahoma, Kansas, Wyoming, Montana, and then into Canada. This northward migration of the cowmen and their herds is one of the historic pastoral movements of the world, though its duration covered but a brief period of years.

These multitudes of cattle roamed at will over great, unfenced areas, fattening throughout the summer on the range grasses that made even better beef than the corn-fed products. Under the influence of the rarefied and moisture-free atmosphere of late summer and early fall, these native grasses cured up and provided hardy and strength-giving feed on which the cattle lived during the long winters. Each outfit chose its home range with a view to securing well distributed water, winter protection from storms, and natural barriers to check the cattle from roaming too far. More drama seems to have centered around this industry than any other business in the world, and in all time it has had a peculiar appeal to those of adventure loving and pioneering natures.

This, no doubt, explains largely the migration of Colonel George W. Miller, father of the Miller brothers, from Crab Orchard, Kentucky, the Millers' ancestral home, to the prairies of the Southwest. As was the custom in that day, the title "Colonel" was attached without official

decree to the names of prominent men as a mark of respect and, for that reason, Mr. Miller was known widely as Colonel Miller. He was born February 22, 1841, on his father's plantation in Lincoln County, near Crab Orchard, Kentucky. His father died soon after he was born and his grandfather, John Fish, reared him on his large plantation, also situated near Crab Orchard. John Fish was a typical southern plantation owner, possessing many slaves and operating his hundreds of acres industriously and efficiently. Like most Kentuckians, he was a great lover of livestock, particularly of fine horses. It was in this southern environment that young Miller grew to manhood. With his grandfather he was *de facto* manager of the big plantation and was from the very beginning initiated into doing things in a grand manner, a dominating characteristic in his future years. This background of experience molded the character of young Miller and greatly influenced his life in subsequent years. He, like his grandfather, was a great lover of livestock, and during the Civil War he traded in government mules. With the money thus acquired, at the close of the war he purchased a small portion of his grandfather's plantation.

On January 9, 1866, Mr. Miller married Miss Mary Anne (Molly) Carson in Louisville, Kentucky, and soon after their marriage, they assumed complete management of the plantation, since the grandfather desired to retire from active life. Here their first son, Joseph Carson Miller, was born March 12, 1868. Mr. Miller's ambition was to continue operation of the plantation on the same scale as his grandfather before him had so successfully done, but soon he found himself greatly handicapped as a result of the war, due to the fact that the Negro slaves had been freed and severe conditions imposed upon his state immediately following the war, preventing his becoming the sole owner of the big plantation.

Defeated in Kentucky, he began to con-

sider a new location. At the time there was considerable talk of the new western country, particularly California, and the possibilities of new ranch homes and livestock production. Thus lured, Mr. Miller sold his share in his grandfather's plantation and started overland in 1870 with Mrs. Miller and their two-year-old son, Joseph, for California in search of a location where he could realize his ambition—a mammoth livestock ranch. It was late in 1870 that Colonel Miller arrived at St. Louis, Missouri, then the railroad terminus. Here he bought a pair of mules and an "outfit," ferried the Mississippi at St. Louis, and struck out southwestward across the open country for California. After leaving Missouri it was Colonel Miller's intention to follow the Arkansas-Indian Territory border and then take the southern route to the Pacific coast. However, as they progressed westward, he kept scanning the vast prairie lands with a speculative eye. Here at his very feet was opportunity for a great livestock ranch. This was a cattle country, without cattle.

With winter coming on, Colonel Miller pitched camp at the little village of Newtonia, Missouri—then a frontier outfitting point—and was held there by the charm of the prairie. He was a born trader and an opportunist, the kind of man who would go to town on Saturday with a buckboard and a pair of colts and return home with a spring wagon, a mare, and a couple of cows. There were settlers scattered not distant from the little village of Newtonia who had hogs they wished to dispose of, and Colonel Miller soon began to trade various possessions for hogs. That winter he converted the hogs into hams and bacon. When spring came, he set out with twenty thousand pounds of bacon for Texas, for he had learned from the cowboys coming up the trails that cattle were so cheap in Texas that one hundred pounds of bacon could be traded for a full-grown steer. This was soon after the Civil War when cattle in Texas were

almost worthless. Arriving at San Saba County, the heart of the cattle country, he found the plains alive with cattle and the ranchers anxious to trade steers for bacon. With no trouble he exchanged the entire ten wagon loads of bacon for cattle, receiving a steer for every fifty pounds of hog meat. With a small herd of four hundred Texas steers, he struck back over the Eastern Trail, grazing his cattle as he went, through Indian Territory and arrived with his herd at the south line of Kansas, near Baxter Springs. Obtaining permission from the Quapaw Indians to graze his cattle on their reservation, he established in the early part of 1871 his first cattle ranch, a few miles south of Baxter Springs, Kansas, near the present Miami, Oklahoma. This herd was the nucleus of the great 101 Ranch to be, and was so successfully marketed at Baxter Springs that Colonel Miller gave up all thought of California, and plunged into the cattle business on the scale he had dreamed of.

Colonel Miller's first ranch, near Miami, Oklahoma, was known as the "L K" Ranch. Lee Kokernut was a noted Texas rancher with whom Colonel Miller had formed a partnership in the cattle business. The brand of a reversed L. K. was on many of the cattle arriving at Baxter Springs from Mr. Kokernut's ranch in Texas, and, for that reason, Colonel Miller adopted this brand for his new ranch. He maintained his family home at Newtonia, Missouri, about twenty miles north of his ranch. Here he built a comfortable dwelling for his family and on June 21, 1875, Alma, his only daughter was born, and Zachary Taylor, his second son, April 26, 1878. Mrs. Miller had several younger brothers, living at Crab Orchard, Kentucky, some of whom joined her at Newtonia for company and protection while Colonel Miller was in Texas on his trips, which usually occupied three months and longer. In order to provide his new cattle ranch with necessary supplies, Colonel Miller established a general merchandise

store at the family home at Newtonia, which Mrs. Miller, with the assistance of her brothers, conducted successfully during her residence at Newtonia.

On his first trip to Texas, Colonel Miller learned that the ranchers cared little for any form of paper money, considering only gold as having any value. The Texas soldiers had just returned from the War, and, having been paid off in worthless Confederate currency, looked with disfavor upon any form of money other than metal. On succeeding trips, therefore, Colonel Miller took gold instead of bacon, since steers priced at \$6.00 could be purchased for \$3.00 in gold. A while before his death, J. D. Rainwater wrote Colonel Zack T. Miller an account of the first cattle drive of his father, George W. Miller. Corb Sarchet reports this account as follows: "Colonel Zack Miller of the 101 Ranch, Hugo Milde, Ike Clubb and other early day cowmen of the Cherokee Strip country believe that the only personal account of a trip to Texas for southern cattle for the Oklahoma ranges is that left by the late J. D. Rainwater, one of the first cowboys to work within the present state of Oklahoma. It was Rainwater's first trip over an early trail that went southward via Fort Smith, Arkansas, and across southeastern Oklahoma, then Indian Territory.

