

"For Old Crime's Sake" - - DAY KEENE

ANC

Short Stories

April 10th

25c

***Murder in the
North—and the
report of the
Mounted was . . .***

**"Too
Many
Angles"**

**H. S. M.
KEMP**



***A Chinatown
mystery . . .***

**"Yellow
Firecrackers"**

**STEUART
EMERY**



When a COLD threatens to run through a family...

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FOR EVERYBODY!



IT'S all too easy for a cold, once it starts, to spread from one member of the family to another . . . with troublesome results. That's why it's so sensible to enlist the aid of the Listerine Antiseptic gargle *early* and *often*!

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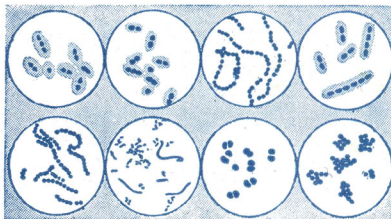
This germ-killing power, we believe, accounts for Listerine Antiseptic's remarkable clinical test record against colds. Tests made over a

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These are some types of the threatening germs that can cause so much of the misery of a cold when they invade the body through throat membranes.



TOP ROW, left to right: Pneumococcus Type III, Pneumococcus Type IV, Streptococcus viridans, Friedlander's bacillus. BOTTOM ROW, left to right: Streptococcus hemolyticus, Bacillus influenzae, Micrococcus cattarrhalis, Staphylococcus aureus.

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MYSTERY

THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Pete Kuhlhoff 4

TOO MANY ANGLES (A Novelette)

H. S. M. Kemp 6

*In Maintaining Law in the North, the Corporal Had to
Take Into Account Such Matters as Game Laws,
Prospector's Lore, Indian Customs, and Air
Patrol Methods*

WHAT COMES NATURALLY John Scott Douglas 28

*Maybe the Dog-blasted Bunch of Phony Seaweed Wasn't
Such a Good Idea in a Parade That Featured Blonde
Starlets and Atom Bomb Effects*

MEN WHO WOULDN'T DIE George C. Appell 33

FOR OLD CRIME'S SAKE (A Novelette)

Day Keene 34

*Backwash from World Wide Events Touches a California
Resort and Everything from Commando Tactics to
Ancestral Estates Appears in the Whirlpool*

MURDER WEARS A MUFFLER Giff Cheshire 58

*It Was Quite a Set-up; a Gas Station Owned by an Elderly
Maiden Lady—and the Manager Murdered. Andy
Bow Just Happened Along, and the Picture
Developed Considerably*

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EDITOR
D. McILWRAITH

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
LAMONT BUCHANAN

April 10th, 1948

CONTENTS

YOUR BONES IN THE BRUSH

(Third Part of Four)

Caddo Cameron 72

*"Somebody or Somethin' Is Always on a Man Hunt and
Some Poor Cuss Is Always on the Wrong
End of It. . . That's Life!"*

THE FIREBALL PITCH

John E. Kelly 106

*Dick Had Quite a Rep in the Sand Lot League Where He
Played with the Railroad Nine. But after the Hold-up
He Quit the Sunset Games and Turned Detective*

CURIODDITIES

Irwin J. Weill 111

YELLOW FIRECRACKERS

(A Novelette)

Steuart Emery 112

*A Taxicab Collision in New York's Chinatown Precipitates
an Ex-service Man into a Welter of Adventure Com-
parable to Chinatown's Most Exciting Episodes
of the Old Days*

BUCKAROO'S BREW

(Verse)

S. Omar Barker 133

MONGSWA OF YUKON

Thomas Francis Norris 134

*The Endless Fight for Existence That Goes on in the Wild
Can Be Further Complicated by the Appearance of
Man—Sportsmen, if You Will*

COVER—Benton Clark

Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use or
the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

CONDUCTED BY PETE KUHLMANN

New Stuff!

SINCE the war gunsmiths and makers of gadgets for shooters have certainly been busy!

Items that were off the market for years and plenty of new contrivances that gladden the heart of the gun bug are back in quantity.

Custom rifles, barrels and barrel blanks, loading tools, set triggers as well as speed-lock triggers, inletted stocks, new gun oils, spotting scopes, scope sights, scope mounts, iron sight (rear and front) gun racks and cabinets, shooting glasses, new gun books, and so on, all more or less plentiful. Gad! If it wasn't for that flat pocketbook I could be happy for years.

Let's take a look at some of these items.

Crosswire Sight

A NEW sight that is being used with enthusiasm by a great number of shooters may now be purchased at most gun stores. It is the Dockendorff A375 Crosswire Hunting Sight, which should be installed in place of the regular front sight on your favorite hunting rifle.

Basically, it consists of two square, gold cross-wires fitted into a short tubular housing equipped with a sliding cover to open or close a small window cut into the top of the tube.

This front sight gives best results when used with an aperture (peep) receiver or tang sight.

When shooting toward a light background the little window is closed. This gives a sight picture similar to that of a scope sight with cross-hair reticule, but without magnification. In other words, the cross-wires appear flat-black.

With a dark background the slide is moved to the rear, opening the little win-

dow. When the slide is in this position the cross-wires appear light giving a clear and sharp outline against the target. The window opening may be instantly adjusted to allow the exact amount of light desired, under all daylight conditions.

Before last hunting season I installed one of these Dockendorff cross-wire sights at the front end of my Model 86 Winchester, lever-action, .33-caliber hunting rifle. This old rifle has been one of my favorites for many years, especially for woods shooting. It handles very easily and shots may be gotten off with great rapidity. Although the .33-caliber cartridge is almost obsolete, having been superceded by the .348, it is nevertheless an accurate one with plenty of punch.

Fortunately, it was easy to "sight in" this new combination and I used just three cartridges. This was a break as I had only twenty-five cartridges and wanted to do a little shooting at the running deer target in case I failed to locate a live one.

As luck would have it, my hunting partner and I ran into a bunch of lousy weather, very cold and a lot of snow, for most of the week and a half we were in the field.

My pal had his little .30-30, but he was so enthusiastic about the Dockendorff sight that I turned the Model 86 over to him and used my scope sighted .30-'06.

To make a long story short, he never did get a shot at a deer. But the day before we hit for home we fired the twenty-two remaining cartridges, mostly at rocks. One shot at a gray squirrel, about 40 yards away, completely decapitated the little animal. Which is pretty good aiming with a heavy hunting rifle. Did someone say something about luck?

A couple of weeks later I located a couple of boxes of .33-caliber ammo. and since then have used the forty rounds for plink-

(Continued on page 142)



THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas*? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have

privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

This Free Book Points Out the Way

The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) invite you to explore the powers of your mind. Their sensible, simple suggestions have caused intelligent men and women to soar to new heights of accomplishment. *They will show you how to use your natural forces and talents to do things you now think are beyond your ability. Use the coupon below and send for a copy of the fascinating sealed free book, "The Mastery of Life," which explains how you may receive this unique wisdom and benefit by its application to your daily affairs.*

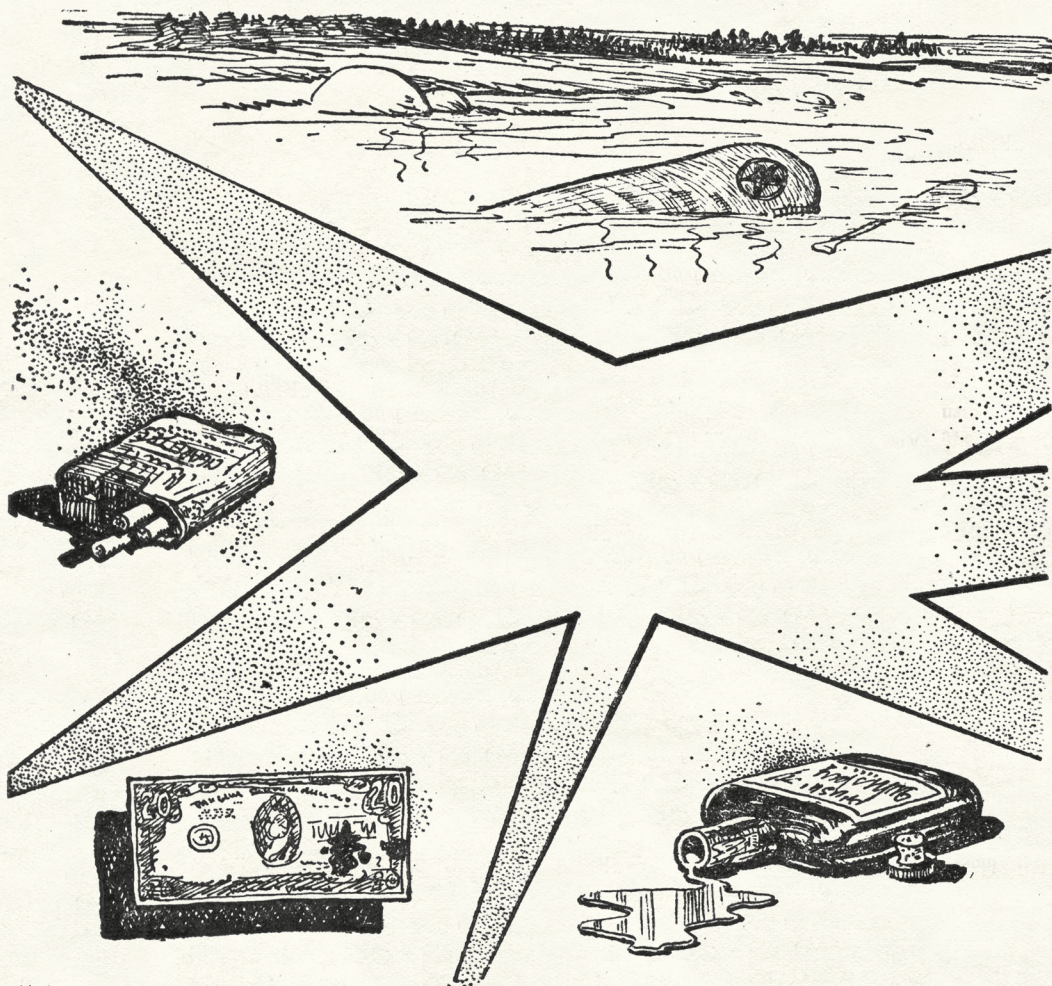
The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)

Scribe G. K. S. The Rosicrucians, AMORC,
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Kindly send me a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." I am interested in learning how I may receive instructions about the full use of my natural powers.

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TOO MANY ANGLES

CHAPTER I

DEATH IN THE NIGHT

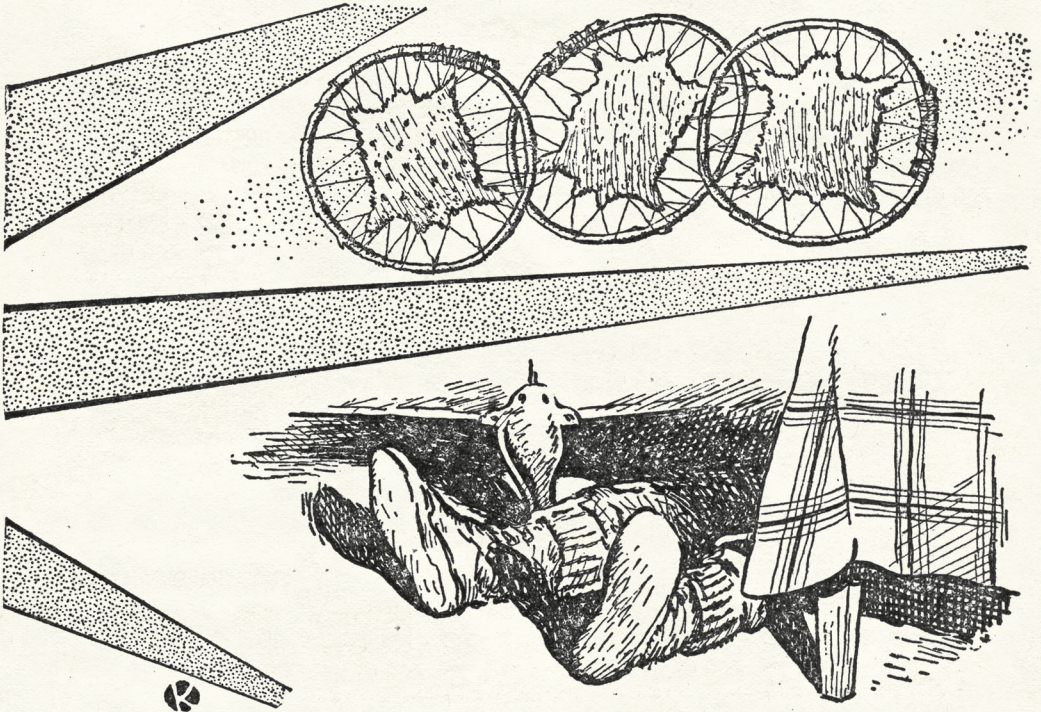
THE thing looked good, looked like it might prove interesting. The Indian's birch-bark was found floating keel-up below the Medicine Rapid and all indications were that he had drowned. But after Corporal Pat Hennessey had traveled up there, poked around, and bucked head winds that threatened to swamp the big police canoe getting back, he was able to report five days of wasted effort. Now, with his head over a washbowl in the Smoothstone Lake detachment, he spluttered,

snorted and said there ought to be a law ag'in it.

Matthews, the downy-faced constable, turned from the steaks he was frying on the cookstove. "A law ag'in it? A law ag'in what?"

Scrubbing his neck, Hennessey said, "Ag'in starting wild rumors. Like this business. A guy's canoe blows away from him while he's picking up his traps and he has to hoof it home twenty miles around the shore. But somebody else finds the canoe, puts up a holler, and the Mounted Police have to sit in." He gave another snort. "And I'm supposed to be right here in the settlement for when something worthwhile transpires. Yeah, and get

The Corporal of the Mounted Thought There Ought to Be a Law Ag'in It. "Ag'in What?" He Was Asked. "Ag'in Startin' Wild Rumors!"



By H. S..M. KEMP

bawled out when I'm not!" He reached for a towel, dried himself, turned up his shirt-collar and rolled down his sleeves. "And what happened this time while I was away on this fool errand?"

Matthews speared the steaks to a platter and carried them to the table. "Nothing much. Chap named Arnold, mining-man, flew in with Walt Palmer. Landed here yesterday morning. Then there was some other guy around here looking for you about an hour ago. Said he'd call back after a while."

The corporal gave a grunt. "Know this Arnold. Field-man for North Star Minerals. Well, what've we got for supper? I'm famished."

Matthews, up from the rookie-ranks a month or so before, gave promise of becoming both an excellent policeman and a better-than-average cook. For as well as cleanliness and neatness to the detachment, there was loaf-bread on the table, hot bis-

cuits, and pie. Hennessey grinned his appreciation.

"All same Waldorf-Astoria. Well, let's at it!"

But ten minutes later, between the steaks and the pie, he turned to the matter of the arrival of the mining-man, Arnold. "I met him once, before the war. Up at Norway House. Wonder what interests him here?"

Matthews said he'd seen him going down to the Hudson's Bay post with Dutch Myers. "Maybe he's got business with Dutch."

"Could be," decided the corporal. "Yeah, could be, all right. Arnold's a mineral-man, and Dutch and another guy named Joe Gilroy own a block of claims up on Beaver-lodge River. Maybe that's what interests George Arnold." He went on to say that Dutch and this Joe Gilroy had owned the claims for some years but hadn't done much about them. "They proved 'em up and got title to 'em, but that's about as far as they went."

"Gold claims?" Matthews hazarded.

"Gold, and copper, and a showing of nickel. We figured they weren't so hot; but if George Arnold's interested, there's a joker somewhere." He gave a quiet chuckle. "And George Arnold isn't the sort to tell all he knows."

Later again, over the last cup of tea and a cigarette, the corporal asked if Joe Gilroy himself had pulled in. Matthews shrugged.

"Search me. Quite a few of the boys got in while you were away, but I didn't know any of 'em."

The corporal nodded. "You wouldn't. Most of 'em hit for the trapline before you got here. Then around this time of the year, they begin to straggle in again." He glanced at a calendar on the wall. "Second of June. Well, they should all be in now—even Joe Gilroy." He went on to say that Joe Gilroy trapped the farthest from the settlement of any of them, that Beaver-lodge Lake was up near the edge of the Barrens. "Good trapper, too, for an oldish guy; but crooked as a dog's hind leg." He gave another chuckle. "But by what I hear, he's no crookeder than George Arnold. So it'll be quite a deal they'll fix up—with each trying to slip it over the other."

WITH the dishes washed and the floor swept, the corporal said he might as well type out a report of his wasted trip while the details were fresh in his mind.

"Then me for the feathers!" he announced. "I've been going hard the last five days."

He finished his report, but there were to be no feathers for him for the next few hours.

For just then the door suddenly opened and Jack Price from the Hudson's Bay post stepped into the room.

Price was lean, sinewy, with a dash of Indian blood in him. He was a bit out of breath. "Better hustle up to Joe Gilroy's," he told the corporal. "Guy's in pretty bad shape."

Hennessey frowned. "In bad shape? Didn't even know he was in town. What's the matter with him?"

"He's dead," Price answered succinctly. "With the top of his head smashed in."

The corporal moved quickly. He grabbed sweater, hat, a flashlight. With Matthews

following him and Price leading the way, he ran along the trail that skirted Smoothstone Lake for a hundred yards or so, then ducked into a low log shack in which a lamp was burning. There, he pulled up short.

A MAN lay on his back, feet outward, between a small cookstove and an oilcloth-covered table. There was no disorder, nothing untoward. That is, except the man on his back and a spreading pool of blood beneath him.

The policeman moved over, dropped to a knee. He felt for the man's pulse, touched his forehead. Then he slipped his fingers down through the open-necked shirt.

He waited a moment, frowned, then spun on the other two men.

"He's still alive! Here—gimme a hand!"

Between them they lifted Joe Gilroy onto a bunk in a corner of the room. Matthews fetched a dipper of water, tried to trickle a few drops between the injured man's lips. Hennessey threw the beam of his flashlight onto the battered skull, then caught his own breath sharply.

"What a mess! Can't live with a wound like that!"

He glanced around him. The place was practically bare, but a grub-box had been emptied onto the table-top. Among the litter was a half-bottle of Painkiller.

"Good as nothing!" the corporal growled; but he took the dipper of water from Matthews, threw half of it away and poured the Painkiller in. As Matthews, had done, he managed to get a few drops of the mixture down Joe Gilroy's throat.

There was a movement. The wounded man moved his head a trifle, and he muttered half-audible, muffled words.

Hennessey stooped over him. "You hear me, Joe? Who did it? Who beat you up like this?"

Again came that effort to speak. The corporal bent low, listening.

"Who?" he demanded. "Your partner? What partner, Joe?" A frown crossed his face. "D'you say 'beaver'? Yeah, well—And a river? Beaver and a river. You mean the Beaver-lodge River?"

There was one more effort to talk, a straining of the muscles and a throaty-rattle; and Joe Gilroy was gone.

GRIM-FACED, thoughtful, Pat Hennessey stood up and faced the other two.

"Well," he observed. "That's that."

"What did he say?" asked the Hudson's Bay man, Price.

"Couldn't make it out," confessed the corporal. "Something about a partner; and I caught the words 'beaver' and 'river'. Beaver-lodge River, I guess. Missed all the rest of it, though." He glanced around him, then asked Price, "When did he get in here, anyway?"

"Yesterday afternoon. He was up to the store around five. Then again this afternoon."

Along with the other things on the table, there was an opened can of meat; a slice or two of bannock, and a cup half-filled with black tea. Price said, "Looks like he'd just finished supper. I sold him that can of meat. And the jam."

Hennessey looked around again. Every indication pointed to Joe Gilroy's recent arrival. The shelves were about bare, the wood-box empty, but there were blankets on the bunk and a half-dozen well-filled sacks piled in a corner of the room.

"Hadn't taken time to get settled yet," the corporal remarked.

"Kept too busy with George Arnold and Dutch Myers," suggested Jack Price. "They've been around most of the day with him, trying to fix up a deal. But by what I heard, Joe played tough."

Hennessey squinted. "How did you come to find him?"

"In here?" The Hudson's Bay man gave a weak smile. "Trying to fix up a deal with him myself. But a different sort of a deal—for his fur. He was playing me against Slim McRoberts. He wanted the two of us to bid on his fur; but I don't do business like that. What I mean, if the Indians were to know I offered him more than I pay them, they'd be on my neck. But tonight I was going to make him a proposition. I'd ship his fur out to our District office in town for them to sell. They'd get him the top price for it, and I'd get credit for the transaction."

The corporal nodded. "Yeah, sure. But what I want to know is how you found him. Did you walk right in—?"

"I came along the trail," explained

Price, "and just as I got near the shack, I thought I saw somebody going out. Now I won't swear to this," he emphasized, "but I'm pretty sure I did. I even thought it might be Slim McRoberts—trying a bit of back-stage dealing himself. But it was dark, and I could have been mistaken. And when I came to the door, I saw Joe just like you saw him when you first walked in."

The corporal shoved the Stetson to the back of his black-thatched head. "You didn't, well, didn't sort of sneak down to the shack? Anyone could have heard you coming?"

Price said, "Sure." He went on, "As a matter of fact, I'd been listening to the radio just before I came out, and it was playing this 'Across the Alley from the Alamo' thing. I kind of liked the tune, and I was whistling it. And if the guy that clubbed old Joe was in the shack at the time, he could have heard me coming and lit out in time."

The corporal turned suddenly to young Matthews. "Leg it for the detachment, kid, and get your sidearms. You can do guard-duty here while I poke around a bit."

Matthews said, "Okay!" disappeared, and the corporal turned to Jack Price.

"Where can I find this Arnold guy? And Dutch Myers? Though Dutch," he added, "will probably be down at his own place."

The Hudson's Bay man said, "Arnold's staying with me. Don't know if he's there right now. He went out soon after supper and said he'd take a walk over to Slim McRoberts'. Said he wanted to see what my opposition looked like. He hadn't met Slim before."

"And he didn't say anything about this deal—this deal he was trying to make with Joe?"

"Not a lot. We were kidding him at supper-time, telling him that Joe Gilroy was a mule when he got his mind made up and that he'd better start building a fire under him."

"But you know what the deal was about?"

"Certainly," agreed the Company man. "But I didn't get it from George Arnold. All Arnold said was that it was a 'deal.' But when he was knocking around with Dutch Myers and the two of 'em were putting the bee on Joe, it could only mean one thing. And that was something to do with those

claims that Dutch and Joe own up on the Beaver-lodge River."

Soon young Matthews returned wearing his sidearms. Hennessey gave him instructions.