"Jim Rainwater was Oklahoma's oldest cowboy, when he passed away last November (1933) in a soldiers' home at St. Louis. On September 16, just prior to Rainwater's death, Colonel Zack Miller had a letter from him, calling attention to the fact that not only was that date the anniversary of the opening of the Cherokee Strip to settlement in 1893 but also the anniversary of the start on the same date of the 101 Ranch by Colonel George W. Miller, father of the Miller brothers. At that time, too, Rainwater sent to Colonel Zack Miller this account of the first trip to Texas for southern cattle.

"Rainwater was head cowboy for Col-

onel George W. Miller even back to the time when the Millers were living at Newtonia, Missouri, sixty-three years ago. The trail then, over which cattle were brought from Texas overland to southwestern Missouri, according to Rainwater, was via Newtonia to Pierce City, Missouri, and not long afterward it was from San Saba, Texas, to Baxter Springs. Rainwater and the late George Van Hook of the 101 Ranch accompanied Colonel Miller many times. Van Hook had come with Miller to Newtonia from Crab Orchard, Kentucky, the Miller ancestral home. Rainwater was a native of the vicinity of Fayetteville, Arkansas.

"It was a very pretty winter day on February 16, 1871, when this first trip to southern Texas for cattle started overland from Newtonia, Missouri. In the party were Colonel George W. Miller, his brother-in-law, George W. Carson, Frank Kellogg, Luke Hatcher, Perry Britton, a Negro, and Rainwater. The men with the exception of Britton rode horseback. The Negro drove a chuck wagon. Progress was slow, for at noon they had arrived only at Rocky Comfort, Missouri, where they had dinner and at night they camped at Keysville, near the Missouri-Arkansas border.

"Rainwater describes at some length his experiences in passing over the Pea Ridge battleground, the next day, where northern and southern armies had fought in 1862. There were still many broken trees and broken limbs with other still fresh evidences of the battle. He notes that they went across Cross Hollow, where now is located Rogers, Arkansas, and that night they camped at the town of Springdale, then known as Nubbin Ridge.

"Rainwater's diary shows the next day was Sunday and that morning they traveled through his native town of Fayetteville, stopping for dinner just south of town. During the afternoon they forded the west branch of White River ten or twelve times, camping on its bank at night,

just a mile from the foot of Boston mountain. It required a tiresome climb of half a day to reach the summit of Boston by the following noon, and he records: 'The world sure looks big when you are on top of a mountain.' That night, after fording Lee's Creek sixteen times while going down the mountain, they spent the night just out of Van Buren, Arkansas. It must have been an unusual sound for he put in writing that 'we heard the frogs holler.'

"The first sight of a ferryboat was in leaving Van Buren the following morning, which was February 20, and crossing the Arkansas River into Fort Smith. Not long afterward they forded Poteau River, and camped on a tributary creek for supper and for the night. Rainwater recalls that Colonel Miller passed around a bottle of liquor, which also must have been unusual, for at no other time does he report such an occurrence. He was the butt of the party during the remainder of the trip because he did not like the liquor 'and spit it out.'

"The Red River was crossed at Colbert's Ferry and soon afterward they were in Sherman, Texas; thence to Fort Worth, and then on to Comanche, where Rainwater records that he saw 'the largest tract of red sandy land' in his memory, then or afterwards, so long as he lived.

"An interesting incident to Rainwater occurred between Comanche and Brownwood, Texas, when they met twenty to thirty men, all armed with Winchester rifles and six-shooters, escorting two men in a wagon, being taken overland to Waco for trial on charges of murder. They were the first men arrested in Brownwood since the close of the Civil War. 'We camped that night on Jim-Ned Creek,' writes Rainwater, 'and then went into Brownwood the next day and camped there that night.'

"The trip from Brownwood into San Saba County and to the county seat of San Saba was uneventful, but there they found the man for whom they were look-

ing, 'Red' Harky, the cattle agent for that county. Harky took a bunch of cowboys, went up the river and rounded up near San Saba all the cattle he and his boys could find. Colonel Miller and Carson looked the bunch over, picked out the individual heads they desired. Immediately these were cut out from the main herd and held together nearby by Rainwater and the other men who were in his party. Those cattle, not selected by Miller, were simply turned loose to wander anywhere they might desire to find grass, of which there was plenty.

It was necessary, according to Rainwater's account, to go through a considerable amount of red tape, prior to the cattle actually being bought. The livestock, that Miller had selected, were placed in a corral near San Saba, where they were passed single file through a chute. This was done so that the county recorder and county treasurer might make a note of each head, putting down the age and brand. The bill of sale was made to Miller from this record, which became a permanent record of that county, no doubt to this day.

"Rainwater gives an interesting account of the stampede of the Miller herd on Easter Sunday. It was on the return trip with the cattle northward, and they were in the vicinity of Fort Worth. There was a Mr. Sanders then with the party, evidently as foreman. A storm was brewing and as the cattle began to drift eastward Sanders understood they might stampede away from the storm. Accordingly he told each man personally the work cut out for him, in case of a stampede, and declared, 'We are going to have one hell of a storm.' Rainwater, who had celebrated his fifteenth birthday while on the trip, accompanied Colonel Miller during the storm that followed, attempting to hold the cattle. 'That morning Colonel Miller had given me a \$5 raise per month in wages, placing me on an equal scale with the rest of the men,' Rainwater writes.

"The herd did stampede in the face of the storm and the most of the horses stampeded with them, carrying their riders away. Colonel Miller, Carson, and Rainwater, who was riding a trained pony, held the herd eventually and continued to do so until 11 o'clock that night, when the cattle were finally quieted down. In the morning as the cattle were leaving their beds to graze along the trail, they were counted by Colonel Miller who found not a head missing. For this effectual work during the previous night, Rainwater was presented with a white and black two-year-old steer by Colonel Miller, which meant that whatever the cattle brought finally on the market the money from that steer was his. The next day Colonel Miller gave him also a pair of pants and overcoat which he states 'was the greatest treat of my life up to that time—first time in my life that anyone, who wasn't any kin to me, had given me anything.'

"Rainwater describes the crossing of Trinity River near Fort Worth and a few days later that of Red River near Sherman. It was while in a general store at Sherman, where Colonel Miller was getting sugar, bacon and other supplies, that he bought the pants and overcoat for Rainwater. All the cattle, excepting one two-year-old, crossed the Red without incident. This one wandered up a canyon, followed by Rainwater, who discovered that he was not going to be able to head it off and return it to the herd. Consequently he shot the steer. Some river men skinned and dressed the carcass, tying a quarter of the beef to his saddle. Arriving in camp on the Indian Territory side of the river with the beef, Rainwater was commended for killing the steer rather than permit it to escape.

"An interesting incident, in which Colonel Miller nearly lost his life by drowning, is related. This occurred just after the herd had successfully crossed the North Fork of the Canadian River. A

deep tributary creek was encountered, making it necessary for all the cattle and horses to swim across. This was accomplished by all excepting Colonel Miller. 'When the horse, which Miller was riding,' says Rainwater, 'felt its front feet touch ground, the animal quit swimming, although its hind feet drifted into deeper water. It was necessary for Miller to dismount in the water. The horse caught him between its feet and attempted to drown him. But Miller, caught, finally the horse by the tail and was thus pulled to shore when the horse finally swam out.'

"Rainwater describes the next stop as Okmulgee, Indian Territory, where there were the Indians' 'council house and storehouse and several small homes. There is prairie grass as far as you can see, east, north and south.'

"Within a few more days the herd was crossing the Arkansas River at Childer's Ferry, and within another few days the Neosho, and then Cagin Creek and Rock Creek and into Baxter Springs, Kansas, the end of the railroad and the end of the cattle trail. Rainwater says he was a helper at the tail of the herd and states 'that ever afterward I have thought there should be two men at the tail.'"

Reminiscing in connection with the anniversary of the opening of Cherokee Strip in 1893, Rainwater says in his diary that Colonel Joe C. Miller, oldest son of Colonel George W. Miller, rode a thoroughbred Kentucky horse and made the run along with thousands of homesteaders on that famous September 16. By that day also Colonel George W. Miller had acquired enough Ponca Indian lands by lease to establish his long-to-be-remembered 101 Ranch, "101" being his cattle brand.

His cattle business having grown to such extent that he found it necessary to have his family home and headquarters nearer the ranch, Colonel Miller sold his Newtonia home and store and removed his family in the fall of 1880 to Baxter

Spring, Kansas, at that time headquarters for many cattlemen operating in the Indian Territory and on the Texas trail.

As the railroad moved westward, opening up new cattle ranges, Colonel Miller moved with it. His first ranch, the L K Ranch, soon proved inadequate for the great herds of cattle coming up the eastern trail from Texas. The herds ranging from 1,000 to 1,500 were driven up a day's journey apart in order to insure adequate water and grass and to avoid stampedes. He, therefore, set about to establish himself on a range providing more abundantly the necessities of an ever expanding outfit through leasing lands in the famous old Cherokee Strip. The Strip was a cattleman's paradise. Indian-owned, in the very pathway of the Texas cattle trails, land could be leased for from two to five cents an acre per annum. The grass was rich and there was abundant water; the winters were mild and the summers long. Not a fence stood in all of the Strip, so that vast herds could roam at will until the roundup. Here Colonel Miller leased in 1879 from the government two large pastures, about equal in size, including a total of 60,000 acres of grazing land. One of the pastures was known as the Deer Creek Ranch, since it was located on Deer Creek about twenty miles south of Hunnewell, Kansas. The headquarters included only a camp for the cowboys herding cattle on this pasture. The other pasture was known as the Salt Fork Ranch, since the headquarters were located on the Salt Fork River near the big sand mound not far from the present site of Lamont, Oklahoma. The headquarters included a three-room log house with dirt roof, a horse corral, a branding pen and chute, a log house to store corn, and a horse barn with a hay roof. The Salt Fork Ranch was Colonel Miller's main headquarters, since all branding was done at this ranch. When the first barbed wire fence was built in the

Cherokee Strip in 1880 to enclose an extensive pasturage on the Deer Creek Ranch, it was Colonel Miller who built it. In the spring of 1881, after Mrs. Miller and the children had made their annual visit to Crab Orchard, Kentucky, Colonel Miller moved his family from Baxter Springs to Winfield, Kansas, to be near the new location. Thus established, he set about to realize his cherished dream—a mammoth cattle ranch.

At Winfield, Kansas, Colonel Miller purchased a large, two story brick dwelling for his family. Servants were employed to do the household work and a new carriage and prancing bays were provided each year for the family, in addition to a surrey and gentle mare for Mrs. Miller's personal use. Miller, when home, always would attend church with his family, dressed in formal clothing, including a silk hat and gold-headed walking stick.

George Miller had at last begun to realize the ambitions he had formed as a boy on a Kentucky plantation. Thousands of cattle roamed over the vast ranges of his ranch across the Kansas-Oklahoma line. And for the first time appeared the brand mark which was to become famous, the "101" brand. The cowman always considers several factors in the choice of a new brand. It must be simple, easy to read and to describe, and preferably, made up of straight lines. These factors Miller had in mind when he adopted the 101 as the new brand for his ranch in 1881.

Miller was a great lover of horses and was always loath to dispose of them when they became of little use on the ranch. Because of this sentimentality, he accumulated a large number of old horses, in spite of the insistence of his sons to dispose of them at any price. Finally, during the fall of 1888 he selected more than a hundred head of his old horses considered no good for his cow business and advertised a public sale at

Winfield, Kansas. On the day of the sale many Kansas farmers attended in the hope of buying some horses at a cheap price. Miller failed, through an oversight, to print the terms of the sale on the bills, although it was customary at such sales to allow convenient terms. Naturally, when the auctioneer opened the sale, a farmer inquired about the terms. The presidential campaign was then on between Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison. Colonel Miller sensed the situation quickly and instructed the auctioneer to explain to the farmers that they could give their notes at 10 per cent interest payable when Grover Cleveland should be elected president. Of course, this brought a yell from the farmers, mostly Republicans, who considered it a splendid opportunity to buy the horses for nothing. They promptly yelled bids at prices far beyond the value of the horses. The auctioneer knocked the horses off to the farmers at prices exceeding \$100. The same horses could have been purchased at the time on the open market for about \$75. Grover Cleveland was defeated in the election and the farmers, of course, laughed loudly about the sale. Colonel Miller filed the notes away in a large walnut secretary at his home and dismissed them from his mind, until the election of 1892. The same candidates opposed each other for the presidency and this time Grover Cleveland was elected. Colonel Miller took the old notes out of his secretary and secured the services of a Winfield lawyer to collect at 40 per cent accrued interest. The notes were paid, with few exceptions, and Colonel Miller enjoyed immensely many a laugh about the sale.

The region included in Colonel Miller's ranches in the Cherokee Strip was part of a vast Indian country, inhabited by bands of roving Indians, living in tepee villages. Pioneers among the white men grazed their herds of cattle over this Indian reservation and Easterners hunted

game over its plains and wooded valleys. It was known as the Cherokee "Strip," or Cherokee "Outlet," because it had been ceded to the Cherokee Indians by the United States government in order to provide them an outlet from their larger reservation farther east to their summer hunting grounds in the Rockies.