"Now you don't move from here, see; and you don't let anyone in. You don't touch anything, either." Then he added, as though by afterthought, "And it might be better if you did your guarding from outside some place in the shadows. Not that I think anything'll happen, but you sitting in here with the door open and the lamp lit—well, you'd make a pretty fair mark."

Matthews gave a determined shrug. There was a big spruce tree a few feet from the door and to one side. Under it, he could see but not be seen himself.

"Sure," agreed the corporal. "Though you're not apt to receive many visitors, anyway. Nobody knows about it yet. Only you and Jack and I."

"And the guy that did the killing," pointed out Constable Matthews. "But I'll be ready for him."

JOE GILROY'S cabin was at the far, the most easterly end of Smoothstone Lake settlement. Coming away from it, Hennessey and the Hudson's Bay man passed a few Indian houses and teepees, the Mounted Police detachment, then three more buildings and a long wharf running out into the lake. This was the Smoothstone base of Comet Airlines. A light showed in one of the buildings, and the star-studded water etched the outlines of a plane snubbed to the wharf. Beyond that were more houses, more teepees, a steepled church and mission-house, then the sprawling bulk of the Hudson's Bay post.

They found George Arnold in a chair in the front room. With him were Jack Price's clerk and the halfbreed store-keeper. The latter two were fighting it out in a crib game, but George Arnold contented himself with a magazine. At a nod from the corporal, Price turned to the storekeeper and the clerk.

"Okay, you boys—scram!" He added, "Private business with Mr. Arnold. You can finish your game in the kitchen."

The two gathered up their cards and board. Arnold turned in his chair.

Sitting down, even, he was a big man. Big and tough-faced and hard. He was

dressed in whipcords and high boots, and the gold wrist-watch he wore seemed out of place on his hairy arm. He was frowning a bit, a puzzled frown. "Business with me?" he repeated. "Who's got business with me?"

As the door closed on the crib-players, the corporal back-straddled a chair and folded his arms on the top of it.

"I got business with you," he said bluntly. "Big business. Concerning Joe Gilroy."

Arnold gave a grunt. "And what's eating Joe Gilroy?"

"Nothing," said the policeman. "He's dead."

Watching the man closely, Hennessey saw his jaw harden and little crowsfeet gather around the corners of his eyes.

"Dead?" Arnold echoed. "Dead since when?"

"Since about fifteen-twenty minutes ago. He was murdered. And as the purveyor of law-and-order around here, it's up to me to sort of figure out who killed him."

Arnold may have known something about Joe Gilroy's finish, or he might have known nothing at all. But either way, save for that slight contraction of his facial muscles, he had wonderful control of himself.

"So I'm nosing around," the corporal went on. "Investigating, if you like. Nobody needs talk unless he wants to; but if he does, it may save a lot of trouble and time."

Arnold gave a short, hard laugh. "But why pick on me? I never beefed the guy. Haven't even known him forty-eight hours."

"Sure, sure. But this is a sort of elimination business," Hennessey pointed out. "We'll eliminate all those who couldn't have done it and put the bite on those who could." Then, bluntly, he asked, "How long ago did you get back from Slim McRoberts?"

Arnold squinted. "About—oh, about half an hour ago. Would have got back before but I got a bit balled up in the dark. Took a wrong trail and came out a few hundred yards down the shore." His squint deepened. "Which would put me on the loose just about the time Joe Gilroy was bumped off."

"Could do," agreed the corporal. "Yeah, could do. And Dutch Myers—? When did you see Dutch last?"

"Up at Slim McRoberts," Arnold answered. "He was there when I went in and he was still there when I came out."

"Yeah? And this deal you were making

with Joe Gilroy, did you get her all completed?"

"Completed, nothing!" Arnold's voice was gratingly hard. "We couldn't do business with him at all."

"Care to tell me just what this deal was?" suggested Hennessey.

"Sure I'll tell you. Dutch and Joe Gilroy owned some mineral property up on Beaverlodge River. I offered 'em seven thousand dollars for outright sale. Dutch said okay, but Joe said no. Joe claimed if it was worth seven thousand to me, he'd hang on for a while and see what turned up."

"And you couldn't buy Dutch's share?"

"Dutch's share wouldn't be no use to us," Arnold averred. "We needed the whole thing or nothing. Anyway, Dutch didn't have what you'd call a 'share'. The property is registered under the partnership; so one man can't sell any or the whole of it without the agreement of the other."

The corporal smiled whimsically. "And now that Joe's dead—?"

"Well, what?" countered Arnold. "You're more of a lawyer than me."

But at the end of fifteen minutes' conversation with George Arnold, Hennessey had to admit he was getting nowhere fast. The mining-man had no alibi; in fact, he was disarmingly frank in pointing out that if he had had any reason for killing Joe Gilroy, he had had every opportunity to do it. For, as he said, when he was supposed to have been on his way home from Slim McRoberts', he could just as well have been on his way home from Joe's.

CHAPTER II

DUTCH RUSHES THINGS

THE CORPORAL stood up to leave. He settled his hat and figured he'd go on down and have a talk with Dutch Myers.

"Mind if I go along? I'd like to see this thing through," said Jack Price.

The policeman hesitated, then said, "Okay. Won't do any harm, I guess."

This time the road led away from the shore, through the main village and to a point behind the mission where a creek came down. Dutch Myers had a cabin on the creek immediately in front of Slim McRoberts one-man trading post. But when

they reached it, there was no light in the cabin. A light, however, showed in Slim McRoberts'.

They crossed a footbridge, were met by the howling from a dozen chained huskies. But as they approached McRoberts' dwelling, the door was opened and the trader himself appeared. From the light behind him, Slim McRoberts recognized his visitors and invited them inside.

Dutch Myers was still there. The man, built along the lines of a beer-keg, was sitting at a table and whittling tobacco from a plug. He wore a faded mackinaw and a battered felt hat, and a huge curved pipe hung from his stubbled lips. The policeman and the Hudson's Bay man took offered chairs, and Slim McRoberts looked curiously from one man to the other.

The trader was blond, thirty, with a bony face and steel-gray eyes. But he summoned a grin for his opposition and asked if the Company was still buying fur.

"Oh, the odd skin or two," Price grinned back at him. "Just enough to keep you wolves from the door."

Then Pat Hennessey broke in. "This is no social call, boys. I'm looking for a guy—the guy that killed Joe Gilroy."

There was a sudden, a seemingly shocked silence. Slim McRoberts blinked once, then just stared. Dutch Myers' jaw sagged, and the jack-knife fell from his fingers with a clatter to the table-top.

"You kiddin'?" demanded Slim finally.

The corporal faced him. "No; I'm not kiddin'. And the guy that beefed Joe wasn't kiddin', either. He made a job of it."

Slim seemed puzzled, out of his depth. "But I was talkin' to him—just before supper. Where is he? You mean, he's been shot?"

"He hasn't been shot, and he's down in his shack. And if you guys like to tell me where you've been the last hour, it'll save me asking a lot of questions."

Dutch Myers found his tongue. "I ain't bin nowhere. I bin settin' here with Slim all night. We chewed th' rag and listened to th' radio—"

"Check!" agreed Slim McRoberts. "Dutch came in right after supper. Then George Arnold came up, and there's been just the three of us here all evening."

"I see," observed the corporal, thought-

fully. "So you can each go aubi for the other."

Slim's eyes narrowed. He gave a sharp frown. "So what?" he demanded. "What does that crack mean?"

The corporal gave him a cool look. "You're too hair-triggered, boy. Some day it'll backfire on you. I mean what I said. Nothing more; nothing less."

Dutch Myers broke in. "But who says Joe's dead? You seen him? And who found him?"

"He's dead, all right," stated Hennessey. "Is now, anyway."

Dutch blinked, and his brain seemed to be in ponderous motion.

"Whaddya mean—is now? If he's bin killed, sure he's dead!"

"But he wasn't quite dead when I first saw him," pointed out the corporal. "He lived for—well, I'd say perhaps a minute. And he talked a bit before he went."

"What'd he say?" broke in Slim McRoberts. "Give you any clue? Anything you can work on?"

"Not much. And then he was probably rambling."

The corporal looked around the meagerly-furnished room before he addressed Slim McRoberts again.

"When did you see Joe Gilroy last?"

McRoberts said that the dead man was up to the store late in the afternoon, bought a can of tobacco and left almost at once. Dutch Myers volunteered the information that he himself had parted with Joe Gilroy at a few minutes before six.

"Mr. Arnold and me was down to his cabin tryin' to fix up a deal with him. On'y the old buzzard was bull-headed and we couldn't get nowheres. So we come away and left him."

"And the deal was all off?" suggested Hennessey.

"Well, I dunno," admitted Dutch. "It all depended on if we could bring him around. I figured I'd work him over ag'in in the mornin'."

The corporal gave a grunt. "You're out of luck now. Some gent worked him over tonight." He sighed, glanced at Jack Price and figured they'd trot along. "Only thing is," he pointed out for the benefit of McRoberts and Dutch, "I wouldn't want you boys to get itchy-footed for a few days

yet. I'd rather you stuck around and helped me get this mess cleaned up."

McRoberts gave a frown. "You mean that? I was figurin' to fly out with Walt Palmer and come back in again as soon as I can. I got business with my bank; and business that's sort of important."

"Too bad," sympathized Hennessey, "but you'd best take the next flight out. Anyway, what's a day or so to you?"

"A whole lot," retorted McRoberts. "A few more days, and I don't eat!"

AS THEY walked away in the night, the corporal asked Jack Price, "What did that mean? About business that's important and him not eating?"

"Probably just what he said," the Company man answered. "He came in here on a shoestring and he don't know too much about fur. I guess he's up against it. I did hear that the bank was crowding him; so it's one of two things—stall 'em off, or lay some money on the line."

They re-crossed the footbridge, but instead of going back to the Hudson's Bay post, Hennessey headed down towards Joe Gilroy's. Then passing the air-base, an idea came to him.

"Walt's still up, so I'll tell him about Joe. Tell him, too, that his passenger-list is closed for the time being."

Palmer, the pilot of the Junker snubbed to the wharf, was getting ready for bed. He was a man in his middle thirties, dark, and in a heavy sort of way, handsome. Hennessey asked him if he'd heard the latest scandal, and when Palmer said he didn't know what the latest scandal might be, the policeman told him that someone had beefed Joe Gilroy.

The pilot stared. "Beefed him? You mean, killed him? Rubbed him out?" And then he asked, "When?"

"Within the last hour. And I want," mentioned Hennessey, "a bit of co-operation from you."

Palmer stood up from the edge of his cot and reached for his trousers.

"Not that sort of co-operation," Hennessey pointed out. "What I mean, whoever killed Joe Gilroy is probably still in the village. Which is okay by me. Because I want him to stay here. So if anyone comes to you and wants you to fly him out to-

morrow—someone I may overlook—you're not doing business."

Palmer nodded slowly. "But what about the two fares I've got—Slim McRoberts and the parson, Edwards?"

"Take the parson if you like," decided the corporal. "He don't look like a killer to me. But Slim stays."

The pilot said all right, but his mind was evidently more on the death of Joe Gilroy than tomorrow's business.

"What you were saying about Joe—where was he killed? And how?"

"Somebody bashed his skull in. Down at his shack. We're just going back there again. And if I get time," Hennessey added, "I'll get you to take a report for me out to headquarters. When'll you be leaving in the morning?"

"Not before ten. And I'll be in again before dark."

The corporal and Price went on, and when they reached Joe Gilroy's young Matthews reported that nothing of interest had occurred. Hennessey stepped inside.

He looked first for the murder-weapon; but he found none. Either the killer had brought his own tools, or he had carried away with him the one he had used to do the deed. But looking for the weapon brought the corporal to those sacks of fur.

He crossed over, gave them a tentative kick. "This guy made a hunt."

"He sure did," agreed the Hudson's Bay man, Price. "That is, if he trapped it all himself."

"Yeah," Hennessey said he'd look into the matter later on. First, though, he'd take inventory of the dead man's person.

He went through Joe Gilroy's pockets, dumped his findings onto the table. There was the usual hodge-podge—pipe, tobacco, jack-knife, scraps of paper, matches and a worn wallet. The wallet disclosed more papers but no money of any sort.

"Didn't expect to find any," grunted the corporal. "Man's got no use for money up alongside the Barren Lands."

But the Company man's lean face wore a frown. "Just a minute, though. Frisk him again. And take a look in that old suitcase. I paid him three hundred dollars for some fur just after dinner today."

"You did? Well," said Hennessey, "that's different."

But the suitcase contained only clothing, shaving-gear and a few odds and ends; and though the corporal went over the premises pretty thoroughly, there was no money of any kind.

"Now let's get this straight," Hennessey suggested. "You say you paid him this three-hundred."

"Sure," reiterated Price. "Joe said he didn't want to run around broke, but the rest of his fur he'd hang onto."

"And he *was* broke?"

"Yeah—if that means he didn't have money. Even the grub he got earlier was charged up to him." Price went on to say that Joe Gilroy was down in the Company books for around a couple of hundred dollars, most of which he had drawn on credit before going north in the Fall. "That's the way he always did—ran a bit of an account, then settled up in the Spring."

Hennessey gave another grunt. "We're doing swell! Now we've got a money-angle to worry about."

He looked around him, suddenly seemed to make up his mind.

"I got to get the guy outa here. It's either that or sit up all night with him. Well, there's three of us and his canoe'll be on the shore. So we'll pack him down there. Then with him and his fur under lock and key, I can close up the shack and go over it again in the morning."

WITH THE remains of Joe Gilroy ferried down to the Police warehouse and the fur stored in the detachment office, Pat Hennessey tried to get some understanding of things. Price had not yet gone home, so the corporal quizzed him a bit.

"Mebbe this money's been swiped, mebbe that's why old Joe was murdered. But do you know why he wanted the money, except for the reason that he didn't want to run around broke?"

Price didn't know of any other reason, save, possibly, one. "Joe was quite a poker-player; and now that the boys are in, the games run pretty steep. When he asked for it, I sort of figured that's what it was for."

"And when you paid him, was there anyone else present?"

The trader pondered the point. "I gave him the money over the counter, and there were several around just then. Nitchies,

y'know; Dutch Myers; and I guess George Arnold and Walt Palmer."

Hennessey pursed his lips. "I can't see George Arnold bumping anyone off for a measley three hundred. He takes it from 'em smoother than that. And the Nitchies? Well, they aren't strong-arm boys; and this time of the year they're pretty well heeled. That leaves Walt Palmer and Dutch Myers. Dutch is always broke, though he's fair enough trapper; and Walt, well, he hasn't been flying this run long enough for me to know much about him."

PRICE said he couldn't feature a four-hundred-dollar-a-month pilot doing murder for three weeks' pay, though Pat Hennessey said you never could tell.

"But I'll ask around in the morning. And if the dough doesn't turn up, we'll have to figure it ties in with the murder."

Before Price left, though, Hennessey asked him to take a look at Joe Gilroy's fur. Dumped out it made a sizable stack. Price estimated it, and figured it would run around four thousand dollars.

"Which is too much for one man," he suggested. "Even up on the edge of the Barrens."

"And for a guy who was crowding sixty," added the corporal. "But maybe he traded a bit. He never had a license to trade, but Joe was the sort who'd take a chance on anything. Or what about a few jackpots? You said he was quite a poker-player."

The Hudson's Bay man nodded. "Could be anything—except honest trapping." He stood up, yawned. "Getting late. Guess I'll push off home and try for some sleep."

But almost as the door closed behind him, it opened again and Dutch Myers walked in.

Dutch blinked in the glare of the lamp and said he wanted a bit of information.

"I bin talkin' to Mr. Arnold. About them claims me and Joe own up on the Beaver-lodge River. What's to stop me sellin' 'em?"

Hennessey tipped back in his chair. "You want to sell 'em?"

"Sure I do. Bin wantin' to sell 'em for years. And if I don't sell 'em now, mebbe I won't get th' chancet ag'in."

"You mean, sell them to Mr. Arnold?"

"Yeah. He offered me quite a hunk o' dough for 'em. And if I *can* sell 'em, I'll be settin' pretty."

Hennessey looked thoughtfully at Dutch Myers for a moment.

"You were a sort of partner of Joe's, weren't you?"

"Sure I was," answered Dutch stoutly. "Couple years ago, though, we split up. He was gettin' old, kinda, and cantankerous. But we was partners, all right; and if I can sell them claims to Mr. Arnold—"

Hennessey shook his head. "You're sort of rushing things. What about Joe's relatives? Won't they have something to say?"

"Joe never had no relatives," Dutch declared. "He told me his folks died while he was young and he was raised in an orphanage. And we always allowed," he added naively, "that if either of us was to kick-off sudden-like, the other took the whole shebang."

"Quite a workable procedure," agreed Hennessey. "Only the Public Administrator might object to that." He explained the point, then concluded, "No, Dutch, you can't rush things. It'll all be straightened according to law."

Dutch sniffed, growled. "Th' law! All the law ever did to a guy was t' cramp his style. Me, I never had no use for her. She's all a bunch o' baloney!"

Pat Hennessey grinned. "And that's been said by a lot of brighter boys than you!"

CHAPTER III

CELEBRATION

DISGUSTED and profane, Dutch Myers walked out. The corporal began the rolling of a cigarette.

"Well, there you are," he told young Matthews. "That is, if it means anything. Remember me asking Joe Gilroy who cracked him? And him trying to say something about a partner, beaver and a river. Well, we know all about the beaver and the river.

"Like I told you, he trapped on Beaver-lodge Lake and these claims he owned with Dutch were on the Beaver-lodge River. But was he trying to tell us that he was killed on account of these claims? And if he was, who's the 'partner'? Dutch, or someone we haven't got wise to yet?"

The constable shrugged. "He might still figure Dutch as his partner even after a

couple of years. And the shape he was in, his mind wouldn't be too clear."

"Yeah." Hennessey scowled. "Mebbe I ought to grab Dutch now that he's handy. I've got enough on him. But could I make it stick? I know these criminal lawyers. They'd say Joe wasn't in his right mind when we found him, and that for two years he hadn't had a partner at all. And what about the three hundred dollars? They'd say, 'Has Dutch got it?' And if I couldn't prove that he had, they'd chase me out of the courtroom!"

After a moment, he went on. "But what about the other angles? What about Joe having all that fur? For all we know it was the fur the killer was after, and he might have got it too if Jack Price hadn't breezed along when he did."

The fur was still in the office. Hennessey stood up. "I want a better look at it. Want to see if it was skinned and stretched by the same man. You think I can't tell? Well, watch me!"

He crossed over, began to paw at the pile. He checked the mink, the foxes, then picked up a couple of lynx-skins and compared them. Then he turned to Matthews with a grunt of satisfaction.

"See?"

The two skins, fur-side in were almost identical—identical, that is, save for one feature. On one, the front legs were stretched and dried, tube-fashion; on the other, the legs had been removed.

"See?" he said again. "Someone's starting to get himself a lynx-paw robe." He explained what he meant. "You cut off the front legs and stretch 'em flat; then when you get enough of 'em, you can make a robe that's the loveliest thing you ever saw. The fur-buyers howl, and they'll dock you for it; but if you want such a robe bad enough, what's a bit of howling and docking?"

Matthews saw the possibilities. "So if you're interested enough in knowing how Joe came by all this fur, all you've got to do is find the guy who's saving up for a lynx-paw robe and ask him about it."

The corporal went on to say that in spite of his earlier surmise, there was little possibility that Joe Gilroy did any trading. It would keep Joe busy hauling his own grub to the Barrens without trying to take in trade-goods as well.

"So that makes me think he gambled with the Nitchies. Or maybe with the Barren Land Chipewyans—the Chips. Well, it's too late now to worry about that. But when a guy's been knocked off, we can't afford to pass up anything just because we haven't got an answer for it. It's the things you can't answer at once that work out the riddle in the end."

Hennessey said there was little more he could do in the way of investigating at that late hour; but there was the report of the murder to be typed out for headquarters. So, though it was crowding midnight, Hennessey went at it.

That meant he got to bed at around one; but six in the morning found him up again. He ate, shaved, carried his mail to the air-base, then continued on to the Hudson's Bay post.

The morning was clear, calm, and Smoothstone Lake was mirror-like. With a loon floating motionless and the spruce of a nearby point reflected in the water, it seemed hard to reconcile the peacefulness of the scene with the messy murder of the night before. But as he went along the trail past the teepees and met the hesitant, self-conscious glances of the Indian folk, he sensed the tension in the air.

He was aware of it too as he entered the Hudson's Bay store. A couple of natives were at the counter, laughing at something that passed between themselves and the clerk; but as they turned and saw him, the merriment died away. They glanced at him as though they too were under suspicion.

To one side of the trade-room was a doorway leading to the office. Pipe-smoke streaked out from it. So turning in, Hennessey found the manager, Jack Price, sorting out some sales-slips.

Catching the footfall, Price turned. He said, "Around early, eh?" kicked the door shut and asked what was new.

"Nothing new," the corporal told him. "But maybe a slant on one of the angles. This too-much-fur business of the late Joe Gilroy." He told Price of his discovery of the two-legged lynx, then said, "So I'm wondering if you bought any skins like that. Bought 'em from anyone, I mean, who trapped up alongside Joe."

Without hesitation, Price said, "Sure I did. Bought three skins from Charlie Otter.

He's a neighbor of Joe's. Hangs out on Windy Point, about ten miles south of him."

"Charlie Otter?" Hennessey was frowning. "He's in the store right now. Call him in here, eh?"

AT PRICE'S suggestion, the Indian came into the office. He was a man of around thirty-five, tall, lean, intelligent. Price closed the door and indicated the corporal.

Hennessey drove straight to the point in the man's own tongue. "You gave Joe Gilroy a lynx-skin."

The Indian looked *searchingly* at him before nodding. "*Tapway. Ne ke methow.*"

"You did, eh? And why did you give it to him?" Hennessey pressed.

The man seemed to hesitate. His eyes flitted from policeman to Hudson's Bay man. Then, "I gave it to him as a present."

"A present?" the corporal echoed. "What did you give him a present for?"

The Indian, seemingly now on surer ground, hunched his shoulders in a shrug. "He was a friend of mine. He used to visit me."

"And that called for a present?"

The Indian gave another shrug, and Hennessey could almost see his quick mind working. "He helped me in many ways. Once, when I was out of dog-feed, he made me a present of four cariboo he had shot and left in the bush. *Akoseesee*, I gave him a present in return."

Hennessey, too, did a bit of quick thinking. He knew the Indian was lying, but if he told him so, he would only create hostility. It would be better to accept the statement and soothe any suspicion that might be arising in the Indian's mind.

So he gave a nod. "It is understood. We were merely wondering if the dead one was trading without a license."

As the man walked out and the door was closed again, Price said, "Lying hound! He never gave old Joe a present. He's been playing poker or the blanket-game with him!"

He added, "And if he couldn't bluff old Joe better than he bluffed us, no wonder it cost him money."

"Maybe I'm chasing the wrong sow," Hennessey admitted. "Joe did have too much fur, but that doesn't have to tie in with why he was murdered. Still"—doggedly—"I've

got to know how he came by it. Whether it's connected with the killing or not."

He went on to speak of the impending inquest. "You're the J. P.," he told Price, "so how about holding it this afternoon? I'll grab half a dozen of the boys, and we'll see what that produces."

Price said it would be all right with him; so agreeing for three in the afternoon, the corporal headed back to the barracks.

Matthews, the constable, had a bit of news to impart.

"You know something?" he asked Hennessey. "Remember me saying that some guy came looking for you last night and would call back again? Well, the guy was Joe Gilroy."

"Oh?" The corporal looked interested.

"Sure. When he called here, he was wearing a sweater and a cap, and it was getting dusk. The guy I saw in the shack with his head caved in was in his shirt-sleeves and certainly wore no cap. And without his cap, he looked older; he was pretty much gray-headed. But when I saw him now," Matthews went on, "saw him by daylight just now in the warehouse, I recognized him at once. Joe was the guy who was looking for you last night."

Hennessey said, "Huh!" sat on the edge of the table and shoved back his hat. "Now what does that mean?"

He scrubbed his big chin, frowned.

"What have we got anyway?" he went on at last. "Joe's dead. If he'd lived and played ball with Dutch Myers, Dutch and he would have split seven thousand bucks between them and George Arnold would own a string of claims up on Beaver-lodge River. But he wouldn't play ball; and after turning the deal down, he comes looking for me. Did he," the corporal suddenly asked Matthews, "seemed worried or scared when he called here last night?"

Matthews debated the matter. "Frankly," he said, "I don't know. He stepped into the porch and to one side, like he didn't want to be seen; and he had to know just when you'd be back. But I couldn't see enough of him to know if he was scared or not."

"Well, anyway," went on Hennessey, "he *did* come down here to see me; and an hour or so afterwards he's killed. And then what do we find? Well, we don't find three hundred bucks he's supposed to have on

him, but we do find about four thousand dollars' worth of fur. And Joe being dead, sort of complicates things. Dutch Myers is sore as a boil because he can't sell their mineral property, George Arnold has had a wasted trip, and so far as I can see, nobody gets anything. That is," he amended, "except for the guy with the three hundred bucks and me with the headache!"

SO FAR as achieving anything was concerned, the inquest was a flop. Pat Hennessey raked together half a dozen white men and halfbreeds who seemed to have had the least connection with the crime and empanelled them before Jack Price. Dutch Myers, Slim McRoberts, George Arnold, Constable Matthews and even Price himself all gave testimony; and after an hour of deliberation, the jury returned an open verdict. Which put Corporal Hennessey right back where he started—behind the eight-ball.

And the rest of the day proved as uneventful. A couple of government men in a light, fast plane arrived, and the Airways pilot, Walt Palmer, returned with the Junker. Palmer brought with him a load of freight, a deaconess for the mission, and a letter for Hennessey. The letter, written by a headquarters staff-sergeant, noted the murder of Joe Gilroy and stated that the matter would be referred to Hennessey's O. C. when that officer returned from his inspection of the detachments on the west line.

And for this Pat Hennessey breathed a sigh of relief. What he needed least of all was a brass-hat hampering his investigations. The corporal knew what was expected of him and he knew what had to be done; and although the immediate future looked a trifle murky, the all-important something would turn up, as it had always turned up in the past.

With the rest of the mail disposed of, he took time out for a cup of coffee. This meant fetching a pail of water from the lake.

And it was while he was down for this that Frenchy Fontaine pulled in.

Frenchy, a bantamweight from the hinterlands of Quebec, beached his canoe beside the police wharf and looked up at Hennessey with a grin.

"Ullo!" he said. "'Ome again! And d' first man I'm see is a policeman!"

Hennessey grinned back at the stubby-faced runt and told Frenchy it was pretty nearly time he was getting in. "I was that worried!" he declared. "So worried I couldn't sleep nights."

"Don't worry about deese keed!" jeered Frenchy. "He show up every tam!" The man dropped his paddle, spread his bow-legs and pulled out a crumpled pack of cigarettes. He lit one, sucked a lungful of smoke and exhaled gustily. "Good to get in fo' sure," he declared. "Almost I'm forget w'at a white man look lak!" He added, in query. "Mebbeso I'm d' last?"

"Yup," agreed Hennessey. "You're the can on the cat's tail." But he was regarding Frenchy with thoughtful curiosity.

"An' now, I'm celebrate!" Frenchy avowed. "I'm order in two leetle bottle Scotch las' fall. Jack Price look after for me all winter."

"And what're you going to celebrate?" grunted Pat Hennessey. He was squinting at Frenchy's load. "All the fur you didn't bring back with you?"

Frenchy grimaced. "D' hont, she's no good. Den I com' by Pemmican Portage and get into wan leetle poker-game with some prospectairs. We play t'ree, four hours and—zowie! Eef I don' queet, I lose d' canoe and 'ave to swim 'ome!"

Hennessey stared at the man. "Well, well! And now what happens?"

Frenchy gave another shrug. "I get along." He brightened suddenly. "And I celebrate! Celebrate ever'ting! Somebody mebbe 'ave birt'day? Get married?" He flashed a white-toothed smile. "Mebbeso you get married, no?"

Hennessey said, no, he hadn't got married yet; and as he was saying this, something stirred his memory. Something that connected Frenchy Fontaine with something else that was ever-present in his mind—the stiff in the warehouse, Joe Gilroy.

It wasn't much over a year ago that Joe Gilroy had turned Frenchy in. Frenchy trapped a full day south of Joe Gilroy, but Frenchy traveled a lot. And in his travels he scattered strychnine baits. One of these baits, intended for a fox, had been picked up by the leader of Joe Gilroy's string of

huskies. As soon as another leader could be procured, Joe Gilroy made the long trek into Smoothstone to lay a charge against Frenchy. For lack of proof, the charge had fallen down; but from that day on, Frenchy and Joe Gilroy loved each other like a Chinaman loves a Jap.

So, solemn-faced, the corporal said to Frenchy Fontaine, "I got some bad news for you, boy. Yeah, real bad. Your old pal, Joe Gilroy, passed out last night."

Frenchy stared, his cigarette halfway to his lips. "Passed out? You mean—he ees dead?"

"Yeah. Somebody had a grudge against him. Sneaked up and bashed in his skull."

Frenchy continued to stare for a moment, then a slow, wicked smile wreathed his black-stubbed lips.

"Well!" he said; and he seemed to savor it. "Well! Now I am celebrate—fo' sure!"

CHAPTER IV

BUSHWHACKED

FRENCHY was as good as his word. Twice between then and sundown the corporal bumped into him hilariously drunk. Once, on the trail between the detachment and the Hudson's Bay post, Frenchy hauled a bottle from his pocket and offered Hennessey a drink. Instead of accepting, the corporal gave the roisterer a bit of advice.

"Keep that crock in your pocket, Frenchy, or I'll run you in. Should do it, anyhow. And if I catch you giving a snort to any of the Indians, there won't be any argument about it. You'll go up for sixty days."

Frenchy giggled vacuously. "Deese keed don' buy d' good liquer for give to Indians. Tomorrow, too, I am fly to town. Mebbeso I fly to Montreal. Then we 'ave—" and he waved his arms expansively—"wan beeg celebration!"

Hennessey watched him stagger on towards the air-base, and his eyes narrowed a bit.

The picture was getting screwier all the time. Joe Gilroy, with too much fur, was dead; Frenchy, with very little fur if any, was now preparing to fly East for a continuation of his celebration. Air-trips as far east as Montreal cost important

dough, and when he got there, Frenchy couldn't celebrate on peanuts.

"Too many angles," growled the corporal. "And not a lead in any of 'em."

Already that day, between the outgoing of the mail and the inquest, he had gone over Joe Gilroy's premises pretty thoroughly. He hadn't expected to find either tracks or fingerprints, so he was not greatly disappointed when they failed to show up. He realized that the whole mystery of the murder was the absolute simplicity of it. Someone had walked into Joe Gilroy's house, clubbed him just about to death, then slipped out again when he heard Jack Price coming. The only clue to the murder, if clue it could be called, was the missing three hundred dollars of Joe's money; and it looked to Pat Hennessey that so long as the murderer moved around in a natural manner and kept his mouth shut, the crime might never be explained.

But, doggedly, he spent the balance of the day circulating amongst the Indians who had been Joe's near neighbors, quizzing Dutch Myers, Slim McRoberts and a belligerent George Arnold. And when night fell, it seemed as though his patience was going to receive its first bit of reward.

It was in the front room of the Hudson's Bay post, where a poker game was in progress. Present were one of the government men, the pilot Walt Palmer, Slim McRoberts, a trapper from the country east of the settlement, George Arnold and Jack Price himself. The game was getting steep, and Slim McRoberts seemed to be the one forcing most of the play. There was a deliberate concentration about the man, a cold-blooded intensity that was at variance with the good humor of the rest of them. Hat back and lips tight, McRoberts crowded every pot to the limit, and the pile of chips in front of him showed that luck was coming his way.

Two other men looked on. One was Dutch Myers, the other Frenchy Fontaine. Dutch sat behind Slim McRoberts, while Frenchy peered over the shoulder of Walt Palmer. Frenchy's celebration had degenerated to the maudlin stage, and it was about all he could do to hold his feet. He glanced across at Pat Hennessey, winked, and suggested the corporal sit in for a hand.

Hennessey said, "No; this stuff's too high

for me." Then he asked Frenchy why he didn't sit in himself.

Frenchy winked, swayed again. "Deese keed, he's too wise. He don't play d' poker. He keep hees monee for go Montreal!"

"You don't play poker?" echoed the corporal. "Then what about the game up at Pemmican Portage?"

Frenchy blinked, seemed almost to sober for a moment. Then a crafty, evasive look came into his eyes.

"Ah, dat was once!" he giggled. "But Frenchy don' play no more."

Hennessey studied the man curiously. He didn't believe him, but he was surprised that the question had hit him so hard. That reference to the game at Pemmican Portage had jolted Frenchy out of his maudlin daze. For an instant his mind had cleared, and he had tried to cover a slip of the tongue with a bigger and clumsier lie.

And the little interchange between the two men hadn't passed unnoticed by the others. Jack Price seemed to look at Frenchy with awakened interest; the pilot, Palmer, turned in his chair to stare up at him. Even Slim McRoberts and George Arnold gave evidence of wondering what it was all about. Frenchy, not too drunk to be unconscious of the eyes on him, gave a short hiccupping laugh and turned away to drop into a big arm-chair nearby. A moment or so later, mouth open and snoring, he passed out of the picture completely.

Came another deal of the cards. The weak hands dropped out. Jack Price, Slim McRoberts and Walt Palmer remained. It became a battle between the three; and after Price had raised the bet five blue chips, Slim produced a twenty-dollar bill and tossed it into the pot.

"Your five," he gritted. "And fifteen better."

The pilot, Palmer, figured he'd had enough, and chucked in his cards. The Hudson's Bay man went into his wallet for a ten and a five. "Okay, Slim," he said. "Let's see 'em."

Momentarily, at least, it looked as though McRoberts' luck had turned. Against his kick-full, Jack Price showed four jacks.

"Just goes to prove," grinned Price, "that a feller can't be good all the time."

He raked in the chips, opened his wallet and folded the bills. But putting the twenty

away, he hesitated for just the barest second. Then he tucked it in neatly, ran the zipper, and pocketed the wallet again.

SOON after that the Company man declared a round of jackpot's and the game's conclusion. "I'm a working man," he stated. "Got to get some shut-eye once in a while."

But when the game broke up and the others made a move to leave, Frenchy was still snoring in his chair. Price tried to rouse him, then Pat Hennessey took a hand.

The corporal shook him, dragged him upright. "On your way, Lush! We're going home."

But Frenchy had his own ideas. He tried to shake himself free. "Ain' goin' home. Stayin' right 'ere!"

Swinging an arm, he connected with Slim McRoberts' jaw. Slim almost cracked him. "Throw the bum out!" he told Hennessey. "Let him sleep it off outside!"

Frenchy blinked, goggled at Slim and looked injured.

"Bum, you say? Bum?" He hiccupped again, wagged his black and curly head. "Deese Frenchy no bum. He got monee; and he get more! Frenchy he know somet'ing." He waved a hand theatrically. "An' w'en we know somet'ing, we don' t'ink about monee!"

Hennessey listened, frowning. The liquor that Frenchy Fontaine had poured into him was loosening his tongue. The words might have significance. The other men present seemed to think so too. They were either frowning at the scuppered Frenchman or looking expectantly at Pat Hennessey.

The corporal quickly made up his mind. "I've had enough of this!" He jabbed Frenchy's hat on his head, spun him around and grabbed him by his shirt collar. "Come on, you slob! You're going home with me!"

He hustled Frenchy outside, looked around, and located Walt Palmer.

"You're going my way. Come on; and if this baby wants trouble, we'll spread-eagle him."

But Frenchy didn't seem to want trouble. He whined, blustered, mumbled drunkenly of his rights. But with Hennessey's fingers still gripping his shirt collar, he allowed himself to be herded down the trail.

Two or three of the other poker players tagged along, but at last forked off individually. When the corporal came to the air-base, Palmer turned off too.

"You don't need me," he said, and bade the policeman goodnight.

Hennessey was inclined to agree; for the air was cooling Frenchy's head. He was walking straighter, and when they came within sight of the lamp-lit detachment, he promised to behave himself if Hennessey would let him go.

"I'll let you go after a while," the corporal promised him grimly. "But first, we're going to have a little talk."

The night was inky, and a wind had sprung up. The spruce were swaying and the waves of Smoothstone were pounding on shore. But above the wind and the waves, Hennessey suddenly thought he heard another sound—perhaps the rustle of leaves, the slither of a footstep, a sharp intake of breath. Then, just as he was turning, his skull seemed to split; and in unconsciousness he slumped to the ground.

CHAPTER V

TEEPEE TALK

THE stars were bright and his hands were cold when he opened his eyes again; and the voice of Jack Price was speaking to him. "Hey, Pat! What's the matter? Are you sick? Hurt?"

Hennessey said no, and lay there for a moment orienting himself. Then, dizzy and a bit groggy at the stomach, he got to his knees.

"Some bird slugged me—" He broke off. "Hey, where's Frenchy?"

He groped around, as did the Hudson's Bay man, but there was no sign of Frenchy Fontaine.

"Slugged me," mumbled Hennessey. "And turned Frenchy loose!"

With Price's help he made to the detachment and dropped into a chair. He removed his hat and found a lump on his head. But no blood. The Stetson had saved him to that extent. Then Matthews, pajama-clad and blinking, came out of his room.

"Thought I might as well hit the hay—" He broke off, staring at the corporal. "Whatever's the matter? Ill?"

Hennessey, feeling tenderly of the hen's-egg, rested his forehead in his hand. "Not ill. Just blackjacked." He said, "Dig out that brandy and gimme a shot."

The brandy helped considerably. Hennessey made a grimace. "Got what was coming to me. Yeah, and I asked for it."

For the benefit of Matthews as well as Price, he went on to explain.

"Frenchy knows something, and he kind of let on he did. So I thought I'd run him in and sweat it out of him. But I made a mistake. After I left Walt, I came the balance of the way alone. And between here and Walt's, some bird sneaked up on me." He worked his hat gingerly onto his head. "Come on; there's a job to be done."

The constable dressed quickly, and the three went out together. It was a little short of midnight.

"I'm not looking for Frenchy just now," Hennessey said. "I'm checking up on my friends—those birds who were at the poker party."

But first he dropped in on Walt Palmer. The pilot, getting ready for bed, had the radio going.

"Didn't notice anything funny, did you, Walt, right after you left me just now?"

The pilot frowned a bit. "Dunno. Maybe I did." With a grin he asked, "Will you settle for a ghost?"

Hennessey said, "It wasn't no ghost that slugged me. Nor a ghost that let Frenchy get away."

Palmer frowned again, glanced at Price, then back to the corporal.

"This 'ghost' I saw was following me down the trail. I didn't notice it till just after I'd turned in, and then it was pretty hazy. Scared me a bit, too. I said, 'Hullo, there!' And then—" and Palmer gave the smile of one who expected to be disbelieved—"it vanished."

Hennessey gave a grunt. "Any idea how long ago that was?"

Palmer glanced at the watch on his wrist. "Oh, around twenty minutes ago. The eleven-thirty newscast had just started when I switched on the radio and it's now seven minutes to twelve."

"Which means," growled Hennessey, "that I was out cold for about ten minutes." He added, "Which means that Frenchy gets that twenty-minute start."

The three men left at once and made the rounds of the other poker players. The trapper and the government men were asleep in their tents; so after apologizing for waking them, Hennessey led the way on again.

Dutch Myers, too, was in bed and snoring like a hog when the visitors dropped in on him. Hennessey roused the man, got him sitting up in his robes and asked him who he came home with from the poker game.

Dutch said, "Nobody? Why? Who'd want to come home here with me?"

At a loss to answer that one, Hennessey took a look around the place and told Dutch to go to sleep again. Dutch scratched himself, scowled, told Hennessey it was nice to see him and to come back ag'in when he had some other fool question to ask.

"Sort of thing I can expect," the corporal growled once they were outside; and he stood there undecided as to what to do next. Suddenly he said to Price, "This George Arnold—he's staying with you. What did he do after the game?"

"Went right to bed."

"Yeah? And where's bed for him?"

"Out on the east verandah."

"Alone?"

"Sure."

Hennessey thought about it. "So nice! Everybody accounted for. Still, we might's well wake George Arnold and have 'em all on our neck."

They went up to the Hudson's Bay post, got Arnold into the front room, and received the expected blast. He didn't know what was all the mumbo-jumbo, but he'd gone right to bed after the game and stayed there. And if it was anything to do with Joe Gilroy, the guy had been stiff now twenty-four hours, so why not save the funny-stuff till the morning?

With Arnold padding back to his couch and the verandah door shut, Hennessey gave a disgusted growl. "All I'm getting out of this is a bigger headache. These birds'll all play dumb; and looking for Frenchy at night is like hunting a nigger in a coal-pit." He scowled, stared at Jack Price, then suddenly asked, "How come you were the one to find me stretched out tonight?" He added, "Or do I get in wrong with you too by the asking?"

The Company man merely smiled. "I was looking for you." He indicated the kitchen. "Come on out here, and I'll explain."

In the kitchen, he produced his wallet and extracted a twenty-dollar bill. He passed it across, said, "One of the bills I gave Joe Gilroy. One of the three hundred."

Hennessey took it, scanned it, asked, "How do you know it is?"

Price turned it over to its reverse side. "See that little green ink stain? I did that, accidentally, inking one of my stamp pads." As the corporal looked at him, he went on, "There's no argument about it. I don't keep much cash on hand; won't have much till after the Treaty payments. And I had to scratch that one out of the bottom of the till to make up the three hundred for Joe."

"And where did you get it from? I mean, who gave it back to you?"

"Slim McRoberts," said Price. "That's the bill he threw in the pot when he bumped my four Jacks."

For a long moment Hennessey looked thoughtful. "Slim was playing a pretty savage game tonight. Sort of a desperate game. You other guys were out for fun, but Slim was after a killing."

"What I told you," pointed out Jack Price. "He's up against it. And if he can turn an honest dollar in a jack-pot, the bank won't wonder where it came from."

"Yeah." Hennessey turned the twenty-dollar bill in his fingers again. "But I wonder how honest this one is."

He sighed. "Maybe I'm getting somewhere. I dunno. Seems like every step forward means one step back. This twenty-dollar bill, for instance—It hooks Slim up with old Joe's three hundred. I should go to work on Slim. But instead of that, I've got to get busy on Frenchy Fontaine." Hennessey suddenly looked old, and tired. "Frenchy made a bad crack tonight," he told Jack Price. "You knew something was up but you didn't know just what it was. Well—when Frenchy first landed here, he'd got no fur to speak of but he was going to fly to Montreal for a celebration. It sounded screwy to me, but Frenchy explained one part of it by saying he'd lost the fur in a poker game with some prospectors up at Pemmican Portage. But tonight, with a few slugs of hooch in him, he said he never played poker. Said he was 'too

wise.' Well, probably he is too wise—but wise to something that isn't poker. And that means," said Hennessey wearily, "that I've just got to hunt him up."

SO, IN spite of the darkness and the lateness of the hour, and in spite of his earlier declaration, the corporal combed the village.

None of the remaining poker players had seen Frenchy since the game, and the Indians were equally bland. But in one of the teepees Hennessey ran across a lead that was important, although it seemed to have nothing to do with Frenchy Fontaine at all.

Seeing a light burning in the lodge, Hennessey and Matthews ducked in. Across the fire in the teepee's center a man sat boiling a tea kettle. Nearby was a woman rocking a baby, a baby that coughed and whimpered.

Squatting down, Hennessey said, "You are up late."

The man agreed. "Our child is sick. We could not sleep."

As the corporal looked across, the baby coughed again. It was a dry cough, tight and racking.

"You should get some medicine," suggested Hennessey. "From the Company."

The man said perhaps he should, but the woman looked across at him with scorn in her eyes. She hugged the baby to her, and Hennessey barely caught the muttered words she said.

But he seized on them. "What did you say?" he pressed. "You can't buy medicine? Only liquor?"

She looked down, lips tight. Hennessey said nothing for the moment, but he was thinking. And thinking fast.

This man, this Indian, trapped up in the Wolverine River country. Wolverine River was half a day west of Beaver-lodge Lake. And, by the woman's muttered words, he couldn't buy medicine but he could buy liquor. Liquor—Wolverine River—Beaver-lodge Lake—

Suddenly Hennessey knew that one angle of his investigations was rapidly solving itself.

He turned to the Indian. "So Joe Gilroy was a liquor-trader, eh? And you got your liquor from him?"

The Indian glanced up. Fear was in his

eyes. He made no answer. But Hennessey was wise in the wisdom of the North.

"The fur," he said, "Gilroy's fur, is still at my house. And fur which is bought with liquor is considered stolen." He paused. "So if a man were to tell me just what fur he sold to Gilroy for liquor, it might be that the law would give it back to him."

The Indian looked up. He studied Hennessey intently for a moment. Then he said, "This is good speaking. I will tell the truth. To Joe Gilroy I gave a lynx-skin, four mink, an otter, fifty-two muskrats, and the two beaver which the law allows me to kill each spring."