Not only in those days of the Indian and cattleman, but for many years to come, the hills of the "Strip" and the hills of the Osage provided outlaw hiding places for three decades. The Dalton boys grew up in this region. Bob Dalton, who was killed in the Coffeyville raid, bought his famous "Red Buck," the white-faced horse with curly coat, from Henry Wilson, a cattleman who worked the range just east of the Arkansas River from where Ponca City now stands. Emmet Dalton not only grew up in this region, but he lived here for many years after his brother was killed in the Kansas hold-up. Henry Starr, perhaps the most notorious bank robber the West has seen, likewise ranged over the hills of this same region.

In those earlier days, the dusty trails over which the cattle of the Texas plains were driven to market, passed through this same Strip. The scar of ten million hoofs can still be seen across the country. This was the trail blazed by Chisholm. Great herds of fattened beef were transported over this trail to the nearest railroad point in Kansas, from which they were shipped by train to the slaughter houses of Chicago. That was when the Great Plains of the West made America the largest producer of beef in the world. Stock pens at the time made up a big part of where Ponca City is now located and the round-up and its branding of cattle were the chief industries of that location.

The Cherokee Strip could not remain long in its natural, undeveloped state when the territory to the north of it, in the state of Kansas, was a region of

homes, and when the pioneers of north and east were constantly extending the western fringes of civilization. Men who wanted farm lands could not remain contented when there was before them a vast domain, its hills used only as grazing grounds for cattle, its valleys cow camps for the round-ups, its cities nothing but Indian villages, and its homes tepees that might be moved in a night.

Bands of settlers were organized at Caldwell and other Kansas towns to seize the land from the cattlemen, drive out the Indians and build new homes in the Indian country. Captain David L. Payne repeatedly led expeditions into this region, each time to find the United States soldiers destroying his settlements and escorting him and his followers to the Kansas line. These men were called "boomers." They planted one colony at Rock Falls, in the northwestern part of what is now Kay County, in 1884. Payne died that autumn at Wellington, Kansas, but his followers continued the contest. Their fight for homes caught the sympathy of the country and Congress was forced to provide for the opening of a part of the Indian Territory in 1889. Other smaller tracts were opened each year until 1893, when Congress arranged for the "Big" opening of the Cherokee Strip.

Such is the genesis of the present 101 Ranch. On the one hand, there was the spirit of vision, hospitality, of boldness of the Old South transplanted abundantly through Colonel George W. Miller and his wife to the open ranges of the West. It was this spirit, the heritage of old Kentucky, that enabled them to overcome failures that would have crushed men and women less stalwart; it was the force that guided them in building a cattle empire on the broad and rolling prairies of Oklahoma. On the other hand, there was the West of the old days, of vast open ranges where buffalo roved in herds that blackened the prairie. There was rich grass everywhere. There was

abundant water in all seasons. The winters were mild and the summers long. To the south in Texas thousands upon thousands of cattle roamed over the ranges. Here was opportunity at the feet of men with vision and the spirit of boldness. This was a cattle country without cattle. And the blending of the Kentucky heritage of the Millers with the opportunities presented in the new country to conduct a cattle business on a big scale, is the story of the development of the 101 Ranch from the open cattle range to the greatest diversified farm in the world.

II

THE WHITE HOUSE ON THE PLAINS

BEFORE the Cherokee Strip country was cleared of cattle and opened to settlement in 1893, the 101 cattle were moved in the fall of 1892 a few miles down the Salt Fork River; a new dugout was made in the side of the bluff; a corral was built and the 101 settled down into its new headquarters.

It was an ideal location that Colonel Miller chose in the fall of 1892 for the headquarters of his third ranch—the present 101 Ranch. There were thousands of acres of rolling prairie for range which he could lease from the Poncas as he pleased, and which he could purchase in time. There were wonderfully fertile bottoms for wheat, corn, alfalfa, vegetables, and fruits of all kinds. The Salt Fork River wound its way through it all to provide during all seasons an abundant supply of water for the big herds. All the natural resources were present for the establishment of a permanent cattle empire on the prairie.

In the vernacular of the West a ranch is known as an "outfit" and whether it happens to be owned by an individual or by a company, it is universally called by the name of the mark with which the cattle are branded. There is, for example, the "Bar C" outfit, the "Spur" outfit, the

"Four 6's" outfit, the "XIT" outfit. The brand of a big ranch is an intangible asset of great value. It is the insignia of the cattleman and stands at once for honesty in dealing and for the quality of the cattle he raises. Just as in the science of heraldry the coat of arms stands for noble deeds and accomplishments, so in the code of the cattle country a brand represents years of endeavor to produce a certain quality of cattle. When the cattle of a well-known brand are offered for sale, prospective buyers know at once the kind of stock they can expect to see. They know that for years the cattle bearing this particular brand have always conformed to certain standards. Such brands on the side of a steer have the significance of the hall-mark of a piece of silver.

Colonel Miller's cattle brand was "101" and when he moved his "outfit" down from his Salt Fork Ranch, he continued to use the 101 brand on the cattle and from that brand the present 101 Ranch got its name and at the time of his death, the 101 Ranch had grown to huge proportions. Mr. Miller paid the Ponca and Otoe Indians \$32,500 annual rental for his 50,000 acre ranch; other running expenses amounted to \$75,000 annually. The year before his death, 13,000 acres were sown to wheat, 3,000 in corn, and 3,000 in forage crops. The income was from \$400,000 to \$500,000 annually. Two hundred men were employed on the ranch and \$33,000 worth of tools and machinery were used in the fields and more than 200 ponies were used in herding cattle on the ranges. When it was established in 1893, it was a ranch and not a farm. For several years, the ranch business was concerned exclusively with cattle. During this time, not a blade of wheat or a stalk of corn was grown. Agriculture was an unknown science on the vast ranges of the 101 Ranch. It was a cattle domain and Colonel Miller was a cattleman. But twenty-five years later, at the time of

Mrs. Miller's death, the ranch under the management of the Miller brothers was a veritable agricultural kingdom, as a result of the inevitable march of progress. The age of the buffalo and Indian was followed by the era of the longhorn and the cattleman. Then came the settler and the farmer, which wrought a marvelous change in the ranches on the broad and rolling prairies of Oklahoma. The farmer brought the idea of diversified production to the ranchman and thus the short-horn cattle displaced the longhorns. The Miller brothers, young and alert, followed all these changes in the West of the old days. They established herds of blooded cattle, added a variety of new crops, planted vast orchards, erected modern farm buildings, introduced power machinery, built slaughter and packing houses, put up hundreds of miles of fences, initiated scientific methods in every department of the ranch, and began systematic experiments in an effort to improve what they had. The 101 Ranch's change, in a word, from a cattle domain on the open ranges of Oklahoma to the largest diversified farm in the world, is the result of Miller brothers' efforts to keep pace with the march of civilization. They met, joined, and led this march, thus playing an outstanding part in placing Oklahoma in the front rank of the agricultural and oil producing states of the United States.

III

THE 101 EMPIRE

ITS north boundary the Kansas line, its east the Osage Reservation, and its west the Panhandle of Texas and the "No Man's Land" of western Oklahoma, the Cherokee Strip comprised a vast region of more than six million acres occupying an area fifty-eight miles wide and more than one hundred and eighty miles long. Ideal grazing land, the Strip had been used for a number of years

following the Civil War by cattlemen to graze and fatten their herds without payment to the Cherokee Indians, the owners of the Strip. The grass of the Strip shared the rare quality of that in the Osage Reservation, one of the richest grasslands on the continent, and the Texas trail drivers did not fail to observe the fine quality of the grass as they grazed their herds from southern Texas to northern markets. When delayed by swollen streams or by tired and footsore animals, they permitted their herds to scatter for the time on the grass that cost them nothing. And, after the railroads in their westward expansion built loading pens at such places as Arkansas City, Hunnewell, Kiowa, and Caldwell, cattlemen when delayed in loading, as occurred frequently, simply turned their herds loose on the Strip pastures.

From grazing cattle along the trail drives and at the shipping points, it was but a short step to grazing herds in the Cherokee Strip throughout the grazing season. Grazing permits could be secured from the Cherokees for a small consideration, if not free, thus making unnecessary the long and tiresome drives. Consequently, it was only a short time until cattle ranches began to be established in the Strip and before long, it resembled the settled ranges of Texas.

Great herds grazing on the ranges soon attracted the attention of officials of the Cherokee Nation and they accordingly decided to obtain more revenue from the ranches by sending officers to collect a grazing tax of one dollar a head annually on all cattle. When the ranchers protested vigorously, a compromise was agreed to, whereby a grazing tax was imposed of forty cents a head for grown cattle and twenty-five cents a head for all animals less than two years of age, the tax to be paid annually. The Cherokee Strip Livestock Association grew out of this experience, for it was organized at Caldwell, Kansas, March, 1883, by ranch-

ers who felt that some form of organization was necessary. Practically all the stockholders in the Association were ranch owners in the Cherokee Strip. The officers immediately set about to secure from the Cherokee Nation a more satisfactory plan of leasing grazing land and succeeded in a short time in leasing the entire unoccupied part of the Cherokee Strip for \$100,000 annually for a period of five years. Surveyors were appointed by the Association to determine the boundaries of each ranchowner's range and as a result the Strip was subdivided into slightly more than a hundred ranches. Each ranchman was given a lease on his range by the Association for the entire period of five years at a price of one and a fourth cents an acre every six months. The ranches were fenced by the owners, leaving wide trails for the cattle coming up from Texas.

One of the early ranchmen in the Strip, as we have seen, had been Colonel Miller, whose two tracts—on Deer Creek and on the Salt Fork River—were about equal in size, and included a total of sixty thousand acres. It was on the Deer Creek Ranch that Colonel Miller in 1880 built the first barbed-wire fence in the Cherokee Strip and by 1884 he had seventy-two miles of fence around his pasture.

Although the ranchmen were able to adjust their own difficulties easily through the Cherokee Strip Association, they experienced difficulties outside of their organization that could not be adjusted so easily. Considerable opposition from the farmers along the Kansas line developed because the cattlemen were permitted to occupy the Cherokee Strip while they were excluded. At the same time there was a general feeling that the Indians had not received full value for the grazing lands and that the Cherokee Strip Livestock Association had resorted to unfair practices in securing the lease. These difficulties, along with the persis-

tent agitation for opening the lands to white settlement, resulted in Congress appointing a commission to purchase the entire Strip from the Cherokees at \$1.25 an acre. Matters were complicated by the ranchmen offering to purchase the lands at a price of \$3.00 an acre. The Indians naturally refused the government's offer, and, in order to compel them to accept, the Secretary of the Interior advised the President to remove all cattle from the lands and to stop all revenue from the leases. He contended that the lease made by the Cherokee Nation to the Cherokee Strip Livestock Association was void; that the Indians had no authority to lease the lands, and that the President had the power and right to declare the leases in force void. The President accordingly issued a proclamation in 1890 forbidding grazing on the lands of the Cherokee Strip and ordered all cattle to be removed immediately. The removal order was modified but the brief extension of time did not affect the break-up of the big ranches established in the Cherokee Strip.

The Indians, seeing their last hope of revenue from the leases vanishing, yielded to the inevitable, and late in 1891 signed an agreement with the government to sell the entire Cherokee Strip lands for a fraction over \$1.40 an acre. The lands were surveyed into homesteads of 160 acres, providing homes for more than forty thousand families. This plan to establish small homes marked the end of the big cattle ranches in the Cherokee Strip, since the very nature of cattle ranching demanded large tracts of grazing lands. Nothing remained for the ranchmen to do but to market such cattle as they could and remove the remainder to other ranges.

Cattlemen, as a class, had little use for the settler in those days. The settler disturbed the freedom of the range and insisted upon planting wheat where nature had sown only grass. But instead of rail-

ing at the settler, Colonel Miller saw ahead to the time when the settler would farm the prairie, establish counties, towns, and markets. He began early to lease lands along the Salt Fork River from the Ponca Indians, in preparation for the day when the Cherokee Strip would be thrown open to white settlers. That day came in 1893. Colonel Miller abandoned his Deer Creek and Salt Fork Ranches in the Cherokee Strip and the 101 cattle were moved in the fall of 1892 a few miles down the Salt Fork River to the new range in the Ponca country. On the banks of the Salt Fork, the 101 Ranch became a fact. The leases obtained from the Poncas represent the first lands of the present 101 Ranch. They included vast stretches of rolling prairies, wonderfully rich bottoms, the Salt Fork running through it all, furnishing an ample supply of water. Later the lands of the 101 Ranch, they made up a veritable agricultural and livestock kingdom. They embraced an approximate total of 110,000 acres that sprawled like patchwork over the Oklahoma plains in Kay, Noble, Osage, and Pawnee counties. Here is what this vast expanse included: the farming lands comprised fifteen thousand acres planted to grain and cotton crops each season, in addition to garden acreage of cabbage, onions, tomatoes, watermelons, and potatoes. The crop acreage usually included four thousand acres of wheat, twenty-five hundred acres in oats, five thousand acres in corn, and twenty-five hundred acres in cotton. The rest of the fifteen thousand acres of farming land was devoted to alfalfa, cane, kafir, sweet clover, and other short crops for the silos principally. The grazing and pasture lands included the remainder whereon cattle, horses, mules, and hogs roved in herds of thousands. This was fine grazing and pasture land, carpeted with a good quality of native grasses and it provided an excellent range. With the Salt Fork River providing an abundant sup-

ply of water at all times of the year, it was truly a cattleman's paradise.

The 101 Ranch lands contained approximately 172 sections. If this amount of land were placed in a strip one mile wide, it would be 127 miles long, or nearly fifteen miles square. Necessarily, several sets of improvements were maintained, so that the employees could be near the work. The Bar L headquarters was such a place. The improvements consisted of a large ranchhouse for the foreman, barns and corrals, silos, blacksmith shop, and several bunkhouses for the cowboys. At this place the cowboys lived throughout the year caring for the livestock and repairing fences of the ranges.