"Which is all the fur you caught?"

"No. The early fur I sent down to Company to pay my debt. The white man, Gilroy, had no liquor till after Easter."

"Till after Easter?" repeated the corporal. "Then, unless he flew out to town himself, he must have had it flown in to him."

"That is correct."

"And the man who flew it in to him was the man who flies the plane here?" Hennessey felt his senses tingling. "This man Palmer, as he is called."

"No." The Indian shook his head. "It was a plane we had not seen before."

It was a let-down for Hennessey. But the Indian's next words astounded him. "And now that I have told you this, I will tell you something else. The man, Gilroy, told me secretly, told me *keemooch*, that he would be getting more liquor in at Treaty time, and that I would be able to get a bottle or two from him then for cash."

Hennessey stared at the Indian so long and so intently that the man dropped his eyes. Even young Matthews was moved.

"What's the matter?" he asked the corporal. "Another ghost—walking over your grave?"

The corporal turned to him. "Not yet. But now I know how old Joe Gilroy came by all that fur. And I know why he drew that three hundred bucks." He interpreted the Indian's story. "So you see? At Treaty time, with lots of cash in circulation, old Joe figured to crowd his luck a bit. The three hundred was for booze. And who'd fetch it in for him? Who was supposed to fly to town today? That's right; Slim McRoberts. That's how-come Slim pushed that twenty-dollar bill into the pot. He figured

that now old Joe was dead, the money was good as his." Hennessey gave a thin smile. "I'll have to make medicine with Slim tomorrow, but right now there's one load off my mind. Joe Gilroy wasn't killed for his money. He'd handed that over before death caught up with him."

But as the corporal stood up to go, another whimper and a series of coughs came from the baby. Hennessey said, "I don't like that," and he moved around the fire to where the child, moss-bag wrapped, lay in its mother's arms.

Gently he pushed the little blanket away from its face, laid his hand against its cheek.

"Dinah!" he exclaimed. "The kid's burning up!" Then when another cough came, he gave his opinion. "Pneumonia—if I know anything at all!"

The corporal lapsed again into Cree. "This child must have attention. You'll have to get it to hospital. The plane goes south tomorrow. Will you take it out then?"

There was some demurring between man and wife, but at Hennessey's insistence they gave way.

"It is the only thing," he told them. "If the child stays here, it will never get better. In town, with the new drugs, it will have a chance."

When the woman nodded, he said, "The plane leaves at nine. I'll see the pilot and arrange for transportation."

With a wry smile he turned to Matthews.

"I can take care of everybody's worries but my own. And they go on for ever."

But link by link the corporal was forging a chain. Just at that moment, though, he couldn't see it.

CHAPTER VI

TO THE KAWAKAMOW

BUT there was no need to interview Palmer at this late hour. Hennessey knew that a load of Hudson's Bay fur-bales was going south on the plane in the morning, and the matter of the trip of mother-and-baby could be fixed up while this was going on. And with the utter futility of any further search for Frenchy that night in his mind, he told Matthews they might as well head for home.

But once there, he was strangely quiet. Nervous, for him, too; and fidgety. Matthews seemed aware of it, for while setting the coffee to boil, the constable's eyes were on him.

"I don't like it," Hennessey confessed at last. "Don't like it at all. The killing of Joe Gilroy wasn't horse-play; no practical joke. It was murder, with the risk of someone swinging for it. And I'm worried about Frenchy Fontaine." He went on, "You weren't up at the poker party tonight, but when Frenchy was casting out his hints he said he had money and was going to get more of it because he 'knew somet'ing'. Knew something, mind you. Well, what did he know that was worth all this money? And while you're figuring that one, ask yourself why someone ran the risk of laying me out tonight so that Frenchy and I should not get together."

In his chair, Hennessey rubbed his bristly cheeks.

"They turned Frenchy loose, but are they any further ahead? If my guess is correct, if Frenchy is wise to something about the background of old Joe Gilroy's murder, they know what'll happen next time he's caught. No," he said, "if I'd done murder, I wouldn't want Frenchy Fontaine running around with a swivel tongue."

Matthews read the implications. "You figure—" and he seemed to hesitate.

"I figure," Hennessey cut in, "that Frenchy's already gone the way of old Joe."

A LOOK that was almost horror crept into young Matthew's eyes. "You mean to say that while we were looking for him just now—"

"Probably before that," Hennessey hazarded. "Before I blundered in here with Jack Price. It wouldn't take long. One wallop for me and a couple of good ones for Frenchy. The rest would be simple. Frenchy's only a flyweight. They'd pack him back into the bush for a day or so, or shove a couple of good rocks inside the waistband of his breeches and sink him in the lake. Anything like that till the fuss blows over and we figure Frenchy's vamoosed. And how long would it take 'em. Ten minutes? Not more. And by what Walt Palmer said; they had up to fifteen or twenty. No wonder when we got around to

'em we found 'em all bedded down for the night."

The coffee brewed, but for the moment both men seemed to have lost their interest in it.

"Frenchy's a liar," Hennessey went on, "but a blamed poor one. This stuff of making no hunt, then talking of a celebration in Montreal. Saying he'd lost his fur playing poker, and six hours later giving out that he never plays poker because he's too wise. But he made his worst crack right as he landed. Brazen-faced he stood there on the shore, intimated he hadn't seen a white man in months, then spoke of a poker game on his way down at Pemmican Portage. And as though to prove what a liar he was about all this, he goes into his pocket and pulls out a package of tailor-made cigarettes!"

Matthews pondered the matter, but it didn't seem to register with him. "Maybe he smokes that kind. Took them north at freeze-up."

"Eight months ago?" hooted Hennessey. "Eight months? Did you ever see a trapper hit for the bush with an eight-month supply of tailor-made cigarettes? And Philip Morris, that they don't sell up here?" He laughed shortly. "The only thing Frenchy Fontaine ever smoked in the years I've known him is French-Canadian raw leaf."

Matthews frowned. "Yeah, but---? But what about those prospectors up at Pemmican Portage?"

"He never saw any prospectors at Pemmican Portage. They were there all winter, but when I went north last week on that phony drowning case, they'd pulled out. And that too means something," said Hennessey. "It means, no matter what he said, that Frenchy didn't come down by the Portage. He should have done, all right, if he hit south from his camp on the Mattagasee; and as he didn't, where's he been since I saw him up there in March?"

Matthews wanted to know if the Mattagasee was anywhere near Beaver-lodge Lake, Joe Gilroy's old hangout. Hennessey said no; that the Mattagasee was a good day west of that.

"You tell me where Frenchy's been all spring," he suggested, "and I'll tell you why he landed in here with so little fur."

Then he stood up, stretched, yawned.

"I'm tired, good and tired. Didn't sleep much last night." He eyed the stove. "We'll have some of that coffee, and then turn in."

BUT the morning brought his worries back again. And so engrossed was he with them that it took the constable to recall another matter to his mind. That was the matter of the sick child to be flown out to civilization.

Hennessey cut short his breakfast and hurried down to the air-base. A couple of Indians were loading the last of the furbales into the Junker when he arrived, with Walt Palmer superintending things. Hennessey informed the pilot regarding the passengers he'd have and explained the reason for the move.

"The kid'll die if it stays here, but it may have a chance in the hospital. So you fly it and its mother out, and I'll take the responsibility."

The pilot frowned. "I don't know about that. I've quite a load."

"Sure. But no passengers. And it'll take only the one chair."

Palmer nodded dubiously. "Be tough on a sick kid, though. And an all-day trip. I've got to swing over to McKenzie Mines and pick up the mail. Means I won't get to town before dark."

"Well, dark's better than never. Like I said, the kid has no chance at all here." Hennessey told Palmer to hold things while he went up the village and promised he'd be right back.

And he was; for he found the woman dressed in her Sunday-best and with a birch-bark basket ready. With her husband, he escorted her down to the plane; and in a moment or so the Junker had taken off.

Matthews was there, and when the thunder of the plane was lessened by distance, he took a cigarette from his mouth and said to Hennessey, "Nice smoke. I don't wonder Frenchy liked 'em." And when he extended the cigarette, Hennessey saw it was one of the "Philip Morris" brand.

The corporal looked at him sharply. "Where'd you get it? Around here?"

"From Walt Palmer. He took one for a last smoke himself, so he had to offer the pack to me."

Hennessey shot a glance at the Junker, growing smaller against the western sky.

"Why the devil," he demanded, "didn't you tell me this before?"

Matthews looked at him oddly. "Anything wrong with smoking a Philip Morris cigarette?"

Hennessey thought about it. "No, guess not." He added, "And I guess lots of people smoke 'em."

After a moment or so he spoke again, and it was as though to himself.

"Even if Frenchy did get the odd pack from him, that don't mean a thing. Frenchy bumped into him some place, he was out of smoking—" He paused, squinted thoughtfully. "Some place—up near the Mattagasee—?" Then he broke off, turned, and walked quickly back to the detachment.

There was a large-scale map hanging on the wall. He studied it for some minutes, then crossed to his desk and picked up a file of papers. These were his crime reports, and the one concerning the murder of Joe Gilroy was the uppermost. He dropped into the chair and read again what he had typed for the information of headquarters out in town.

When he got done his fingers were drumming on the desk-top. He chewed at his lip, looked at Matthews without seeing him. Then abruptly he kicked the chair away and returned to the large-scale map on the wall.

WITH a pencil he sketched the canoe-route from Beaver-lodge Lake to Smoothstone. It was an irregular route, edging westerly for a while before it swung southeast again. Then he drew another route, a more direct one; and because it was more direct, it cut through a corner of the Kawakamow Game Preserve. To Matthews, who was looking curiously over his shoulder, he said, "Restricted territory, the Preserve. But if a feller, a feller like old Joe Gilroy, wanted to take the chance and follow the Muskeg River all the way down, he'd save himself a good day of travel. And maybe old Joe did." Then he said, "I'm hunting up those government men. And if I'm not back right away, don't worry."

The government men were late risers, for Hennessey found them at their tent just washing the breakfast dishes. To the older of the two he said, "You guys never told me

what you were in here for, but I hope it's nothing urgent."

The man, and Hennessey now recalled his name as Gibbons, answered with a grin and the information that they were going to take a fish-census of the larger northern lakes.

"Well, could you spare me a couple of hours?" suggested the corporal. "And that means you guys and the plane."

Gibbons gave a shrug but said he might if he knew what it was all about.

So Hennessey told him; at least, told him enough to quicken his interest. And Gibbons turned to his companion.

"There you are, Dave. It's up to you."

Dave, still wearing an Air Force shirt, said it sounded pretty fair to him. "Go ahead!" he told Gibbons. "You straighten up here and I'll look after the kite."

CHAPTER VII

THE ANSWER

SO IT was that within fifteen minutes, Hennessey and Gibbons, with Dave at the controls, took off and held their course straight north. They flew at five thousand feet, and in forty minutes the fast low-winger was approaching the Kawakamow Game Preserve. Hennessey, in the co-pilot's chair, turned to Dave.

"Cut her a bit, and go down as low as you can."

They lost altitude, cut across the windings of the Muskeg River, came at last to a vast bullrush-and-poplar swamp. At Hennessey's direction they zig-zagged across its surface, the floats scarce skimming the water. Now could be seen irregular dyke-like formations and mounds that were ragged with the butts of protruding trees. Hennessey nodded to the pilot. "Yeah; beaver-houses and dams." Then, "Okay. Swing back and land on the river."

Dave understood. He made a couple of passes at the Muskeg and located the bend of it that was closest to the swamp. When he landed and they went ashore, his judgment was proved. Others had been there before them.

There were footprints in the mud, boot-tracks and the imprints of three separate sets of moccasins. Hennessey said the

moccasin tracks represented one good big man and two smaller men. And leading away from there, a clearly defined trail ran through the grass to the swamp.

Here, aloof, isolated and almost forbidding, they saw the place at eye-level. There was rotting vegetation, dead trees. A hawk flapped up and away, and a couple of pelicans wheeled tirelessly. But apart from these the place seemed dead, deserted, as though it belonged to another world.

But on a higher piece of ground in the poplars was a camp-site. There was a spot where a four-width tent had been pitched; and to the rear of this were a number of hoops made of willows that varied from a couple of feet to four feet across.

Tough-faced, Hennessey said, "Stretching-frames. For beaver." And in the ashes of a cooking-fire he turned over a number of charred skulls and bones.

Above all was a foul sickening stench. The wind was east, and the stench came from that direction. Following their noses, Hennessey and the others came on a pile of rotting carcasses.

Some had been mauled and chewed at, some were apart from the rest. Hennessey appraised them. "All beaver," he grunted. "Must have cleaned out the swamp."

They went back to the campsite, where the corporal went over the ground more carefully. There were a couple of old, worn moccasins, tin cans, scraps of paper and a half-burned shirt. In another tin can were a few rusted razor blades. The corporal grunted at the sight of them.

"That'd be the white man. Few Nitchies shave."

And the white man would be Frenchy Fontaine; for one of the crumpled pieces of paper that Hennessey retrieved had printing on it. Spread out, the words read, "*Tabac Canadien*."

Hennessey, hard-faced, turned to the other two. "'Tisn't hard to figure it now. Frenchy and a couple of Nitchies were in here this spring. Probably weren't here long, but they cleaned out the swamp. A plane landed their stuff and flew out their skins. Then, to allay suspicion, Frenchy drifted down to Smoothstone." He spoke to Gibbons. "Remember last night at the poker game him saying that he had money coming? That he was going to have a big

time in Montreal? Well, that's it. His share is waiting for him out in town. And," Hennessey added grimly, "it'll wait!"

After a moment he said, "I've got to get to town myself. And in a hurry. Could I prevail on you boys to go with me that other mile?" He summoned a grin. "It's still government business, y'know."

THEY landed in town at three in the afternoon. At the corporal's suggestion, Dave flew his ship ten miles further down the river, left it there, and came back in a chartered cab. Now, from the air, the river-base was deserted; and when Walt Palmer's Junker landed there just before dark, it had the ramp to itself.

But when full darkness fell, the place was far from deserted. For squatting in the shadows of the pilings were a couple of Mounted Police constables and Pat Hennessey. The Junker had long since been unloaded of its fur, and the Indian mother and her baby whisked away to the hospital. Palmer, too, had locked the door of the plane and could have been gone for the night. But Pat Hennessey was playing a hunch.

But he didn't call it a hunch. To him, it was a matter of certainty. He had gone back over the thing step by step; the chain was complete and he had tested every link in it. The next few hours would tell how correct his theorizing had been.

The first hour went by. It grew a bit cold, down there at the water's edge; but the men had come prepared. A greater hardship was that they couldn't smoke. Another hour went by, and one by one the neons up on the main street went out. Then at a little past midnight, they heard the first tiny sounds.

They were footsteps, cautious but hurrying footsteps coming down the road cut in the river bank that linked the base with the street above. They came closer, sounded a bit muffled as they moved across the thick timbers of the wharf. Long accustomed to the darkness, those in the shadows saw the figure of a man lean over to the water's edge, loosen a skiff and tow it around to the side of the plane.

After that came a moment of silence, then a scratching as the figure appeared and went to work with a key on the ship's door.

Followed a series of creaks, a slithering sound, and the shadowy figure appeared again as he lowered something from the plane to the skiff.

"Now!" snapped Hennessey; and the three men rushed in.

There was a grunt of surprise, a sudden threshing, the sounds of a struggle. At last Hennessey detached himself, reached down into the skiff and dragged up something roped in a canvas tarpaulin. And when he had worked open the tarp and flung the beam of his flashlight downward, he found himself looking at what he expected to find—the blood-caked face of Frenchy Fontaine.

And Walt Palmer was done. Held by the two constables and his wrists handcuffed behind him, he blinked in the flashlight's glare. Hennessey told him, "You shouldn't have squawked so much this morning about flying a sick child to hospital. I knew later what it meant. That you wanted to fly alone so that you could come down some place and dump Frenchy overboard. You probably had him cached away in the tail of your ship, but the woman quered you. So you figured the next best bet was to get rid of him here, tonight. And if it hadn't been for us, you'd have done it."

Palmer's face was pale, bloodstreaked, and a curl of hair fell over his forehead.

"Too bad, Walt," Hennessey told him. "I never thought you'd get down to murder."

Palmer found his voice then, a voice that was savage and harsh. "Murder? Smearing a rat who couldn't keep his face shut?"

"I mean killing old Joe Gilroy," corrected Hennessey.

Palmer stared for a moment, then he passed it off with a sneer.

"What difference does it make? Just another guy who was all mouth. Only he ran squealing to you." He added, as though defensively, "But I didn't mean to kill him. Only when he tried to blackmail me, I let him have it."

"I know," nodded Hennessey. "Everything went wrong with you. It looked so easy at first—just ferry Frenchy into the Preserve, get him to trapping those beaver with the Nitchies, then fly the fur to town and split the proceeds afterwards. But old

Joe came down the Muskeg and through the Preserve and caught Frenchy in there. Then the old coot figured to squeal on Frenchy—"

"Sure," agreed Palmer. "Then Frenchy'd squeal on me. So I try to buy old Joe off—and you know what he wanted? A straight fifty-fifty split, or he'd still go back and squeal. D'you wonder I socked him?"

"Yeah; you socked him," Hennessey agreed.

"He hit his head on the stove going down," Palmer explained. "And I knew there'd be no splitting then. So I had to finish him off." He said it as though in mitigation of his crime.

"Then you were in the soup," offered Hennessey. "Frenchy heard about the killing, talked it over with you, then went out and got pickled." The corporal shrugged. "But old Joe squealed after all. For you didn't quite finish him off. He talked a bit before he went, and when I asked him who slugged him, I thought he said it was a 'partner' and that he'd got it over that Beaver-lodge mineral claim. Only today did I get it. What Joe was trying to tell me was that Palmer—not 'partner'—had slugged him; that the deal was this beaver-poaching racket; and that the 'river' wasn't the Beaver-lodge but the Muskeg."

Hennessey looked at Palmer challengingly, as though waiting for some contradiction of his statements. But when none came, when Palmer's shoulders seemed to sag, the corporal's voice hardened a bit. He had said all he'd wanted to say; it wasn't his nature to gloat over a man. He gave the two constables a nod.

"Run him in and charge him. I'll watch Frenchy till you send the ambulance down."

As they walked off with Palmer, he considered his words. An ambulance for Frenchy. Frenchy—whom he'd last seen in the Hudson's Bay post at Smoothstone; Frenchy, loud, mouthy, cock-a-whoop; Frenchy, heading home to Montreal, on the money he never picked up.

Hennessey looked down at the dim, unmoving bundle at his feet.

"You'll be going home, Frenchy," he said softly. "Home to Montreal. But it won't be the way you figured to go— And there'll be no celebration."



Pirates and Atom Bombs Could Mingle in the Parade of Boats

WHAT COMES NATURALLY

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

JOE OAKLAN worked slowly along crowded Berth 73, avoiding the groups of fishermen's wives and children, the darting, squealing, laughing girls in pirate costumes, the visitors who had come to sail on purse-seiners or to see San Pedro's annual Fishermen's Fiesta. Usually Joe had a cheerful word and a broad smile for everyone he knew. But now his strong and deeply bronzed face was scarcely more festive than Point Vicente on a stormy day. He observed each purse-seiner with a gloomy eye, noting the streamers of colored

pennants, the decorations, and the elaborate floats on the fishing boats.

Coming abreast of the *Sea Victory*, he paused and winced. For Bart Backus had gone to great effort, erecting a replica of an exploding atomic bomb, vividly colored with reds and blues, with a cloud of black smoke reaching almost to the mast.

A heavy hand pummeled Joe and he turned to look into the fat and grinning face of a pirate. Even the layer of brown paint failed to disguise Bart Backus' cocksure countenance under the skull-and-cross-

bones hat. Joe felt his boilers beginning to make steam.

"What do you think, Joe?" Backus asked condescendingly. "Maybe I take the \$500 first prize again, eh?"

"It leaves me cold," Joe said, though secretly impressed.

"Leaves you cold, huh?" Backus demanded with sudden anger. "I tell you in confidence, my friend, that *your* boat stinks."

"I took forty tons of sardines while you were laid up letting a Hollywood decorator foul up your boat," Joe snapped. "If my boat don't smell good, it's because the wind was puffing this morning; the boys didn't dare swing the seine aloft to hose and blue-stone it proper."

"You've got no fiesta spirit! Visitors can't board your boat without holding their noses. Your only decorations are a string of pennants. And your men are hiding in the galley, they look so silly. When the judges look through marine glasses at your boat and see Sam Savage with a wig of yellow curls and a black mustache, and a bunch of mermaids with two days' growth of beard, you won't get no prize."

JOE felt his pressure rising, as it always did with Bart Backus. He'd never forgotten the time Backus salvaged a ship's whistle from a derelict and sounded a shrill blast one black night when Joe was about to "set" his seine. Thinking a steamship had blundered off her course, Joe had fled, only to learn later that Backus made a set on the same school and took 135 tons of sardines. And another time, when the skiff turned over with a heavy seine of fish and Joe went to the hospital with a sprained back, Backus signed on three of Joe's best fishermen by telling them their skipper was permanently crippled and was selling his boat. Joe had many such scores to settle with the plump skipper of the *Sea Victory*, and it always rankled that these scores remained unsettled simply because he was unwilling to use Bart Backus' underhanded methods.

"My crew represents Neptune and his court," Joe cried hotly. "My boat has as good a chance of taking a prize as yours!"

"That's real interesting," said Backus dryly. "If you're not just flapping your fins to make a noise, why don't we make a little

bet? Say, a thousand dollars that you'll take a better prize than I do?"

The crowd that had collected, as well as Joe's intense dislike of Backus, warped his judgment. "You're on," Joe said thickly, regretting his rashness the moment he spoke.

As he started away, the crowd dispersed. A glitter on the *Sea Victory* caught Joe's eye. He turned and his jaw dropped. Six beautiful blonde girls in dazzling silver costumes were taking their places on cushions beside the replica of the exploding bomb. Joe swung around, choking with wrath. He caught Backus' plump arm as his enemy reached the wharf guard-block.

Joe pointed a shaking finger at the girls. "*Those!*" he cried hoarsely. "Where'd you get them? You know the rules! Anyone in floats or in costume has to be either a fisherman or a member of a fisherman's family!"

Backus laughed until he had to hold his sides. Wiping his eyes, he said, "I know the rules, Joe, and I'm complying."

Joe looked at the girls again, his eyes growing hot. "The hell you are! They're actresses!"

"That's right," Backus blandly agreed. "Hollywood starlets. By a curious coincidence, each of those 'atomic blondes' has a cousin, brother or father in my crew."

Joe peered at a knot of six men in business and sports suits who stood, awkward and ill at ease, on the afterdeck of the *Sea Victory*.

"You signed on a relative of each of those actresses' for a single night's fishing!" he guessed, his voice strained with emotion.

"Well, that qualifies the girls," Backus said smoothly. "I got checks proving I paid their relatives their share of my last catch. Why blame me if there are loopholes in the rules?"

"You tricked me into that bet!" Joe blazed, starting toward Backus.

But as his fist swung for the other skipper's chin, he was seized from behind by four of the *Sea Victory's* brawny fishermen. Backus hastily swung down the rigging, dropped heavily to the deck of his boat, and waddled up the raised forward deck. At the wheelhouse he paused, flushed by triumphant, and shouted, "A bet's a bet, Oakland. And remember: I got witnesses!"

Joe wrenched away from the men, and

stormed along the wharf toward his boat. Approaching the *Sun Downer*, however, he saw that his troubles were just beginning. A group of fishermen's wives and daughters and children stood beside the boat; they seemed to be in an unpleasant humor.

Joe quickly jerked down the visor of his cap and tried to slip into the crowd. But his engineer's wife spied him.

"Mr. Oaklan," she cried sternly, "I want to talk to you!"

Pretending not to hear, Joe quickened his stride, moving now toward the *Sun Downer*. He reached the rigging a step ahead of the irate woman, dropped to deck, and sprang through the galley door.

THE doleful crew at the table made Joe think of his thousand-dollar bet and he shuddered. Sam Savage, a large and powerfully built fisherman with a spectacular black mustache, looked ridiculous enough with a cigar clamped between tight lips and his wig of long, yellow hair twisted askew on his round, bald head. But the miserable fishermen costumed in strips of green cloth and wigs of straggly green hemp looked worse. They wouldn't deceive even a near-sighted judge into believing they were mermaids! Their bristling growth of beards, and their stocky, hairy legs made Joe realize that the whole idea was lamentable.

"Never felt so silly in my life," Victor Mellow exploded when he saw Joe. "Our wives and daughters want to come aboard. Maybe if they'd wear these rigs, we could make a deal."

"I don't want women aboard," Joe snapped. "I made arrangements for your families to sail on the *Yankee Clipper*."

"Our wives say they got a right to sail one day a year on our boat," Sam Savage growled.

"Women are bad luck on a boat," said Joe.

"That superstition went out before you were born," said George Gallum, the red-haired and lanky helmsman.

"What do you mean—*superstition*?" Joe demanded. "I took your wives on my boat last year, and I had nothing but bad luck! Some of your wives called all their friends on ship-to-shore radio. I had a whale of a bill! And also a terrible time squaring things with the authorities because they

didn't sign off right with the marine operator."

"That's no reason for keeping our kids off the boat," Victor Mello said. "It would give my daughter a kick to wear this costume."

"Your kids can't come aboard," Joe said firmly. "Last year they turned over the coffee pot, mixed sugar and salt, cut off pieces of seine net for souvenirs, pulled mattresses out on deck and lost several overboard. And one kid tried to make the automatic pilot work by pounding it with a wrench—and what a bill I had to pay! Your kids need training!" He snorted as he recalled the incident. "We've had a poor season, and now that sardines are running again, I want to keep things simple this year so the boat will be in shape to fish again after the full moon. That's final!"

Joe left the grumbling men and went forward. He stared bleakly from the wheelhouse window, scarcely aware of the crowd on the dock. He was thinking of the way Bart Backus had signed on the relatives of Hollywood starlets so the actresses would qualify as members of a fisherman's family. And the more he thought of that trick, and the thousand dollars he would have to pay because of it, the more angry he became.

THE boat parade was to start at ten. But it was an hour later before the purse-seiners began to foam astern and turn in the narrow space between the wharves. Dozens of boats were maneuvering at once, each falling into her position in the line. Awaiting his turn, Joe watched the boats gliding by. Even in his black mood, he was aware that it was colorful.

Most of the boats were crowded with fishermen's families and visitors. On the huge turntables overhanging the sterns of the boats were piled layers of seine, and resting on these mounds were the large skiffs used to support the outer edge after a net was "set." Many of these skiffs were crowded with fishermen's daughters wearing pastel dresses or modified pirate costumes. Some had already taken their positions in tableaux depicting early California history or nautical scenes. Davy Jones' locker was portrayed several times, as were also tableaux with pirate treasure chests and atomic bombs. None of the latter, however,

were quite as elaborate as Bart Backus' float.

As the *Big Dipper* slipped past, Joe swung in behind her. Bringing the *Sun Downer* into line, he passed the *Sea Victory* turning to take her position astern. Joe's eyes hardened at seeing the pretty "atomic blondes" sitting beside the representation of the exploding bomb. His stomach muscles tightened with anger when Backus, at the outside control, grinned and waved.

Presently the line of boats left the wharves and warehouses behind and turned in open water. It was an opalescent day, the silvery sheen of mist giving the shoreline buildings and houses a fantasy quality of unreality. The wind of early morning had died.

But the glistening water, the soft, balmy air was in sharp contrast to Joe Oaklan's black humor. Deserted even by his helmsman, he cruised past Cabrillo Beach, went up the main channel to the turning basin, and was returning in the channel to the outer harbor before George Gallum at last came to relieve him. Gallum's mermaid costume hung limply on his loose, lanky frame.

"Where is Neptune and his court?" Joe snapped. "They should be topside where the judges can see them."

"Other folks could see 'em, too," George retorted sourly. "They're afraid they might be recognized."

"You don't look too bad, George," Joe said, without conviction.

Gallum's eyes blazed. "Then why don't you wear this dog-blasted bunch of phony seaweed?" He pushed back his green wig, glaring at the skipper. "You not only make us look ridiculous, and won't let our families sail on this worm-eaten packet! But when we get back, instead of going to a fish fry like everyone else, we got to hose and bluestone the seine. I tell you, Joe, the boys in the galley is in an ugly mood! They wonder whether mutiny is really so old-fashioned."

"We're fishin' on shares. It's as much to their interest as mine that we keep the boat in shape to fish after full moon. And we sure lost time last year." Joe paused. "I'll go below and talk to the boys."

"You'd be smart not to, unless you've had rabies shots. You ain't exactly the most popular guy on this seiner today, Skipper."

Joe thought about that. Thought about the men's ill humor at hosing and blueston-

ing the net while other fishermen were at the fiesta.

He stood deliberating for many minutes before an idea came to him. *Who were the judges? What did they know about purse-seiners?* For the first time that day, Joe's wide mouth puckered with the suggestion of his usual cheerful smile.

Well, why not? he reflected. *What have I to lose?*

THE man's expressions, when Joe entered the galley, were distinctly on the acid side. Big Sam Savage's black expression, however, wasn't entirely due to his mood. His cigar had apparently set his wig on fire, for it was frizzled and charred, and he was drenched as if water had been used liberally to put out the blaze.

"Listen, boys," Joe said. "My idea of keeping things simple this year wasn't so hot. After looking over other boats, I see my Neptune idea has too much competition from other boats doing the same thing, only better."

"You're coming to your senses, Skipper," Sam Savage said bitterly. "We couldn't win a prize at a blind-man's outing."

"I know," Joe said. "Since we aren't likely to get a prize, we might as well hose and bluestone our net during the parade. Then you boys can get in on the fish fry and the rest of the fiesta when we tie up."

Joe had never seen such a change in a group of faces. Several men almost smiled.

"Now you're talking," Victor Mello said. "We can cast off these rigs?"

"Sure," Joe said genially.

They fell to with a will. The large skiff was raised with the winch, and went rasping over the stern roller of the turntable. It was made fast, pitching in their wake. Then the men began working on the fifteen hundred feet of seine. It was hoisted, a length at a time, until it rested forward of the turntable, partly on the hatches. Next it was heaved up, section by section, with the winch, and thoroughly washed with fresh water. Eight men standing in a row at the stern of the turntable flattened the net as it was lowered. Another man with a wet sack dripped bluestone solution over the seine as each layer was flattened out. The bluestone would prevent the net from moulding during the five days the boat was laid up.

The men were still busily engaged when the boat approached the Rainbow Pier at Long Beach. The line of boats made a turn to pass the crowded pier a second time, and the *Sun Downer* had just completed her turn when a luxurious yacht glided alongside. Men on her afterdeck turned marine glasses on the *Sun Downer*, but her crew were too fully occupied handling the net as it was raised aloft and lowered to notice the pleasure boat. Joe held his breath as the yacht began circling his boat. He saw a movie-cameraman grinding away. The yacht circled Joe's boat a second, a third time.

Then it sped along the line. It slowed just perceptibly passing the *Sea Victory*, but it did not circle her. Joe noticed with surprise that the Hollywood starlets had disappeared.

The last of the seine was stowed in neat layers on the turntable by the time the *Sun Downer* drew near her mooring. There was a slight delay while the large skiff was brought aboard and lowered onto the net. Then she was warped up to the wharf.

A large, distinguished-looking man with a ruddy face and a pearl-gray Honiberg hat set squarely on his white head stepped cautiously aboard the boat and smilingly asked for the skipper. He came forward and gripped Joe's hand.

"I'm Herbert T. Stackpoll, chairman of the awards in the boat parade. I'm happy to inform you that your boat took the \$500 first prize. The judges were very much interested to see how a purse-seiner handles her net. None of us had ever had a chance to see that before."

Joe suppressed a grin. "Thought that might be the case. Did the *Sea Victory* get a prize?"

"No. But it was the best of the atomic displays. Might have won tenth prize if it had had some girls or something to go with it. But there were too many atomic-bomb tableaux, too many Neptunes, too many pirates. Your boat had the most originality. You were *doing* something!"

Joe, seeing the men about to leave, shouted, "We took first, boys! I'm splitting the prize. Come to about forty dollars for each of us."

Sam Savage's eyes widened. "What'd we get a prize for?"

"Originality," Joe shouted, laughing.

"Hell, we wasn't original!" Savage said, grinning. "We was just doing what comes naturally."

"I like that attitude," said Stackpoll gravely, when Savage disappeared into the crowd. "He worked hard during the parade, when fishermen on other boats were taking it easy. But no complaint at all. You'll be at the stand at five to receive your prize?"

"I'll be there," Joe promised; and went ashore with Stackpoll.

He shook hands with the judge on the wharf, and walked rapidly through the crowd, boarding the *Sea Victory*. No one was on deck, but he found Bart Backus in his cabin. He glared at Joe with bitter eyes.

"I won first prize," Joe said, grinning. "Pay me, Backus! Remember: you have witnesses."

"I'm damned if I will! That dirty trick of yours cost me first prize!"

"What trick?" Joe asked.

"Heaving your net up and down! Those Hollywood dames watched it and thought my boat was pitching. It made 'em so seasick they had to go below just before the judges came by."

"Why, you said they were members of fishermen's families." With great effort, Joe managed to keep a straight face. "Fishermen's daughters shouldn't get sick that easy."

Backus' face got purple. "You know damned well that was just a gag!" he roared. "Most of 'em probably never seen a real boat before!"

"Well, if it's a gag, it works both ways. Your crew isn't here this time to help you. And I'm not wasting time talking. Come on, pay up!"

Backus started to protest, and then hesitated, watching Joe's hands slowly clench. He swallowed several times. Then, sullenly he withdrew his wallet, counted out ten one-hundred-dollar notes, and handed them with poor grace to Joe.

"Thanks, Backus," Joe said, and laughed. "If it wasn't for past scores, I'd feel badly, taking this. It's almost worth a thousand bucks to see your happy expression."

Backus tried to answer, but he was so mad he could only sputter.

MEN who wouldn't DIE!

by George C. Appell

Old Sword

AN OLD sword is best, they say; and Nana, the Apache sub-chief, was old. Eighty or more, and racked with rheumatism.. So when Victorio, his leader, was killed, the old sword slipped into New Mexico with fifteen followers and commenced a ride of revenge that smeared that July of 1881 like a red brush. He struck *rancherias*, pack trains, outposts, trapping camps and stage lines. And always he melted away into the canyons with a derisive shout. The Army reports that its entire available establishment—eight troops of cavalry, eight companies of infantry, two companies of Indian scouts and hundreds of civilians—were after Nana and his thinning band of riders. Yet the old man, rheumatic and bent, rode for weeks, for hundreds of miles, and always got away. Cavalry tactics state that the limit for continuous overland marching is twenty-five miles a day. The soldiers chasing Nana rode forty. Nana made fifty and more.

Carrying spit-pebbles under their tongues, living off the land, swapping horses at burned *rancherias*, the little band galloped through, around, behind and over the United States Army and its prestige.

The ailing octogenarian rang up a record on that raid that stands still as a monument to irregular warfare: eight battles fought with the Army, eight battles won; attempted to kill thirty-plus pursuers, killed fifty-one; captured more than two hundred horses and mules; burned out and destroyed a score of posts and ranches; laughed at and rode away from almost two thousand pursuers. All this with one weapon apiece, no carried rations or water, and never any strength in excess of forty warriors.

The old sword melted back into Mexico, having proved that he was best.

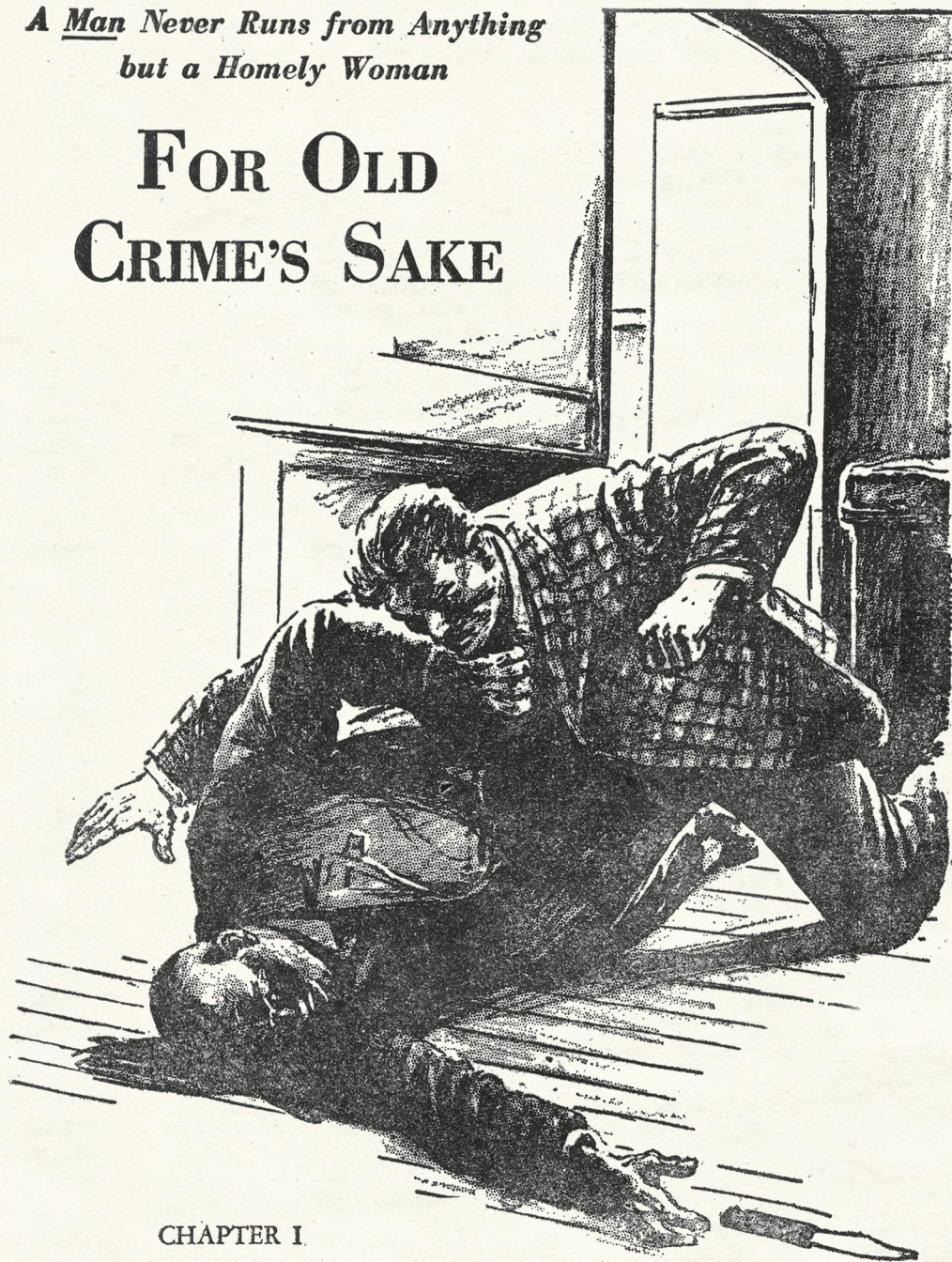


HUMISTON



*A Man Never Runs from Anything
but a Homely Woman*

FOR OLD CRIME'S SAKE



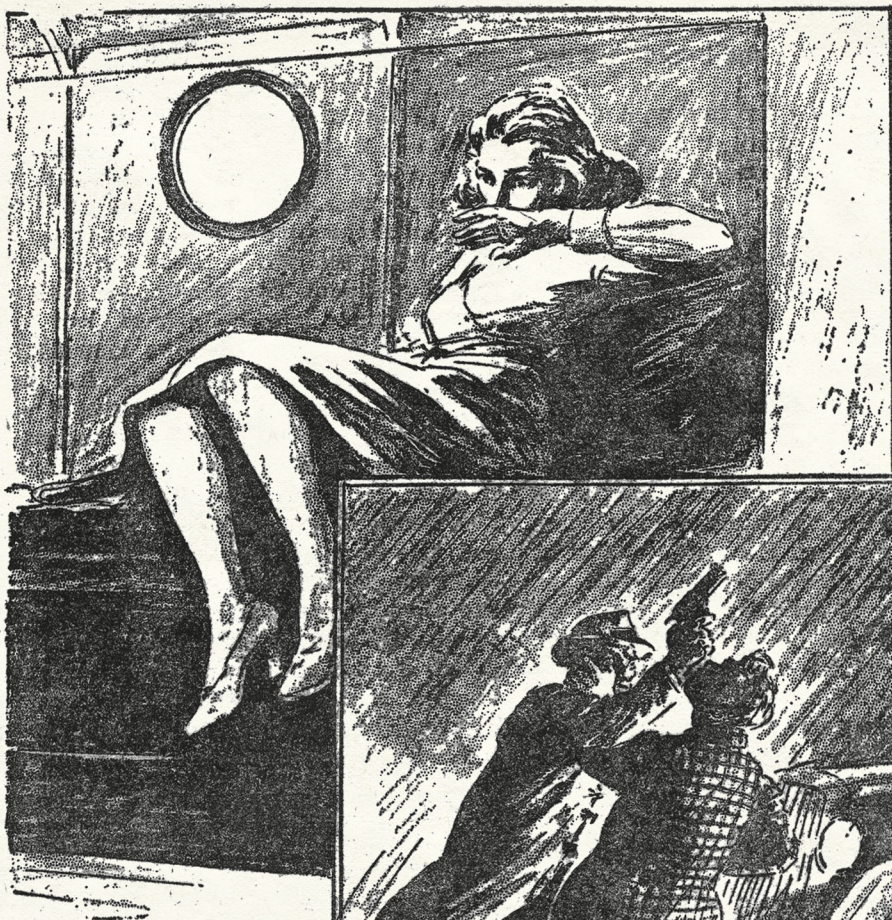
CHAPTER I

DEAD OR MISSING

THE trouble in Fawnskin happened on a Friday night. The tourist season had officially closed two weeks before. The slot machines had highjacked their last nickel, dime and quarter for another year. Prices were reluctantly return-

ing to normal. The gift shops and the dance pavilion had been boarded up. A cold, gray rain was driving from the North with prospects of more to come.

Only a few diehards stayed on at the Inn. Among them were the red-faced, flashily dressed man and the chain-smoking blonde who was registered as his wife. Their name,



By
DAY KEENE



according to the register, was Smith. They had been in Fawnskin for a month, although why such a couple should have chosen such a small, out-of-the-way, mountain resort had been a thirty-day wonder. Both man and woman would have been much more at home in Glitter Canyon in Los Vegas or lolling on the beach of some swank seaside resort.

Neither liked the mountains or the big trees. Neither liked to ride, or hike, or fish. Both spent most of their time in the Antler bar complaining of the meals and the service. True, on several occasions, Smith did poke around the shaft heads of several of the old gold mines with which the moun-

tains were studded, but on each occasion returned to the Antler bar complaining of the roughness of the trails, the heat, the mosquitoes, and the silence.

On the last of these unenjoyed trips he complained to Connie the barman, A guy would have to be nuts to live in this kind of country. If you could scoop up gold nuggets with a shovel, I wouldn't give you a dime for ten thousand acres of it.

The blonde never left the Inn. Rising late in mid-morning she ate her breakfast at noon and spent the rest of the day in the bar either playing the slot machines or reading movie and true confession magazines. She reminded Connie of a Tom Collins.

She was tall, and cold, and habitually filled with gin.

Both were liberally supplied with money. She had the usual wedding and engagement ring. Smith wore a diamond the size of a dime on his right hand. He was reputed to be a race-track tout, a gambler, the owner of a chain of movie theatres, a gunman hiding from the law.

THE seed of what was to mature was planted shortly after two o'clock on Friday afternoon. At that time, acting under orders, Clyde Barrows, the youthful, good-looking desk clerk, was checking the condition of the shutters on the windows of all rooms in the Inn, preparatory to it being closed for the winter. His story was that he knocked on the door of the Smith suite, got no response, and assuming they were both in the bar as usual, opened the door with his pass key and was examining the shutters when Mrs. Smith stepped out of the bathroom in an extremely embarrassing state of nudity. His story continued that, apologizing as best he could, he left the suite immediately.

On this point their stories varied greatly. The known facts of the case were these. A few minutes after two, still barefooted, stopping only to snatch up a negligee that revealed as much as it concealed, and trailing an aroma of gin, the blonde stormed into the bar and up to Smith insisting he "beat the hell out of that nasty little English desk clerk who has been making eyes and pawing at me behind your back ever since we've been in this God-forsaken hole."

Her story continued that using his pass key, Barrows had entered their suite and finding her alone tried to force his attentions on her.

It was all very sordid and unpleasant. Smith, followed by his wife, stormed into Mack Ogilvey's office and raised hell. Ogilvey, the manager and owner of the Inn, sent for Barrows. The youth no sooner entered the office than Smith leaped from his chair and punched him in the face. Barrows, taken by surprise, fought back, and before Ogilvey, Connie, and Sally Dale, one of the dining-room waitresses, could separate them, considerable damage had been done on both sides.