On this vast domain there were located three towns: Marland, Red Rock, and White Eagle, and three hundred miles of fences, costing \$50,000 enclosed its tremendous confines. For twenty-two miles U. S. Highway 77 crossed these lands and is paralleled most of the way with the Santa Fe Railroad, which has a station at Marland, located three and one-half miles south of the "White House." Large warehouses and shipping pens, accommodating more than two thousand cattle at one time, were located at Marland, the shipping center, and the telephone in the central business office at the headquarters connected with every foreman on the ranch, over thirty-five miles of private wire, and long distance service with cities throughout Oklahoma and the nation. Mail was delivered from Marland to and fro by mounted carriers detailed at all times for this purpose. The 101 Ranch, replete in every way, was truly an empire within itself—the dream of its founder.

IV

BLACK GOLD SPOUTS ON THE 101

IN EARLIER geological periods, when the ocean covered all or most of the land, the creatures of the sea lived their

span of life in the plant life of the sea, and at their death their remains sank to the bottom, which were deposited through ages on the floor of the sea. In time, because of the great pressure of the water, these remains became a part of the enormous deposits of oleaginous shale, with layers of porous sand above and below. Later upheavals brought these beds of shale and sand above the ocean level and folded and bent them, forming hills and valleys, most of which have since been eroded. The larger upheavals formed mountains.

To the untrained individual, the surface gives no indication of the former hills and valleys caused by these upheavals, but a study of the layers of the rock outcropping on the hillsides tells the story of their origin to trained geologists, who call the former upheavals of the earth's surface anticlines, and the valleys between the upheavals, synclines.

When the upheavals were in progress, the pressure on those oil bearing shales became greater, until the oil was pressed from the shales into the porous sands. Since these sands contained salt water from the sea in the synclines, or depressions, the oil naturally sought the highest places in the sand above the water, and the gass, which was generated from the oil, found the top of the anticline, or highest place in the natural reservoir.

Mr. E. W. Marland, who came to Oklahoma from Pennsylvania, discovered in 1908 one of these anticlines on the 101 Ranch lands. By practical application of geological knowledge he had previously discovered an oil field in the east; and he believed he could find other fields in the new country. On his way west he stopped in Chicago to visit relatives, and while there he chanced to meet Colonel F. R. Kenney, who had been stationed in Oklahoma in the recruiting service. Colonel Kenney was a friend of George L. Miller and arrangements were soon made for Mr. Marland to visit the 101 Ranch. To-

gether, they came from Chicago to the 101 Ranch and, while visiting there, Mr. Marland tramped the ranch property and the surrounding vicinity. He studied the outcropping of the rocks and walked for miles over the broad and rolling prairie of the 101 Ranch, carefully inspecting the formations. And here is how the anticline was discovered, in the words of Mr. Marland:

"George L. Miller was showing me around the ranch one day and we rode up a hill to see the cemetery of the Ponca Indians. The Indians placed their dead on wicker platforms above the ground.

"I noticed by the outcropping of the rock on the hill that the hill was not only a topographical high but also a geological high. A little further investigation showed it to be a perfect geological dome.

At that time the 101 Ranch included about one hundred thousand acres. Approximately ten thousand acres were owned outright by the Miller brothers, and the remainder of the lands were held under lease from the Ponca Indians. Convinced that the Indian cemetery was a distinct oil formation, Mr. Marland told George L. Miller he would agree to drill a test well if he would give him a lease on the 101 Ranch lands and help him obtain the necessary leases from the Ponca Indians.

Much time was consumed with the tribesmen in the section when the land-owners were known as Running-After-Arrow, Willie-Cries-for-War, Peter-Knows-the-Country, Thomas-on-Two-Lean-Bears'-Ear, and Little-Man-Stands-up. "We had a lot of trouble with the Indians," related Mr. Marland, "before we got a lease on their cemetery and on the surrounding land. But after a lot of palaver, smoking and squatting we got the lands leased up and were ready to drill." In February, 1909, the first location was staked.

The leases obtained included 10,000

acres in the 101 Ranch and 4,800 acres from the Ponca Indians. The Poncas sold a lease on their cemetery tract to George L. Miller, provided he would not drill within the area where they were burying their dead. Miller gave a half interest in the lease to Marland on the condition that he would do the drilling. It is an interesting fact that this block of leases embraced the entire Ponca field. No other company ever drilled a producer in that field except under sublease from Mr. Marland.

The first well was drilled near the headquarters of the 101 Ranch under the most adverse conditions. There were no heavy draft teams in the country, nothing but light horses and cow ponies. Lumbering teams of oxen with their heavy wooden yokes had to be used to haul rig timbers, tools, boilers, and casings from the railroad at Bliss (the present town of Marland) to the well location.

The nearest supply house was at Tulsa, 125 miles distant. The well was drilled with old Manila cable and old-fashioned drills to a depth of 2,700 feet; and was abandoned after locating five different oil and gas sands, all of which were non-producers.

After this failure, a location was made for a second well about five miles from the first, and higher up on the anticline. This location was on land belonging to the 101 Ranch, known as the Iron Thunder tract. The conditions under which this well was drilled were almost as bad as those for the first. At a depth of five hundred feet an extraordinarily large flow of gas was struck in the spring of 1910. The well had a flow of between 11,000,000 and 12,000,000 cubic feet of gas every twenty-four hours. A gas line four miles in length was laid by the Miller brothers between the well and headquarters of the 101 Ranch, piping the gas through wheat and alfalfa fields, leaving pipe connections every one-fourth mile so

that the gas could be used as fuel in handling the crops grown on the land.

An old Ponca Indian, whose name was Running-After-Arrow, witnessed the bringing in of the first gas well on the 101 Ranch. He had never seen one before. George L. Miller, who was present, explained to him in the Indian language what a gas well was, but the Indian could not understand the roaring gas coming from the interior of the earth. He looked upon it as an evil omen, as a sign of coming destruction. "Uh-h, no good, no good," he grunted. "Beautiful country all die now. Cattle die. Ponies die. No good, no good. Beautiful country soon all gone."

No one realized it then, but the Indian's prophecy soon came true. The plains became spotted with oil derricks, and herds of cattle gradually gave way to huge tank farms. The very site on which the Continental refinery now stands was then occupied by cattle pens.

V

THE OLD WEST ON THE 101

IN THE fall of 1882 the citizens of Winfield, Kansas, were planning their first agricultural fair, and they needed some unusual entertainment to attract the necessary crowds. They presented their difficulty to Colonel George W. Miller, who had just finished a cattle drive up the Chisholm Trail, and who still had with him a group of cowboys. With customary ingenuity, the Colonel proposed an exhibition of roping and riding events, which was enthusiastically received by the people of Winfield.

Twenty-two years elapsed before the next round-up show was held. It was also directed by the Millers at the 101 Ranch, and marked the modern beginning of those thrilling displays of western skill and daring—the rodeos. Since then this form of entertainment has been adopted in many places throughout Amer-

ica, and since 1924 an International Rodeo is held in London, England, many of the prizes being won by men who participated annually in the 101 Ranch rodeo arena. The Miller brothers frowned upon the use of the word "rodeo," and remain true to "round-up" as the best and most suggestive name for these wild west sports.

In the early part of 1904 Colonel Joe Miller went to St. Louis with Frank Greer of Guthrie and a few other Oklahoma newspapermen to induce the National Editorial Association to hold its 1905 convention in Guthrie. He promised the editors a big wild west show if they would come. Accordingly, in order to prepare for the big event in 1905, the Miller brothers held a round-up in the fall of 1904, just to see whether it could be done. They were gratified with the result.

Then came the National Editorial Association to Guthrie, Oklahoma, June 7, 8, and 9, 1905, and the big round-up June 11, at the 101 Ranch. Geronimo, the old Apache warrior, a government prisoner, came up under guard from Fort Sill and the Poncas on the ranch appeared in full regalia. A huge pasture was fenced off for the sports, and the people came from almost everywhere. Trains began to arrive from all directions and discharging their loads at the exhibition grounds, returned and were sidetracked in the Ponca City yards. Altogether there were thirty regular and special trains, many of them double headers, and all loaded even to the roofs of the cars. One hundred section men looked after the tracks and cars, and the station masters from Newton and Oklahoma City aided the local forces—handling the trains and crowds.

The special trains carrying the National Editorial Association arrived about noon, and so far as could be ascertained nearly every member was present, not even excepting those from Maine and Vermont!

Shortly after two o'clock the procession, nearly a mile in length and escorted by the Miller brothers, came in at the east entrance. In the lead was the cavalry band, behind which came the famous old Indian war chief, Geronimo, hero of a hundred battles with the whites. He bowed and smiled and enjoyed immensely the attention he attracted from the mighty throng of people as he passed around the arena. Following this came other bands and a long procession of cowboys and Indians, the latter wearing their sacred finery. The pioneer wagon train, drawn by oxen, brought up the rear.

After the parade the arena was cleared and the program carried out as had been advertised. The large herd of buffalo, which had been secured at great expense, was turned into the enclosure and representation given of the genuine buffalo hunt, a thing of the past for nearly forty years, and which will probably never again be seen in any country. Buffaloes, which were so numerous on the plains years ago, were now almost extinct, the only large herd in existence being the one in the 101 Ranch. Over two hundred Indians took part in the chase.

Then followed bronco busting, Indian ball, the roping contest and Indian war dance and pow-wow. The performances of Miss Lucile Mulhall and her trained horse attracted the most attention. Miss Mulhall had the reputation of being the best and most daring horsewoman in the world, and her achievements aroused a mighty applause from the vast throng. After the program began, one event followed the other in rapid succession and there was not a moment when interest lagged or the crowd became restless. As a closing feature of the day a wagon train was attacked by the Indians on a hill south of the amphitheater, and the spectators were given a chance to see what an Indian raid meant to the pioneers.

Those competent to judge say it was the largest crowd ever assembled up to that time in Oklahoma. When the parade began at 1:30 p. m., on Sunday, there were 65,000 people watching and it was an intelligent and good natured crowd, no fault being found with such small and unavoidable inconveniences as always occur where there are large gatherings.

While the round-up was being planned, absurd stories about it became current. One was that Geronimo had offered a prize of \$1,000 to anyone who would permit himself to be scalped on the occasion. Another was that the Millers were to sacrifice thirty-five buffalo in one grand battle. The Indians, according to the tale, were to be turned loose among the herd with bows and arrows to show how their ancestors hunted the buffalo. The story reached New York in credible form and, forthwith, Mr. Dan Beard, the well-known editor and lover of wild life, telegraphed to Colonel Joe Miller inquiring if the herd were to be killed by the Indians. Receiving no reply, Beard telegraphed the President requesting him to stop the slaughter, who, in turn telegraphed the Governor of Oklahoma to send troops up to the 101 Ranch to prevent it. The troops came to the ranch at public expense. And here is Colonel Miller's explanation:

"I had requested the Adjutant-General of Oklahoma to permit two companies of soldiers to come up at my expense, which would have been almost \$1,000. The soldiers would have been glad to come, but the Adjutant-General refused. I was wondering how I should handle that crowd of 65,000 people without soldiers, when Mr. Beard's telegram came. I saw a way. I said nothing. The troops came at the expense of the territory."

In later years despite the hospitality and cordial generosity of the Miller brothers it was found almost impossible to accommodate the throngs of visitors, tourists, and sightseers who flocked to the 101 Ranch. So eager were they to witness the

operations of the vast domain and so absorbed did they become in the sights and scenes that the White House and its adjoining structures were fairly over-run with strangers. Newcomers, finding every living space occupied, sometimes brought along tents and "roughed it."

This overcrowded condition became acute during the summer, but the Millers solved the problem of caring for these annually invading throngs by establishing a camp, operated solely in their behalf and for their comfort and welfare. On the north side of the Salt Fork, a tumbling branch of the Arkansas River, a dozen commodious cottages were erected. Electric light wires were stretched into every room from the central station of the ranch system. Adjoining, an assembly eating hall, in the charge of culinary specialists, was constructed. A clubhouse of ample proportions was placed a few hundred feet away for indoor activities. The Millers called this unusual adjunct, "Riverside Camp."

Riverside Camp was a success from the start and had devotees and converts to its charm from many sections of the country. Every diversified enterprise of the ranch was opened to their observation and, if they desired, their participation. They participated in the round-ups and rode for miles over interminable prairies with the cowboys; hunted; watched and sometimes tried the hazardous operation of subduing bucking horses; shot with rifle, shotgun, and pistol at moving and stationary targets; lolled in hammocks under the great spreading shade trees; played polo on the smoothly rolled prairie; gathered in the evening around campfires to tell the romantic doings of the day or sought early rest in the seclusion of their rooms. Everywhere was abounding, buoyant life and vitality, engendered by the health-restoring spirit of the plains.

It was a spirit that lives on even though now the empire of the 101 ranch is no more, and the prairie is reclaiming its own.



The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

The Earl of Aberdeen

"FOR years the mysterious disappearance of this young nobleman," writes H. Bedford-Jones, anent his story in this issue, "even after his supposed death became known, remained unsolved. Not until a Scotch newspaper dug into the legal records, did the story break. And then—well, his death was established to the satisfaction of the courts, at least. And if my story is correct, to the satisfaction of Osborne himself. He was only one in that long list of European titled gentry who have preferred obscurity and freedom in America to the trappings of rank elsewhere."