Almost hysterical now, also slightly high,

the blonde screamed her story again. Barrows promptly denied it and gave his version of the affair which was as promptly labeled "a damn' lie" by Smith, who, flashing a wad of bills as thick as a man's fist, declared someone should have examined his head before he came to such a crummy joint, that he had the money to pay for the best, that they should have gone to Lake Tahoe as they had originally planned, and that unless Ogilvey fired Barrows immediately he would spend every dime he had putting "such a stink on this joint that it will never do another dime's worth of business."

Ogilvey had little or no choice. An inn lives on the good will of its patrons. It was Barrows' first season at the Inn. He had arrived in Fawnskin that spring and had promptly been lionized by Mary Fields and the local social set because he "looked so distinguished," spoke with an Oxford drawl, and his once expensive but battered luggage was labeled with foreign hotel stickers. The swank set as promptly dropped him when it learned that he had no money and had applied for and accepted the position of desk clerk at the Inn. A youth in his middle twenties, he ate his meals at the Inn and slept in a box of a cabin in the woods built by some long dead miner. He seldom associated with the other employees. He was known to be close as regarding money, never spending a penny he didn't have to. His only near intimate was Sally Dale. She liked him. She insisted he wasn't snooty, he was shy.

The upshot of the scene was that Ogilvey paid off Barrows and fired him on the spot. But he also requested that the Smiths leave, giving the truth as his excuse, that he intended closing the Inn for the season.

And that was all right with the Smiths. Smith repeated he should have had his head examined to have come to such a joint in the first place and he and the blonde, somewhat more substantially dressed, spent the balance of the day in the bar drinking heavily and telling the story of the alleged attempted assault to all who would listen to it.

At six o'clock that evening he ordered his big car sent around, had their baggage brought to the lobby, and paid their bill from the same large wad of cash he had displayed in the office. They left shortly

before seven in a cold, gray, blinding rain that at times completely obscured the tortuous mountain road. Of such was the warp and woof of murder. The blonde, dripping blood from a nasty head wound, was to stagger into Sheriff Dale's office some hours later. But Smith was never seen, alive, again.

THE storm increased with the hour. Nine o'clock found the rain falling in torrents. It also found Sheriff Matt Dale standing in the doorway of his office beating time with his peg to the dance band on his radio while he drank in the storm. If there was murder in the air he failed to smell it. The pelt of the rain on the roof sounded good. He was glad the season was over. He liked people to have a good time. He liked to have a good time himself. He saw nothing wrong in making love to a girl, having a few drinks, or playing a friendly hand of poker.

But some of the summer people carried the thing too far, like the couple Sally had told him about at supper.

He doubted that Clyde had acted as the woman had claimed. Dale knew the clerk slightly and liked him. He wondered what he would do now that his job was gone. Go down hill most likely to Sacramento or San Francisco. Fawnskin had a few jobs for "gentlemen" out of season.

Across the way Jim Thurber locked his gas pumps for the night and waving as he passed the office chugged down the rain-swept road to his small ranch on the outskirts of town. The lights in the Elite and the Palace cafes winked out. Mary Fields and a car filled with laughing young folks, driving too fast, sloshed by on their way to the last dance of the season at the country club and Dale knew a moment of resentment.

Sally was every bit as pretty as Mary Fields. She should be going to the dance wearing the new formal she had purchased so hopefully. But he and Sally didn't "belong."

He was only a county sheriff and Sally waited table at the Inn. It was Sheriff Dale this and Sheriff Dale that when the upper crust of Fawnskin wanted something from him. But at all other times he was just Peg Dale a former ranchhand buck-

aroo and bronc buster who had been foolish enough to get in the way of a Jap mortar shell at Guadalcanal.

It was the country folks and ranchers who had elected him, the elite of Fawnskin insisting a one-legged man wasn't capable of being sheriff. But Dale had confounded his critics. He had proven in the two years he had been sheriff that a determined man could move faster and cover more ground on one sound and one peg leg than most men could on two sound limbs.

A big man with a hearty laugh he had discarded the expensive artificial leg with which he had been discharged almost immediately on returning to Fawnskin. A prosthesis, he insisted, was fine for a city man but a peg was the only thing for a man who had to travel rugged terrain.

Now, yawning, unaware a by-product of murder was chugging back up the hill in Jim Thurber's Model A, he wished Sally would return from consoling Clyde so he could lock up and go home. Almost as he wished it his Ford materialized through the rain and Sally, parking in front of the office, rolled down the window to yell at him:

"Clyde isn't at his cabin. You haven't seen him in town, have you?"

Dale said he had not and rain glistening on her curls, Sally joined him in the office. "I'm worried," she admitted frankly. "No one has seen him since that thing happened this afternoon. And he felt like hell about losing his job."

She had to yell to make herself heard above the pelt of the rain on the roof.

Getting into his slicker, the youthful sheriff shrugged. "So he lost his job. So what? He'll get another job, if not here in Fawnskin then in Sacramento or Frisco."

"That," his sister admitted frankly, "is just what I'm afraid of. Can't you get it through your thick head that I have designs on him?"

He grinned. "There's to be a Englishman in the family, eh?"

She said, "If I have anything to do with it."

And then it happened. The rain stopped abruptly as if on cue. Jim Thurber's Model A slithered up to the office and sobbing broken-heartedly, her expensive traveling suit sodden with rain, her fingers stripped of her rings, clotted blood staining her hair,

Mrs. Smith staggered into the office and sank sobbing in a chair.

His eyes as bright with excitement as the raindrops on his slicker, the gas station man who had followed her in told Dale, "I picked her up like that 'bout two miles out of town, Sheriff. But there wasn't no sign of her husband and she has been crying too hard to tell me what happened. Must have been an accident or something. They stopped for gas before they started down the hill and he was that high I says to myself, 'He'll never make it on a night like this.'"

Words began to grope their way through the blonde's hysterical sobbing. "It—wasn't an accident. He stopped us at the bridge. There was a barricade and he was waiting with a gun."

Sheriff Dale and Thurber looked at each other. There was only one bridge on the road. It wasn't properly a bridge. It was a storm culvert about six miles out of town.

The blonde continued, sobbing, "I walked and walked and walked but no one came along. It was dark in the woods, and wet."

Sheriff Dale knelt beside her. "Look, lady."

"Her name is Smith," his sister told him.

Dale tried again. "Look, Mrs. Smith. Get ahold of yourself if you can. If something has happened to your husband the sooner you tell me about it the sooner I can help him. My name is Dale. I'm the sheriff."

She wailed, hysterically, "John's dead. He shot him and put him in a car."

DALE asked Thurber to hand him the bottle of whiskey in the right hand drawer of his desk and poured a water tumbler half full. The blonde gulped it gratefully. Then, somewhat more composed, she told her story.

Because of the storm her husband had driven slowly. Some miles out of town the headlights had picked up a road barricade their side of a small bridge. Assuming the bridge had washed out, her husband had stopped his car and was rolling down the window in an attempt to see if the shoulder was hard enough to turn around on when a man appeared out of the rain, yanked the car door open, shot her husband twice through the head and slugged her with the barrel of the gun.

Half conscious she felt her rings being stripped from her fingers, saw her husband's body loaded into another car. Then the man had returned for her. Only terror had given her sufficient strength to tear herself free and run blindly into the woods. He had searched for her for what seemed like hours. Then, hearing his car drive away, she had stumbled up the road toward Fawnskin to the point where Mr. Thurber had picked her up.

Her lips dry, Sally asked her, "And this man who shot your husband? You recognized him?"

The blonde held out the glass for more whiskey. "I certainly did. He was that nasty little English desk clerk who broke into my room this afternoon."

CHAPTER II

FANTASTIC STORY

HE WAS cold. He was wet. The air was close and stale. His mouth felt furred. He was lying on his back on something soft but every muscle in his body ached. The old fear of being buried alive again suddenly gnawing at his stomach, Clyde Barrows reached out in the dark and his groping fingers encountered smooth cold glass and metal.

It had happened, just as he had dreamed so often that it would after the affair on the desert. Only then an exploding shell had buried him in sand. Now he was in a glass and metal casket with rain beating on the ground above his grave.

He sat up in terror, smacked his head smartly against the steering wheel of his coupe and realized where he was. But how he had got there was an entirely different matter. He shouldn't be in his car. He should be in his cabin writing a note to Sally.

The pain of the blow clearing his head slightly he rolled down the window by the wheel and sucked in great lungs full of wet air. His car was parked in an unfamiliar clearing. Great pines rose sheer on every side. The drumming of the rain on the roof of the coupe was deafening. He hadn't the least idea where he was. He wished he had a drink, or perhaps a spot of tea.

Tea. That was it. After the scene at the hotel he had gone to the cabin to make a

cup of tea and write a note to Sally, asking her to wait, telling her all the things he was too shy to tell her in person. He had intended to begin it, "Dearest Sally." He remembered wondering if she might consider the salutation too familiar. Then—then what had happened?

He remembered putting a kettle to boil and dropping a tea bag in a cup. His tea made, he had drunk it and opened his traveling bag to get his stationery.

And that was the last he remembered. Now he was in his car parked in the rain in an unfamiliar clearing. He wondered if his mind had snapped. Then he thought of his wallet. The wallet was still in his pocket and as far as he could ascertain by the feeble lights on the dashboard the three hundred and forty dollars he had saved was still intact. He returned it to his pocket with relief.

"Go out. Be a man. Carve a fortune for yourself," the governor had told him. "It's fun to make it yourself. I did."

Well, he had a three hundred dollar start. When he had a hundred pound stake he would look for some business in which to invest it. Meanwhile he was gaining valuable information, learning American ways. He liked them. He liked America. He liked Sally. He hoped for nothing better than to marry her some day and live happily ever after on the profits of a chain of hotels or filling stations.

But that didn't explain where he was or how he had got there. The whole thing was as mysterious as the affair with the brazen blonde. His lips curled with contempt as he thought of her. Attempt to assault her, indeed. If she were the last woman on the earth and he the last man he wouldn't bid her a civil good morning. Flossie the barmaid at the White Anchor in Limehouse was far better looking and far better shaped. In the brief glance that he'd had of her before he could avert his eyes and leave the room he could see she was built like a bean pole.

He felt the lips that Mr. Smith had punched. They were still tender to the touch. A ghastly affair, the whole of it. It simply failed to make sense. Smith was a bounder; his wife was a liar and a tramp. Still, he didn't blame Mr. Ogilvey. There had been little else the Inn owner could do. This

wasn't France. This wasn't Italy. This wasn't England. This was the United States. And in the United States the customer was always right. It was a point to remember when he owned an Inn of his own.

If only he knew where he was and how he had come there. Wondering if his mind had snapped, he stepped out into the rain and the cold downpour cleared the last of the fog from his head. He recognized the clearing vaguely as one in which he and Sally had parked. If that was true, he was below Fawnskin on a side road leading back into the mountains. The main highway was half a mile distant. The thing for him to do was to drive back to his cabin and the Inn and find out what had happened. If his mind had snapped, if he was insane, he needed medical or psychiatric attention.

HE GOT back into the car and noted with surprise that his luggage was neatly stacked on the ledge behind the seat. He was obviously packed and ready to leave. Well, why not? He could write Sally from San Francisco. He would feel like an utter fool trying to explain that he had lost—how many hours out of his life? He consulted his watch and saw it was after ten. He returned the watch to his pocket with fingers that shook slightly. It had been approximately two-thirty when Mr. Ogilvey had discharged him and paid him off. It couldn't have been later than three when he had reached his cabin. Now it was after ten. He had seven unexplained hours to account for.

A nasty business, this. God knew what had happened during those lost hours. A familiar smell in the car intrigued him. He traced it to the web of his right hand. He had fired a faulty gun, and recently. There was an unmistakable smell of spent powder and flecks of powder were still embedded in the flesh of his hand.

He could feel his stomach turn over slowly. *What if he had harmed some one?* He had been angry enough with Mr. Smith to kill him. The short hairs on his neck stood on end as he thought:

"Perhaps I have."

He opened the traveling bag he didn't remember packing and felt under his shirts for his service .455 Webley. The Webley was gone but a cheap, nicked gun, that well

might be faulty, replaced it. Barrows sniffed expertly at the barrel. The cylinder was filled but the gun had been fired recently, within the last hour he would say.

That dished it in his mind. Something was radically wrong. He had done something to someone or someone was doing something to him.

"Be a man. Face it," the governor would say. "A man never runs from anything but a homely woman."

More puzzled than frightened he started his car and drove the half mile to the highway. About to turn uphill to Fawnskin he braked abruptly as a huge colored man, his face contorted with anger, stepped into the beam of his headlights and waved him down.

"Non, non, monsieur," he spat in excited French. "It is not permit you return." Then, as if suddenly realizing he had said too much, he fumbled a heavy automatic from the pocket of his slicker and pantomimed to Barrows to turn his car around. "Avant!"

"Now," Barrows thought, "I know I'm mad. I'm out of my bloody mind. I've ripped my top."

The man looked like a Senegalese. He talked like a Senegalese. But there were no Senegalese in the mountains of California. At least there hadn't been when Barrows had gone to school. The whole thing was a game, a put-up job of some kind. Someone was pulling his leg.

Angered because he didn't turn the car as ordered, the big colored man poked the automatic into the open car window and again pantomimed for him to turn the car around. "Avant!"

"The deuce you say," Barrows said.

He attempted to brush the gun aside and it exploded in his face, the heavy slugs smashing the glass out of the other window of the coupe. Then, cursing Barrows savagely in French the other man who, for some reason, seemed hesitant to shoot, dragged the former desk clerk from his car and slugged him brutally about the head.

It wasn't a game. It wasn't a put-up job. No one was pulling his leg. Whatever was behind it, this thing was for keeps. Groggy from the blows, Barrows retaliated by scraping one heel down the other man's shin then, whirling, snapped the side of his hand to the Senegalese's thorax with suffi-

cient force to stagger him and send the gun spinning from his hand.

Cursing, gagging for breath, the big colored man closed the gap between them again and wrapping his cable-like arms arounds Barrows' back attempted to wrestle him to the ground.

Barrows promptly put a knee where it would do the most good. Screaming with pain the other man released him and staggered back. This time it was Barrows who closed the gap. Following through, he smashed a hard left to the pit of his assailant's stomach to double him into position, then wrapped him smartly just over the kidneys.

He didn't like dirty fighting. He never had. But one didn't last long in the commandos without knowing all of the tricks. Writhing and moaning with pain the big Senegalese sank to the side of the road and Barrows reached into the car for the cheap, nickled, revolver. It was a mistake on his part. His back was turned less than a second but when he turned back again the man who had attacked him was gone—vanished into the rain and the night as if by magic. There was no sound but the pelt of the rain and the gush of the accumulated water as it rushed down the road.

Panting slightly as he leaned against his car it was difficult to make the scene come alive again, difficult not to believe he had imagined the attack. When he remembered to look for it even the automatic was gone and the rain had obliterated its outline from the mud where it had lain.

Getting back in his car he drove on slowly toward Fawnskin. The attack didn't make sense. The whole day hadn't made sense, starting from the moment the bean pole of a blonde had accused him of assaulting her.

DESPITE the hour and the pouring rain the walk and street outside of Sally's brother's office was black with grim-faced men in slickers, gay with girls and women in brightly colored raincoats. Dozens of cars were parked at the curb. Through the brightly lighted window Barrows could see Sheriff Dale passing out rifles and shotguns. Decidedly something had happened.

He wondered if the Senegalese had attacked some other car, then thought of his

own lost hours, the cheap revolver, and the powder flecks on his hand and winced. But whatever he'd done, if he had done anything, he'd have to face it. The only proper thing for him to do was talk to Sheriff Dale and tell him the whole story.

He drove on past the office unnoticed, swung the car in a wide U-turn and drove on back again in search of a place to park, only to have an armed man in a glistening slicker peer in the shattered window of the car, level a rifle on him and order him to stop.

"By Gad. By Gad!" he swore. "Going to pull right on through town as bold as brass, were you?" He raised his voice in an exultant shout. "Hey, fellows. Here he is. I've got Barrows. I'm holding a gun on him."

A dozen men surrounded the coupe immediately, rifles bristling in their hands. "Come on. Get out of there, you dirty killer," Thurber the gas station man ordered. "I gave you credit for better sense. I thought you'd be holed-up in the hills or half way to Frisco by now."

Eager hands dragged him from the car. He attempted to speak and a dozen fists pummeled him silent. He started to fight back, thought better of it. Resistance would only inflame them the more. Besides he wanted to get to the bottom of this as badly as they did.

Mary Fields, her auburn curl neat and trim under her translucent rainhood, stepped out of the doorway of the sheriff's office to allow the men to drag Barrows in. "Yah, yah, you four-flushing Cockney," she shrieked. "Pose as a traveled Englishman, would you? The only Oxford you ever went to was in a shoe store."

Barrows didn't bother to answer her. All he had eyes for was Sally, Sally crying in her brother's arms. His heart sank as she refused to look at him. He must have done something frightfully bad during his lost seven hours.

His peg thumping solidly as he crossed the office, Dale ordered the men holding Barrows to release him and stand back. "A sheriff's posse was just about to start out after you," he said coldly. "What's the matter, Barrows? Why did you come back? Forget something?"

"No," Barrows said clippedly. He hesitated briefly, added, "I don't suppose you'll

believe this. But I don't know what this fuss is all about or what I'm supposed to have done."

Mary Fields sneered, "I'll just bet you don't."

Ignoring her, Barrows continued, "You see, upon my word of honor, until I came to in a clearing a few miles down the road a short half hour ago, the last thing I remember was making and drinking a cup of tea shortly after Mr. Ogilvey discharged me."

"Now," Mary Fields said, "I've heard it all."

Jim Thurber put a silver dollar, monocle fashion, in his eye. "Upon my word of honor."

A wave of nervous laughter rippled through the office.

Color creeping into his cheeks, Barrows continued, "I started for this office immediately but at the juncture with the highway I was set upon by a huge Senegalese."

"A Senegalese?" Sheriff Dale puzzled.

"A French speaking nigra from Senegal, West Africa," Barrows explained. "Don't ask me how he got there. I don't know. But at the point of a gun he ordered me *not* to return to Fawnskin and I was forced to thrash him soundly and take his gun away before I could proceed." His story sounded thin and fantastic even to himself.

Sheriff Dale said dryly, "That's as good a yarn as any, I suppose, to try to explain away the cuts and contusions on your face. What really happened, Barrows? Wasn't Smith dead? Did he come to and put up a fight before you could dispose of the body?"

HIS mouth dry, his throat contracted, Barrows repeated the name Smith. It was Smith then who was dead, the same Smith with whom he had quarreled. He found himself instinctively rubbing his powder-stained hand on his trousers. Then he saw the blonde. She was sitting back of the sheriff's desk, a blood-stained gauze turban around her head. As he looked at her she screamed in terror.

"Don't let him get me. Please don't let him get me." Upsetting the chair in her panic she backed to the wall and pressed her palms flat against it. "Don't let him kill me like he killed John."

Barrows hadn't moved, but a dozen men

sprang to hold him. A moment of ugly silence followed, the only sound the drumming of the rain. Then two of Sheriff Dale's temporary deputies, Manston, the druggist, and Reamer, the feed store man, stomped into the office, Manston carrying Barrow's labeled covered bag, Reamer the nickled gun.

"Found it right on the seat," Reamer said. "He was evidently of a mind to shoot his way out if he was stopped, then lost his nerve." Handling the gun gingerly with his handkerchief he laid it on the sheriff's desk. "One of those cheap mail order things. There should be a law against them."

Manston asked if he should open the bag. Sheriff Dale said he would. Barrows wondered what they were searching for. Then Sheriff Dale stood up again, a thick, flat, wad of money in his hands. "Would you say this was your husband's money, Mrs. Smith?"

She said it looked like her husband's money. "If it is," she added tearfully, "there should be two thousand eight hundred and fifty dollars because that's what John told me we had left after he paid our bill."

A film of cold sweat on his forehead, Barrows watched Dale count the money.

Sheriff Dale counted it carefully. "Two thousand eight hundred and fifty dollars," he concluded his count. Laying the money on his desk he turned back, scowling, to Barrows. "Well, that seems to be it, killer. What did you do with the rings? What did you do with Smith's body?" He accompanied the questions with a back hand slap. "Talk, damn you. Talk! We don't like killers in Fawnskin."

CHAPTER III

MISSING, ONE BODY

THE rain had ceased but there was a soft wet fragrance to the woods. A crescent moon was spiked on the topmost peak of a tall pine. With the floodlight on the sheriff's car illuminating the highway and the rushing stream that gushed under the culvert the scene had an unreal, penny postcard, quality to it.

Sitting handcuffed to the wheel of Dale's car, Barrows thought, "*This can't be happening to me.*"

But it was. He had been formally charged with murder. Mrs. Smith had signed the complaint. Now Sheriff Dale was taking the first of the many preliminary steps that would lead to his eventual trial and ultimate conviction. The peg-legged sheriff was being scrupulously fair but Barrows had no doubt he would be convicted. Whether Smith's body was ever found or not, circumstantial evidence was against him.

It was known he and Smith had quarreled. He had, perhaps, as some of the witnesses alleged, threatened to kill Smith during their exchange of fisticuffs. A man made such threats when he was angry. He had no alibi for the hours from three to ten. He couldn't tell a jury, "I drank a cup of tea and blacked out." A jury would howl at that one.

Sheriff Dale concluded his examination of the dead man's car and turned his attention to the barricade, now moved to the shoulder of the road. Barrows continued his mental review of the evidence against him.

Mrs. Smith's testimony would be the most damning. She would swear on a Bible that he was the man who shot her husband, slugged and attempted to attack her. A paraffin test had revealed powder specks on his hand. A gun had been found in his car. Smith's money had been found in his luggage. No one believed his wild story about the Senegalese who had attempted to prevent him from returning to Fawnskin.

He wondered what it was all about. In stories one was always reading about a man being framed for murder. But there had to be a motive for a frame. And in his case there was none. There was money in his family, true—the governor had a lot of it—but none of it would come to him. What with conditions and taxes as they were, a younger son was lucky to get an education and a paternal pat on the back before being kicked out on his own. No one, a blonde named Bessie Smith least of all, stood to gain a thing if he was electrocuted.

All he could do was keep a stiff upper lip—and mum. There was no use of dragging the governor or his brothers into the sordid mess. They wouldn't thank him for it. It was traditional in the family that a Montgaden went out into the world and returned with his shield, or on it.

Sheriff Dale stumped back to the car. "Feel like talking yet?"

"I don't know what to say," Barrows told him truthfully.

"Can't think up another one like the one about the French-speaking colored man, eh?" Jim Thurber jeered. "Of all the rot I ever heard."

The night air was cool but Sheriff Dale removed his hat and wiped perspiration from his sweatband. It was his first murder case and he was feeling the responsibility. "There's plenty of blood back of the wheel of Smith's car," he told his deputies. "That backs up Mrs. Smith's story. But the rain has washed out any foot- or tireprints and I doubt if the state fingerprint man can get anything off that barricade."

Manston wanted to know what more he wanted than the gun, the recovered money, and Mrs. Smith's story.

"Smith's body, if we can find it," Sheriff Dale said curtly. "There have been two or three murder convictions lately without a *corpus delicti* but juries shy away from voting the death penalty without one." He replaced his hat. "Come on. While we're here let's search the underbrush on both sides of the road. He probably threw it in an old mine shaft but what sticks me there is the fact there's no blood in Barrow's car."

THE group moved away. Electric torches began to gleam under the dripping trees. There was little or no underbrush and the scene took on an even more unreal aspect. The night was a Stygian forest peopled by grotesque fire-flies.

Sally left the little group of women near the culvert and walked back to her brother's car. "Why did you do it, Clyde?" she asked softly. "You might have known you couldn't get away with it."

Barrows declared himself for the first time. "I don't know as I did do it," he told her. "I thought for a time perhaps I might have. But now I am beginning to doubt it."

She stood, both hands on the ledge of the door, saying nothing, her eyes glistening in the dark.

"She's crying. She likes me. I had a chance," Barrows thought. "She wants to believe I didn't do it."

He continued, feeling his way. "I'm no angel, Sally. I've never pretended I was I've

looked on the wine when it was red, had my share of flirtations, sung my quota of song." He added, bitterly, "Yes. And I've killed men, too. But I was in my right mind when I did it and they were endeavoring to kill me." He summed up his conclusions on the fingers of his handcuffed hand. "So, it is possible I might shoot a man I disliked. By a farther stretch of the imagination I might even assault a creature like the blonde, Mrs. Smith. But I am damned if I'd do it for gain. Therefore, finding Smith's money in my luggage throws the whole thing out of kilter." He added, emphatically, "What's more there *was* a Senegalese at the juncture of that road that we parked on and the highway. He *did* try to prevent me from returning to Fawnskin. And I *was* forced to manhandle him severely before I could return."

Sally sobbed, "Oh, Clyde," and turned away, her shoulders shaking.

"She thinks I'm lying," Barrows thought. "She thinks I am inventing a colored man in an attempt to save my neck, sort of a *nigra* in the woodpile so to speak."

He wondered suddenly if the mysterious Senegalese might not have murdered Smith and as promptly dismissed the thought. As hysterical and frightened as she must have been, the dead man's widow couldn't make that big a mistake. Besides, she had identified *him*.

It was a sticker, a puzzle, a right one. But the more he thought about it the less apologetic and the angrier he became. He hadn't assaulted the blonde as she had claimed. That much he knew. Therefore the woman was a liar and having lied about one thing she well might be lying about the manner in which her husband had met his death. His eyes were thoughtful. Perhaps there was a lover as well as a *nigra* in the woodpile.

More, a man didn't pass out on tea unless the tea had been doctored. It would have been a simple matter for *someone* to slip into his cabin and insert chloral in the top few tea bags in the cannister. His habits were well known. His fellow employees had ribbed him unmercifully all summer because whenever he felt the need of a lift he drank a spot of tea. Seven lost hours and powder stains on his hand or not, he was beginning to doubt he had killed anyone, certainly not with the cheap little gun it was

alleged he had used when he had a perfectly good .455 Webley in his bag. How to prove it was another matter. Once he was remanded to jail he would be helpless, entirely at the mercy of the law. His story was fantastic. Sheriff Dale didn't believe it. Sally didn't believe it. A judge and jury wouldn't believe it. He couldn't hire much of a lawyer, let alone investigators, with the three hundred dollars he had saved. And he was damned if he would cable the governor.

His lean jaw set determinedly. A fine kettle of fish that would be after not writing or hearing from home in three years. No. His mind was made up on that score. He would swing, or burn, or be gassed, or whatever they did to one in California, before he would cable the governor or Harry or Andy for help. He had got into this mess. He would damn well get out.

His mind was alert and working now. The furry taste was gone from his mouth. He wanted suddenly to know a great number of things, among them if Smith had been insured and, if so, for how much.

Sheriff Dale wanted a body, did he? Well, he'd locate one for him. He sat perfecting his plans, drumming the fingers of his handcuffed hand on the wheel until the searchers, wet and weary, returned to the string of cars.

SHERIFF DALE looked tired. He was tired. His peg worked well enough on solid ground but the rain had made a quagmire of the woods. Unlocking Barrows from the wheel he told his deputies, "We'll take Barrows back to the jail and 'talk' to him a while. It might just be a little 'conversation' will make him more cooperative."

Barrows simulated fear. "You can't do that. It's against the law to use force in questioning a prisoner."

"Who said anything about using force?" Dale asked.

"You *cawn't* do that," Thurber mimicked the Englishman's accent. "We can do just about what we damn please, you dirty killer. I suppose you didn't use force when you killed Smith and attempted to attack his wife."

"That was the French-speaking colored boy," Manston said dryly.

Still crying quietly, Sally got into the back

seat of the car as her brother's posse prepared to return to Fawnskin.

"You stop that and right now," Dale told her. "Barrows isn't worth wasting your tears on."

Enroute to her swank convertible coupe. Mary Fields, who with a half dozen members of the young country club set were making a picnic of the tragedy, paused at the sheriff's car to ask fliply, "Why do we bother to take him back to Fawnskin, Sheriff? There are plenty of trees around here and *someone* ought to have a rope."

Dale leaned out of his car to shout after her. "And you cut out that kind of talk, Miss Fields. There'll be no lynchings in Fawnskin as long as I am sheriff."

She called back something flip that Barrows couldn't hear. Sally cried even harder. "But maybe Clyde's story is true. Maybe he didn't do it."

Reamer got into the front seat beside Sheriff Dale and Barrows. "Yeah. And maybe the sun won't rise tomorrow. You mind what your brother says. We found both a gun and the money on him, didn't we? And hasn't Mrs. Smith positively identified him as the man who shot her husband. What more do you want?"

Meshing his car into gear, Dale admitted, "I'd still like Smith's body."

Barrows baited his trap. "And to find it you'll beat me the rest of the night."

"That could be," Dale admitted.

Barrows hesitated, seemed to come to a decision. "What's the use putting off the agony," he said glumly. "I seem to have made a proper mess of things. If you will turn the car around and Miss Sally will direct you to the old mine shaft near which we once parked, I'll show you where I put the body."

Manston said, "Why, you dirty coward. Afraid of a little shellacking, eh?"

Sally stopped crying abruptly. His hand hesitating over his horn, Sheriff Dale returned it to the wheel. "We'll let the rest of the crowd go on," he told the men in the car. "The four of us are enough to handle Barrows. I don't like the way that bunch of young punks with Mary Fields are acting. They are drinking for one thing. For another they don't give a damn about justice. They're just out to raise some hell, however. And if we get the stink of a

lynching on us we won't have *any* season next year."

Thurber, Manston, and Reamer, agreed with him. Slowing down his speed, Dale allowed his car to drop back until the long cavalcade of cars that had followed them out of Fawnskin rounded the next bend in the road. Then he asked his sister:

"What shaft is that, Sally?"

"The old Murillo shaft," she said, stiffly.

Sheriff Dale made a sharp U-turn, drove back half a mile, then turned off on the side road where Barrows had encountered the Senegalese. As they neared the clearing it began to rain again.

"You stay in the car," Dale ordered Sally. Handcuffing Barrows to his left wrist he tugged him out into the rain. "No funny stuff now," he warned him. His voice was rich with contempt. "And while I'm at it I'd like to say that I fought alongside a lot of Englishmen, but you're the first yellow belly that I've met."

"All right. We're here," Reamer said. "Where is the body, Barrows?"

Barrows turned to face the shaft, seemingly puzzled. "It's off to the right, I believe, under a large mound of pine needles."

"You *believe*?" Thurber said sharply.

Barrows wiped the rain from his eyes with the back of his hand. "I was in a hurry and confused when I hid it."

Manston asked, "You certain, now you didn't push it back in the shaft?" As he spoke he picked up a piece of tailing and tossed it into the ancient prospect hole. A sharp hiss and an ugly rattling as of dry paper echoed the falling of the stone. "No. I reckon not," he answered his own question. "No yellow belly is going to drag a dead man into a nest of rattlers."

Thurber threw a second rock after the first. "All these old shafts are the same. But at least a rattler gives his victim some warning. And that's more than this skunk did. Just opened the door and shot Smith through the head, so his Missus says."

"We'll fan out," Sheriff Dale decided. "A large mound of needles shouldn't be too hard to spot even in this rain."

THE five men, Barrows still handcuffed to the youthful sheriff, moved forward slowly, their flashlights streaking on before them and reflecting off the wet trunks of

the trees. The ground was wet. The needle-covered floor of the forest was slippery. Barrows lagged purposely. Dale, his peg sinking deeply into the soft ground, from time to time, found the going heavy. The gap between Thurber on their right and Manston and Reamer on their left widened steadily.

"You're sure now," Sheriff Dale asked suspiciously when they had been searching for five minutes, "that this is where you stashed the body?"

"As positive as I am I killed him," the young Englishman said clippedly. It was now or never. He hated to do this thing to Sally's brother. He didn't know if he could do it. He wouldn't have a second chance. And his life was as much at stake as it had been at Derna, Dieppe, and Zeebrugge. "Over there. Isn't that a mound of needles?"

Dale turned to look and swinging his left fist like a club, Barrows struck him back of the ear, then using his own body and handcuffed arm as a fulcrum, pivoted sharply and heaved. Dale landed heavily on his back, momentarily stunned but struggling subconsciously as Barrows searched frantically for the key.

He found it in Dale's vest pocket and had just unlocked the handcuff when Dale returned to full consciousness with an outraged roar that stopped the distant lights in their tracks.

Then Barrows was on his feet and running, Sheriff Dale's gun in his hand and Dale bellowing behind him:

"He's loose! He slugged me and got the key. Shoot him one of you guys!"

Heavy calibered slugs began searching through the trees, then the fusillade stopped as suddenly as it had begun. The rain drowned out all sound—the flashlights wouldn't carry that far—there was nothing at which to shoot—and Sally Dale was back there somewhere.

Barrows found her standing beside the car, her eyes wide with scorn. "You coward. You dirty coward," she spat. "If you've hurt my brother. I—"

She scratched her long nails down his cheeks.

Panting for breath, the running men close behind him, Barrows had no time to argue with her. Picking her up bodily he tossed her into the car, then slipping behind the

wheel and stepping on the starter and meshing into gear simultaneously, he jack-rabbed the car in a skidding turn and roared back down the side-road to the highway, the running men holding their fire for fear of hitting Sally.

Sobbing now, she continued to claw at him. "You dirty coward. You filthy, dirty coward. You stop this car and let me out."

His mind on his driving and the slippery road he paid no attention to her except to push her away from time to time when her hysterics interfered with his vision. Reaching the highway he turned left on two wheels and hurtled the car down the winding mountain road.

What he wanted to know couldn't be learned in Fawnskin. He would have to go to the address in San Francisco from which the blonde and Smith had registered. He remembered it distinctly. It was the Alhama Hotel.

CHAPTER IV

DAKAR DICKEY

A FAINT morning sun was gilding the junction formed by Market, Kearny, Geary, and Third Streets, when Barrows parked the car a quarter of a block from the Alhama Hotel but fog almost immediately obscured both the sun and the hotel sign.

Her eyes swollen from crying, Sally regarded him sullenly from the far side of the front seat. "Believe me now?" he asked her.

"I don't know," she admitted. "I don't know what to believe. If you didn't kill him why did you slug Matt and high-jack me into that wild ride down the mountain?"

He explained, as he had explained a dozen times during the ride, "Because I hope to marry you some day. And I can't do it if I'm sent to the lethal chamber for a murder I didn't commit. As you would put it, I think I was framed."

"Why?" Sally asked hotly. "Why are you so important that anyone should want to frame you? What would they gain?"

His head throbbed dully. His nerves were still screaming from the wild ride down the mountain. He wanted a bath, dry clothes, a cup of tea and a tot of whiskey. But most of all he wanted Sally to believe him. "I

don't know," he admitted wearily. "The whole affair doesn't make sense. I'm not at all important. I don't hope to inherit any and I've only three hundred dollars to my name."

Sally said, too sweetly, "Which really isn't Barrows but Montgaden."

Watching her closely for any sign of recognition, he said quietly, "That slipped out. But I've a right to use the name of Barrows. It was my mother's name."

Woman-like, she persisted, "But why don't you use your right name? Are you ashamed of it?"

Barrows wanted to take her across his knee and spank her. He controlled the impulse with an effort. "No. Not at all. But that's neither here nor there." He peered through the light fog to where a yawning traffic officer was preparing to take up his duties for the day. "But let's decide this right now. There is an alarm out for me and for this car. There is bound to be. I am gambling on borrowed time. Either you believe me or you don't. If you don't, there is an officer. Why don't you call to him and turn me in."

Sally said, truthfully, "I want to believe you, Clyde."

"Then let's get on with it," he said. "I want to talk to the clerk at the Alhama. I want to know how the Smiths got on and what he did for a living. The only possible solution I can see is that Mrs. Smith has a lover, they wanted Smith out of the way, and they picked me for the scapegoat because I was handy. Her claim I attempted to assault her would seem to point to that."

"That beanpole," Sally dismissed Mrs. Smith.

She allowed him to help her from the car. He locked it and threw the keys in a convenient trash can. It had served its purpose. The first officer to spot the official license plate would turn it in and the hunt would be on for him in San Francisco. He had been telling the truth when he said he was gambling on borrowed time.

As they walked toward the hotel he saw, or thought he saw, the officer on the corner glance toward the parked car.

The Alhama was small and flashy, the type of a hotel in which the Smiths would live. It was small wonder they had been bored at the Inn. The business heart of San Francisco, the night-clubs, the theatres, and

the famous restaurants, were all in walking distance of the door.

The lobby was tiled and smelled of soap and disinfectant. A porter was rearranging the chairs and the sofas and the potted palms. A room refusal on his lips, the desk clerk who looked like a disappointed vaudeville actor watched them cross the lobby to the desk.

BARROWS disappointed him. Slipping his wallet from his pocket, he extracted a fifty dollar bill from it and spread it on the hotel blotter. "For information," he said shortly, "about some tenants of yours who may, or may not, reside here permanently." He covered the bill with his palm. "Satisfactory information."

The clerk looked from him to Sally, then back at the bill, "You are paying the admission fee. What do you want to know about whom?"

Barrows said, "The name is Smith. John Smith."

The clerk seemed disappointed. "I'm afraid you are wasting both our time, Mister. The Alhama seems to run to Smiths, a lot of them named John."

"A big, red-faced, flashily-dressed man," Barrows described Smith. "And his wife is a tall thin blonde with a decided preference for gin."

"An artificial blonde," Sally added.

"Oh, those Smiths," the clerk earned a corner of the bill. "Yes. They live here. They have a permanent suite. But they aren't here right now. They haven't been for a month. We have been forwarding their mail, such as it is, to the Antler Hotel in Fawnskin."

Barrows was familiar with the mail. He had handled it on that end, circulars most of it. He uncovered a portion of the bill. "They get along well together?"

"As far as I know," the clerk said. "They both are quite heavy drinkers." He nodded at the closed bar. "But in the two months they've been here, they've done all of their drinking together."

Barrows was disappointed. He asked if the clerk knew Smith's business. The clerk said he did not, that Smith didn't seem to have any business but bellying up to the bar and occasionally placing a bet on the horses.

"And I don't suppose you'd permit me to investigate their suite."

"Not for ten times fifty, Mister," the desk clerk shook his head. "I don't like the air in San Quentin. It's too—close. Why? What's all this about the Smiths anyway? And who are you representing?"

"Myself," Barrows said shortly. "It's a bit of a personal affair." He lifted his palm so the clerk could pocket the bill. "Now, one last question. You say they have stopped here for two months. During that time have you ever seen them in the company of a colored man, a man as large or larger than Smith?"

He struck gold with the question. "Several times," the clerk admitted. "A foreigner of some kind. At least he called me *Monsieur* and spoke with a French accent."

Sally squeezed Clyde's arm. "There *was* a colored man. You *were* telling the truth."

The clerk turned to the key rack behind him. In fact there is a letter here for him now in care of Smith." He found it and laid it on the desk. Postmarked, Podor, French West Africa, it was addressed in a large, almost illiterate, scrawl to—

*Monsieur Dakar Dickey
Alhama Hotel
San Francisco, U.S.A.
In Care of Monsieur J. Smith*

The desk clerk grinned. "Smith raised hell with him the last time Dickey had mail sent in care of Smith." He sniffed the envelope. "Heliotrope. Probably from some dame. They must be the same in Africa as they are here."

"They are," Barrows said curtly. Knowing it was useless to attempt to buy the letter and doubting its contents would prove of any value, he asked, without hope, "I don't suppose you know where this Dakar Dickey is stopping."

The clerk surprised him. "It just so happens I do. I've plugged Smith in to his hotel several times." He rubbed his thumb and forefinger together and Barrows laid another bill, a ten this time, on the counter. "The Eagle Hotel on Grand," the clerk said grinning. "You can't miss it. It's right on the edge of Chinatown. And come back any time, Mister. I'm always pleased to sell information."

OUT on the walk again the fog was a living vital thing that swirled about their heads and shadowed them in mist. The street lights were still on. So were the headlights of the passing cars. Clinging to Barrows' arm Sally took two steps and stopped. Following her eyes he saw a police car parked diagonally behind the car they had just quitted. One foot on the front bumper a uniformed officer was writing the license number in his note book.

It was known he was in San Francisco. The hunt for him was on. His borrowed time was shrinking. And all he had learned was the name of the mysterious Senegalese and the fact he was known to Smith.

Excited now, all doubt dispelled, Sally wanted to know where Dakar Dickey fitted into the picture.

"I don't know," Barrows admitted. "The deeper into this thing I get, the less sense that it makes. But I do know that we have to get out of here."

Taking Sally's elbow he walked her briskly up the street in the parade of early morning workers beginning to appear. It was only the fog that saved them. A moment later a second police car filled with plainclothes men howled past them to join the first police car.

"There," Barrows thought, *"goes death. They are instructed to shoot me on sight. I am a mad man, a killer, a kidnapper. Not guilty, your honor, so help me. All I did was drink a cup of tea and do a spot of dirty fighting with a Senegalese named Dakar Dickey from Podar, French West Africa."*

"You'd better leave me," he suggested to Sally, "before they involve you in this thing."

Her fingers bit into the flesh of his arm. "No. You didn't do it, any of it. And we're going to clear you."

Barrows hoped so but he was beginning to doubt it. The charges against him were real and all he had to work on was shadows. Some blocks away they stopped in a small restaurant and had a bite to eat. As Barrows paid their check the clerk grinned openly at his battered face. "Boy. You've been on a dinger. You ought to get you a room somewhere and get some sleep."

"I'd like to," Barrows admitted. It seemed ages since he had slept. Outside he

hailed a cab and asked to be driven to the Eagle Hotel. There was no use in trying to cover his trail. If the police questioned the clerk at the Alhama he would give them the same information he had given him, this time for nothing.

The Eagle Hotel was small and dingy, as the clerk had said on the fringe of Chinatown, little better than a flop house. There was an employment agency one side of it, a cheap Chinese restaurant on the other. A half dozen disinterested winos and skid row habitués were yawning at the proffered jobs posted on a board in front of the employment agency. Several of them looked with interest at Sally.

His hand on the butt of the gun he had stolen from Sally's brother, Barrows told her, "You can't wait down here on the street. You'd best come in with me."

A series of filthy stairs, the riser of each marked—Eagle—led up to a small first floor lobby. There was no one in the straight backed chairs against the wall or back of the small circular desk. A card near a tap bell read—

RING FOR CLERK

Barrows tapped it with his palm. The bell tinkled in the morning silence but no one responded. He struck it again with the same result, then turning the old-fashioned book register around he thumbed back through its pages. Dakar Dickey of Podar, French West Africa was listed as being in Room 312.

The second floor stairs was filthier than the first. The paint was peeling from the walls. The smell of antiseptic attempted to drown out the reek of cheap perfume and unwashed flesh.

"I'm afraid this isn't a very nice hotel," Barrows told Sally wryly.

She answered him in kind. "Forget it. We aren't here for social purposes."

Room 312 was at the end of a long narrow hall, that seemed to wind back into the adjoining building. Most of the other rooms were dark in sleep but a light showed over its transom. As they neared it they could hear a man speaking in excited French. Dakar Dickey was in his room.

Tugging the gun from his belt, Barrows lifted the barrel to tap on the door, froze as a second voice said in perfect English:

"All right. Don't get your wind up. There's nothing to worry about. They'll pick him up sooner or later."

The short hairs on his neck tingling, Barrows looked at Sally. *Either he had gone mad or he was hearing a dead man speak. The voice back of the door was Smith's.*

Her eyes round in the half light of the hall, Sally gasped, "That's Smith. That was Mr. Smith talking."

Caution forgotten in his anger, Barrows rapped sharply on the door with the barrel of his gun. A moment of silence followed, then the Senegalese with whom he had fought, dressed in gaudy purple silk pajamas, opened the door and stared from him to Sally without seeming recognition.

"Oui, Monsieur?"

Barrows waved him back from the door with his gun and strode on into the room. "Don't give me that. Where is he? Where is Smith? And what is this all about?"

The bed was rumpled as if from sleep. Wet clothes were piled untidily on a chair. His back to the closed room door the huge Senegalese stared stupidly at Barrows. The three were alone in the room.

"Pardon, Monsieur?"

"Don't give me that," Barrows repeated. He yanked open a door. It proved to be a clothes closet—and empty.

"Where is Mr. Smith?" Sally demanded. "We heard his voice. I *know* it was his voice. And how come he can talk if Clyde is supposed to have killed him by shooting him twice through the head?"

Barrows strode to the door leading into the bathroom, froze with his hand on the knob as Sally cried out in terror behind him:

"It was in his sleeve. He took it out of his sleeve."

Turning, Barrows saw the Senegalese, no longer staring stupidly, pressing the point of a long, sharp knife to Sally's throat. The gun in his hand lifted, then lowered.

Smiling now, gold-toothed, the big colored man said, "That ees better. You are thee most persistent *homme, Seigneur* Montgaden. Be pleased to drop that gun."

"No," Sally cried. "Don't do it, Clyde. Shoot him!"