A Newcomer

WE ARE glad to have Fridtjof Michelsen in this issue of **SHORT STORIES**, and to print his very interesting letter:

"Strangers, upon seeing my name in print, have the painful habit of looking at me as if they wanted to sneeze. Some of them do, and with apologetic air, ask me if that's the way to pronounce Fridtjof. Only the Bjornsons and their ilk, from the *fjelds* and *fjords* of Scandinavia, have the nimbleness of tongue to sound the "d" and the "t" of Fridtjof together, or the native desire to pronounce the "Mich" of Michelson as "Mick." So much for the name that John and Synneva Michelson gave to their seventh-

born, author of 'Freeze-out' in this issue.

"The natal event occurred to young Fridtjof in the hell-roaring mining town of Deadwood, S. D., in the year 1896. Wild Bill Hickok, Deadwood Dick, California Joe, and other such picturesque characters had passed on by that time, but Calamity Jane was still abroad.

"In 1904, after the death of my father, my mother loaded her chattels and her offspring into a prairie schooner and set out for Grand River, one hundred and fifty miles northeast of Deadwood. My youngest sister was then a year old, my oldest brother, eighteen years young.

"On North Grand River, not many miles from where Sitting Bull was killed, with two hundred head of young Texas dogies, we started a cattle ranch. Many of the larger outfits ranged their herds there then—the Mill Iron, the DZ, the Turkey Track, the Hat.

"During the twelve years we were there, though I was only ten to begin with, I virtually lived in the saddle. Naturally I learned much of the ways of cowboys from outfits both large and small.

"I was there to see the Dakota prairie opened for settlement, to see the railroad come through, to see land-hungry homesteaders from all sections of the continent flock in for their cut of this free hand-out. I was there to see towns, like mushrooms, spring up along the railroad over night. I was there

In the
Next
Issue

Short Stories

For
Oct.
10th

Part I

ISLES OF DOOM

A startling story of Danites and wreckers in the
early days of Lake Michigan—

by

F. V. W. Mason



THE THANKS OF A BEE

A novelette of the Major

by

L. Patrick Greene

A **DRAGO** story of Northern fur-traders;
"The Mysterious Disappearance of the Two
Captains"—**BEDFORD-JONES**; a crook
novelette by **ROBERT H. ROHDE**;
Poker Savvy by **G. W. BARRINGTON**
Etc., Etc.

when most of the homesteaders, beaten by frost and hail and drought, salvaged what little they could and bought tickets back home. I was there until 1915 when the home ranch, due to insufficient range, went into bankruptcy.

"From the distillation of those twelve years' experience I drew the idea for 'Freeze-out.' Doubtless a story-teller must be a trickster, a word-smith, but the soul of a story, perhaps, is observation. Color, atmosphere, and what not, seem to have there their head waters.

"After South Dakota, pick me up in Albany, Oregon, going to school, using my plains-hardened muscles on the grid-iron. Pick me up later, on an American transport, carrying soldiers to the trenches of France. After the World War, at the University of Oregon, studying journalism. Still later, in San Francisco, as reporter, re-write man, feature writer and editor of daily, weekly and

monthly newspapers and trade magazines.

"In 1930, find me on an American freighter crossing the North Pacific; in Yokohama, Kobe, Shanghai, Hongkong, Manila or Cebu, first-hand gathering material that was later used in a travel book, 'Ocean Parade,' written in Jack London's beloved Valley of the Moon.

"In 1932, pick me up in New York, feet cocked on the desk of the assistant editor of a well-known detective weekly magazine.

"Two years later I was back in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, writing 'Freeze-out,' and numerous other western, adventure and mystery stories. When work palls, I take up my casting rod and lure bass from the lily pads and from behind snags in nearby lakes and rivers, or with my fly rod whip the mountain streams for Rainbows and Cutthroats."

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB

HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, % Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

A trouper for twenty-five years and plenty of travels to tell about.

Dear Secretary:

I have been a reader of your wonderful publication for quite a while and should like to be a member of your Ends of the Earth Club.

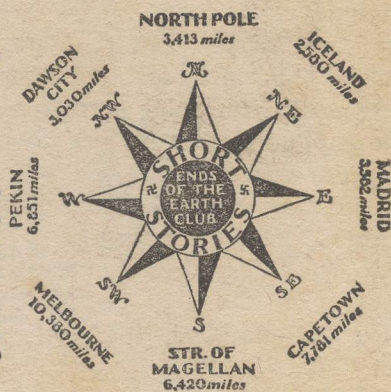
I am Japanese, born and educated in this country. I have traveled all over the

world as a trouper for the last twenty-five years. I am forty-one years old and have traveled ever since I quit school at the age of seventeen. Cleveland, Ohio, is my home town.

Yours truly,

Joseph Ito

641 Corondelet Street,
New Orleans,
Louisiana



The depression did queer things to people, and here's a man who searched for gold and diamonds and found—well, he won't tell unless you write to him.

Dear Secretary:

Please enroll me in the Ends of the Earth Club.

About four years ago I was caught in the depression in New York—no work for a long time—and all I had left was a little car. I did some hard thinking, and finally got an idea that maybe the Brazilian jungles would solve the depression for me.

I went to the Public Library regularly to read adventures and to get as much information out of the books as I possibly could devour. One cold wintry day I couldn't stand the call of the wilds any longer; I got a small offer for my car and bought a passage to Rio de Janeiro. There I started to teach English (studying Portuguese in the meantime) and got acquainted with some real adventurers.

Three of us went to Matto Grosso looking for gold and diamonds. Now comes the interesting part of my adventures—and I shall be glad to tell it to anyone who writes to me.

Wishing you and **SHORT STORIES** the best of luck, I remain

Very sincerely yours,

F. D. Frank

c/o Orlando Nazi,
A. Gazeta,
Sao Paulo,
Brazil,
South America

Another stamp collector with plenty of hobbies and interests as well.

Dear Secretary:

I wonder if you could put me in touch with someone who is interested in philately.

I am twenty-five years of age, of Scottish birth, and by profession a male nurse. My hobbies are nature study, philately, and writing (poetry and songs). I am fond of travel, walking, dancing and a good game of tennis. I am deeply interested in my work and in the theory of reincarnation.

Here's hoping you will be able to locate someone interested in corresponding with me.

Sincerely yours,

W. N. Grant

R.A.M.C.
Military Hospital,
Lower Lake Road,
Colombo,
Ceylon

We're not all lucky enough to see all the beauty spots of the world, but Mr. Regler offers to tell us about them.

Dear Secretary:

Kindly enroll me as a member of the Ends of the Earth Club.

Since I was twenty, I have been travelling around quite a bit to see some of the beauty spots on our globe. I have been to France, Holland, Belgium, Austria, North America, Bermuda, Bahamas, Venezuela, and Panama. Most interesting were the West Indies.

My hobbies are collecting stamps, snapshots, and postcards from all over the world.

The stories in your magazine are thrilling, and I am always anxious to get hold of the next copy.

Here is luck to the Club, and success to the magazine.

Yours sincerely,

Josef Regler

30, Rahm,
Nuernberg,
Germany