His back to the bathroom door, Barrows stood briefly undecided. Then the right of decision was snatched from his hands. The door back of him snicked open and the gun

butt in the hand that emerged slugged him viciously over the head.

Sally's screams ringing in his ears, Barrows crumpled to his knees, a mad thought pounding through the last of his consciousness. *Dickey had called him Seigneur. Why? In the name of time what had happened to the governor, to Harry, to Andy?*

"Cochon, swine-dog," the Senegalese spat. Crossing the room with the lithe tread of a panther he kicked Barrows in the face and all consciousness blotted out.

CHAPTER V

CALLING LONDON

THERE was a wet smell of fish and of tide-flats. He was on or near the sea, Barrows decided. The bobbing, rolling, motion of the bunk on which he was lying soon decided that. He was in the cabin of a boat, a small boat of some kind, not more than a thirty-footer. He lay wondering how he had got there and what had happened to Sally.

He had acted the perfect fool, barging in where angels would have had sense to walk lightly. He opened his eyes with an effort and saw Sally on the filthy blanket of the bunk across the way. Her wrists and her ankles were tied but her eyes were open and she wasn't gagged.

"Thank God," she said quietly. "Thank God. I was afraid that you were dead."

"I'm hard to kill," Barrows admitted. He glanced around the cabin. It was obviously the cabin of a small fishing charter boat. There was a head, a small galley, a sink, a cabine. That was all. Fog-misted sunlight was streaming in the port holes and the vent. From the motion of the boat they were riding at anchor in a bay or estuary.

"Where are we? And how did we get here?" he asked her.

She told him, "On a boat. He took us out a back door of the hotel. He told the cab driver you were drunk and threatened to kill you if I screamed."

"He?"

Sally said, "The Senegalese." She tried hard not to cry and failed. "After you were slugged I screamed and screamed but no one paid any attention."

Barrows asked, "And Smith?"

"I didn't see him," she admitted. "If it was Smith he didn't come out of the bathroom. The Senegalese went in and talked to him. Then he came out and dressed and brought us here." Barrows considered the information. It wasn't of much value. "And we are whereabouts in the bay?"

Sally said she didn't know.

"And Dickey?"

She said he was on deck, or had been, a moment before. As she was speaking the Senegalese poked his head in the cabin, then entering switched on a small radio over the galley. A blast of static came forth. Speaking over it, Barrows said hotly:

"You can't get away with this."

The Senegalese grinned gold-toothed but didn't bother to reply. Barrows tried to spread his bound hands, and couldn't. His wrists were tied with enough new nylon forty pound test fishing line to hold a whale.

"He won't say a word," Sally said. "I've pleaded and threatened and swore but all he does is grin. Someone has told him not to talk."

"Smith," Barrows said shortly. "Dickey is the one weak spot in his murder chain. Neither Smith nor the blonde left the Inn yesterday afternoon until they left for good. Therefore it had to be a stooge who drugged my tea bags, packed my luggage with the money in it, put a gun in my hand and fired two shots, then drove me to that clearing where I regained consciousness. Dickey was that stooge. That's why he was so upset when I showed at the highway again. He didn't know what to do. I wasn't supposed to come to until the posse found me."

Sally demanded to know, "But what is it all about, Clyde?"

"A lot of money, I think," he told her. "But I won't know for certain until I've been able to check with London." Under the purple welts left by brutal handling on his face, his face was lined and gray. He looked older somehow than Sally had ever seen him look before. It was as though pain or responsibility had aged him over night. "How about that, Dickey?" he demanded.

The other man ignored him to fiddle with the dials of the radio. Music replaced static. Then Dickey found the newscast that he sought—

... Night desk clerk at the Alhama has positively identified Barrows as the man who accompanied by Miss Dale entered the lobby of the hotel and offered him a bribe, which he refused, to be allowed to enter the Smith suite, undoubtedly in quest of more loot, the Fawnskin sheriff having retained the two thousand eight hundred odd dollars that Barrows took from the body. . . .

Barrows waited for the newscaster to mention Dakar Dickey. Instead he went on to speculate whether or not Sally was accompanying him of her own free will. There seemed to be two schools of thought. One said she was under his influence, the other that he had threatened her with death if she dared to make an outcry. The F.B.I. had been called into the case re the kidnaping angle. But there was no mention of Dakar Dickey or Barrows' request of the clerk for information concerning him. More money had been paid. The night desk clerk at the Alhama had enjoyed a profitable morning.

Dickey confirmed his suspicion. "I make the phone call," he grinned. "Tell desk clerk if he keep the mouth shut he find a lot of money. He talk, police find him with throat cut. He ver' wise man. *N'est-ce pas. Seigneur?*"

Barrows asked if they might have a cigarette. The Senegalese thrust one between both his and Sally's lips, then refused to light them, enjoying his little joke hugely.

THE newscaster's voice droned on, hashing and rehashing the case. The lovely blonde, Mrs. Smith, had reaffirmed her story of the attempted assault and her identification of Barrows as the man who had shot her husband before the Fawnskin grand jury. A true bill had been voted. Barrows was believed to be insane. A shoot on sight order had been issued to all police. He was believed to be desperate in his attempt to leave the city and was credited with two hold-ups in Oakland, an attempted attack on the U. of C. campus at Berkeley, and the theft of a car at Palo Alto.

Dakar Dickey was hugely amused. "You ver' bad man."

"Yes," Barrows agreed dryly. "I also seem to be quite agile."

The newscaster interrupted himself—

... Just a moment. I have just been handed a bulletin from the sheriff's office in Fawnskin. Smith's body has been found in an old mine shaft near the scene of Barrow's escape. It is believed he was still alive when he was dropped into the shaft for the body is livid and swollen almost beyond recognition by innumerable rattlesnake bites. Identification was made by the widow, papers found in Smith's pockets, and a three-carat good luck diamond which Smith habitually wore. . . .

"That's it," Barrows said. "That's all that I needed." He swung his bound ankles to the deck plates and by twisting his body and using both hands as one managed to extract his cigarette lighter from the pocket of his sodden topcoat. Flicking it into flame he reached across the way and lighted Sally's cigarette. But before he could light his own Dickey picked the cigarette from his lips, crumpled it between his fingers, turned off the radio and went back up on deck, fastening the rasp of the hatch behind him.

Her eyes hot, Sally swore softly.

"Let him enjoy himself," Barrows said. "He who laughs last and all that sort of thing." But he was whistling in the dark and he knew it. It wasn't meant he should ever laugh again. He doubted it was meant for him to leave the boat. The same was true of Sally. She knew too much. He cursed himself for a fool for not having put her out of the car at some point during the ride from Fawnskin. They would undoubtedly be found together, a murder and a suicide. On the other hand he didn't like the way that Dickey looked at Sally. She might merely "disappear."

She puzzled, "But if Smith's body was found in the old Murillo shaft—"

"A *body* was found," he corrected her. "There had to be a body to make certain I was executed. Just as my body has to be found to make certain that I'm dead."

Smoke curled up and got into her eyes. "But—I don't understand."

"I'm beginning to," he said quietly. Balancing on his bound feet and using the **fingers** of both hands he picked the offending cigarette from her lips. "You're an adorable little devil with smoke curling in **your** hair." He stooped and kissed her then

sat back on the bunk again and stared at the glowing tip of the cigarette. There was no telling how much time they had.

"What are they going to do to us?" she asked.

"I don't know," he lied. Puffing at the cigarette to get it glowing he held it with the very tips of his fingers and attempted to bend it back so it would touch the fish line on his wrists.

A bob of the boat jostled it from his fingers. He picked it from the deck plates and considered trying to free Sally first. Then he realized he was acting from inner panic. He wasn't using his head. Snuffing out the cigarette he propped his lighter between his knees and flicking it into flame lowered his bound wrists over it. A pungent smell of burning flesh filled the small cabin.

Sally started to cry out. He stopped her with his eyes. One strand of fish line, then another, and another gave. His hands free he repeated the treatment on his ankles, then removing his shoes searched the cabin for a weapon. All he could find was an empty beer bottle.

H HE SMASHED the neck of it, then cutting Sally free lay back on his bunk, the jagged bottom of the bottle in one hand, just as Dickey withdrew the hatch rasp and looked into the cabin. "What make the noise of breaking down here?"

Barrows stared at the ceiling and refused to answer. Suspicious, the other man drew his wicked looking knife and descended the two-stair ladder.

"What make the noise of breaking?" he repeated.

He bent over Barrows to assure himself his wrists and ankles were still bound and Barrows lashed out with his crude weapon in a blow that cut one of Dickey's plump cheeks to ribbons.

Screaming with pain and anger the Senegalese attempted to knife him. Doubling his feet to his chest Barrows kicked him in the stomach then rolled to his stocking feet to join in the mad scramble for the knife that had fallen from the other man's temporarily pain-paralyzed fingers. He had no compunctions. This was his last chance for life. He meant to take it. If what he surmised was correct it was important he live. This wasn't Marquis of Queensberry rules. This was sur-

vival of the toughest. This was jungle warfare. This was kill or be killed.

Sally screamed as Dickey recovered his knife. But he promptly lost it again as Barrows pushed him off balance. Retaliating, Dickey pulled him down with him and banged his head on the deck plates. Arching his body like a cat, Barrows pulled free and away. Rising, they sparred a moment, neither man daring to stoop in the narrow way lest the other man kick or pounce upon him. Then the boat dipped in the trough of a roller sending both men crashing heavily into the galley stove. Snapping the feed pipe it tore loose from its moorings and the hiss and reek of escaping butane gas began to fill the cabin.

Landing a hard blow to Barrows' face Dickey knocked him into the door of the head with force sufficient to crack the panel. Bouncing back between the bunks Barrows sank first his left and then his right fist into the other man's stomach. Grunting with pain, Dickey snatched up the two-burner stove, attempted to use it as a club, found he hadn't room to swing it and threw it at Barrows' head. Ducking under the steel Barrows heard it clatter on the deck plates behind him and made a mental note of another obstacle to be avoided.

As he fought Dickey swore a steady stream in French. Barrows fought silently except for the increased tempo of his breathing and an occasional, "hah" to clear his throat. He had no breath to waste. His opponent was both strong and tricky. He outweighed him by fifty pounds and if he had learned his business in the army the Senegalese had learned his in barroom brawls from Port Said to Lourenco Marques.

A left to the heart. The side of his hand to the kidneys. Roll with the boat. Dart in, dart out. He had to keep out of the other man's arms if he could. He had felt those steel cables before. They could snap his spine like a match. They would snap it if they could. There was no longer any reason to keep him alive. The police were convinced of his guilt. All that was needed to complete the farce was his body.

SCOOPING the knife from the deck plates Dickey lunged savagely at Barrows. The lighter man side-stepped the thrust, felt steel burn across his ribs, then

clamped on a pressure lock and put all of his weight behind it. There was a sharp snapping of bone. The knife tinkled to the deck plates. Screaming with pain, his right arm dangling at an absurd angle, the Senegalese tore free and bounded up the two-step ladder to the open cock-pit. To avoid being locked below again, Barrows followed at his heels and reaching the deck ducked just in time to avoid having his face and skull ripped open by a vicious swipe of the gaff the other man had snatched from the side of the live-bait well.

Then it was over as suddenly as it had begun. Dickey, gray with pain, made another swipe with the gaff and missed and Barrows stepping in fast smashed a hard left to his heart and a still harder right to his jaw.

The Frenchman's eyes turned glassy. He buckled at the knees and fell forward with his face in the roiled water of the bait well. Swearing softly because drowned men couldn't talk, Barrows pulled his face out of the tank and allowed him to sag to the deck just as Sally emerged from the cabin.

Her eyes were shining. "I—think you're wonderful," she told him. "But now what do we do?"

Panting for breath, sucking in great lungs-full of sea air, Barrows surveyed the fog bound bay around him as he considered his answer. Unable to see the shore he hadn't the least idea in what part of the bay they were. He still had a long way to go to prove his innocence. Dakar Dickey was a tough customer. He might or he might not talk. The police had orders to shoot him on sight. The cut on his ribs was deeper than he thought. He would have to see a doctor. He might or might not be right in his assumption of what was behind this whole affair. John Smith, the alleged dead man, might or might not be the man whom he believed he was. Death was sudden and life was sweet. And so was Sally.

"Well, I'll tell you," he told her soberly. "Whether they shoot me or not we have to turn this blighter over to the police if only to prove that he does exist. Then I have to make two over-seas phone calls to London. One to my family's solicitors, the other to Scotland Yard. But right now, if you don't think it would be too familiar, I believe I am going to kiss you."

He did.

"You're learning," Sally admitted, "fast. Two more kisses like that and you'll be entitled to vote."

CHAPTER VI

IVORY HARRY

A COLD snap had followed the rain but Ogilvey had changed his mind about closing the Inn. The morbidly curious, attracted by the lurid stories in the newspapers, and the reputed fact that Mrs. Smith was still stopping at the Inn, had crowded into Fawnskin all day. Every room was filled. The bar was doing capacity business. He almost wished Barrows was back on the desk. He had been a capable clerk. Funny a quiet chap like that should blow his top. It was equally funny the combined forces of the San Francisco police and the F.B.I. had been unable to pick up any trace of him or Sally after they had left the Alhama. Ogilvey felt sorry for Peg Dale. Allowing Barrows to escape was likely to cost him not only his sister but his job.

Cam Fields, at his daughter's insistence, and a few other of the Fawnskin big shots were out to get Peg's scalp. They claimed that the affair proved a one-legged man was incapable of being sheriff.

He glanced at his watch. It was eight o'clock. Cam and Bill Tenny the district attorney were probably in Peg's office now. They had wanted him to go along but live and let live was his motto.

Room 210 rang for service. It was Mrs. Smith ordering another gin buck. He plugged her into the bar wondering why she didn't buy it by the bottle. She had drunk heavily before her husband's death. She was pouring it into her now. He wondered why Sheriff Dale insisted she stay on in Fawnskin. The blonde had been ready to leave at noon. She had in fact hired Jim Thurber to drive her and her dead husband's car down the mountain when Peg had stumped up to the Inn and practically ordered her to stay over another night. Cam Fields was raising hell about that, too. He called it an unwarranted assertion of authority added to bucolic inefficiency.

Ogilvey interrupted his train of thoughts to tell a youthful couple he was sorry but he hadn't a vacant room with or without a

bath, then turned to watch a mousey appearing gray-haired man with horn rimmed spectacles mounting the room stairs furtively. To the best of his knowledge the man wasn't a guest but so many had registered since noon and there had been so much confusion he couldn't be certain. He started to challenge his right to go up stairs, then dismissed it as unimportant. Live and let live was his motto. What with murder and kidnaping to prove it there were far worse things than two people sleeping in a bed that had been rented for one.

Outside the Inn the first cold wind of Fall whistled about the eaves and through the pines and on down the single main street to Sheriff Matt Dale's office.

A white-haired, bullet-headed, man who was reputed to have the first grove that he had ever foreclosed on, Cam Fields, Fawnskin's leading and only banker, was laying down the law.

"It's not that we don't like to sympathize with you, Peg," he insisted, "but this affair, allowing a scrawny little maverick like that murdering English desk clerk to trick you and then throw you over his back the way he did shows how really physically incapable you are since your—er," he cleared his throat, "accident."

"That's one way of putting it," Dale said. "But there wasn't much room on the Canal to duck."

Bill Tenny the district attorney pleaded, "Be reasonable, Matt. With all this stuff in the newspapers about our one-legged sheriff, tourists will be afraid of their lives. We won't do a dime's worth of business next year."

"I've heard that every season since I was ten years old," Dale told him. "Why don't you tell the truth? You guys want me out of office because I try to enforce what few laws there are on the books." He drummed his fingers on his desk. "Yes. And if I'm still sheriff next year I think I'll shut up the slot machines."

From behind her father, Mary Fields said hotly. "Don't worry. You won't be sheriff. You've made Fawnskin the laughing stock of the state."

Dale pointed out, "Not half the laughing stock it would have been if I had allowed you to incite that boozy crowd of yours to lynch Barrows last night."

Fields said that was no way for Dale to talk to his daughter. She sniffed, "Ignore him. He's only jealous because our crowd didn't take that waitress sister of his into our country club set. Small wonder. She and that nasty little Cockney are a pair. For my money she went with him of her own free will."

Sheriff Dale snapped a pencil with his thumb but said nothing.

Bill Tenny pleaded, "Let's not get off the subject. It's bad enough for a thing like this to happen in a town without an incapable sheriff allowing the prisoner to escape."

He pounded on Dale's desk.

"And to make matters worse you have for all practical purposes arrested Smith's innocent wife. Why? You aren't going to attempt to allege she was in collusion with Barrows, are you?"

"No," Dale admitted.

"Then, why order her to stay in town?"

"She is a material witness," Dale pointed out the law. "And if we catch the killer it might be we'll need her testimony."

"We," Fields snorted. "For the last time, Dale. Will, or will you not, resign so we can elect a capable man in your place?"

UP THE street, somewhere near the Inn, an auto horn honked three times. Dale got to his feet, favoring his peg leg, and reached his hat and wind-breaker from the wooden pegs on the wall. "Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Fields," he said.

"Yes—?"

"The answer is 'no,'" Dale told him. Shaping his hat to his head he stumped across the office to the door. "Now," if you will excuse me, I have an appointment with a dead man."

"He's mad," Fields echoed the slamming door.

"Out of his mind with grief over his sister," Tenny agreed. "Look. Here's how we'll handle it, Cam. We'll get up a recall petition. With our names at the head of it—"

"Let's talk it over over a drink up at the Inn," Fields suggested.

Outside the office the wind shifted and picking up a newspaper dropped sometime during the day along with the other debris the curious crowds had left on Main Street carried the paper back toward the Inn and in

a playful mood plastered it briefly against one of the second-story windows.

Her mind fogged with gin, Bess Smith started nervously to her feet as the flapping paper tapped against her window before sailing off into the night, then remained at the window staring out at the tall dark writhing pines.

Damn such a country. Damn Fawnskin. Damn the money. Damn Harry. He had assured her it would be a pipe, a few questions and nothing more. Now she wasn't so certain. Not only had Barrows escaped, he was still at large, and the big one-legged rube sheriff had practically ordered her to remain in Fawnskin. She gulped her most recently ordered drink and considered going down to the bar and playing the bereaved widow. She was lonely in her room—and frightened. Why didn't Harry contact her, tell her what to do? What if something had gone irreparably wrong?

SHE reached for the phone to order another drink sent up and froze, too terrified to scream, as the face materialized outside her window.

It was her nerves. She was drunk. It couldn't be Barrows. It couldn't be Barrows looking in her window. Her window was on the second floor. He was in San Francisco being hunted by the police for murder.

She made a gesture with one hand as if to wave the face away. Instead the sash was raised on well-oiled slides and Barrows muscled himself over the sill. "I'm real, very real," he assured her. He closed the window behind him. "And I think we have something to discuss, don't you?"

She found her voice but it was small. "Go away. Please go away. If you don't I'll scream for the police."

The blonde started for the door and stopped halfway as it opened and the mousey-appearing gray-haired man with horn rimmed spectacles whom Ogilvey had seen mounting the room steps entered the room, a .455 Webley in one hand and closing the door leaned against it, pointing the gun at Barrows.

"You can't win, can you, Clyde?" he said quietly. "I was afraid something like this might happen when Dickey didn't turn up on schedule and no report was made of your body."

The blonde sobbed, "Harry," and would have thrown herself in his arms from sheer relief.

He waved her away. "Where is the girl?" he demanded of Barrows. "And how much does she know? How much do you know for that matter?"

Poised on the balls of his feet, his arms extended stiffly from his body, Barrows admitted, "I've phoned London."

"That tears it," the blonde sobbed.

The mousey appearing man shook his head. "Not necessarily. If I can get back to Tanganyika without it being known I was in this country we can still pull it out of the fire. I should have known better than to trust Dickey to dispose of them but I hadn't much choice in the matter. I had other irons to attend to. You killed him?" he asked Barrows.

The young Englishman's smile was tight. "He'll never be the same."

IGNORING the answer to his question the gray-haired man told the blonde, "We'll have to chance the girl knowing the truth. There is no way she can prove it. Here's the new lay. Pay attention. Clyde obviously came up a ladder. I'll leave the same way after shooting him. Your story is, he broke into your room and attempted to shoot you to keep you from testifying against him. Fortunately you were able to wrest the gun away from him and shoot him before he could. This is his gun and can be traced to him. That's your story. Stick with it and you'll yet wear diamonds and live in a castle."

As he spoke he kept moving the barrel of the gun over Barrows' body as if anticipating an attack.

The blonde repeated, parrot-like, "He broke into my room and attempted to shoot me to keep me from testifying against him. Fortunately I was able to wrest the gun from him and shoot him before he could."

"Check," the gray-haired man said curtly.

His eyes cold, he leveled the gun on Barrows' heart only to shift his aim and fire, cursing, at the window as Sheriff Dale's face and shoulders appeared outside the pane.

"A trap, damn it, a trap. And I walked into it like a booby."

Sheriff Dale's heavy Colt drowned out the shattering of glass and hurling himself

forward before the gray-haired man whom the blonde called Harry could shoot again, Barrows tore the gun from his hand and beat him over the head with it as Sheriff Dale, dependent mainly on his arms, heaved himself over the sill.

With the strength of desperation, the would-be killer broke away from Barrows and raced out into a hall suddenly peopled with armed men. Weaseling past them before they could use their guns, Barrows at his heels, he fled down the stairs, through the lobby and into the bar where Barrows stopped him with a flying tackle that sent both men crashing to the floor almost at Cam Field's feet.

Snatching a bottle from the bar the banker screamed, "It's Barrows! It's the Killer!"

He made a wild swipe at the former desk clerk's head but before he could swing the bottle again, Sheriff Dale, red-faced from the exertion, stumped across the barroom and tore the bottle from his hand. "Stop it, you damn fool," he swore. He pointed at the unconscious gray-haired man. "He's the dead man. He's Smith. He's the guy I had the appointment with."

"Smith?" the banker puzzled.

Barrows got wearily to his feet. "Or Ivory Harry, or Harold Montgaden, whichever you chose to call him. A bit of a bad one that."

Bill Tenny repeated the names. "Ivory Harry. Harold Montgaden. What the hell are you talking about?"

One of the grinning F.B.I. men who had followed the three men down the stairs stopped grinning. "It's a long story, chum," he told him. "And a darn interesting one."

SEATED on the bar, Sally one side of him and a steaming cup of tea on the other, Clyde Montgaden admitted, "I should have guessed the set-up sooner but I had been out of touch with my family for three years, making good on my own, don't you know. One year I spent in a lumber camp a good bit up in the bush. Last year I tried ranching in Montana. This year, as you know, I clerked here at the hotel, not reading the papers much and blissfully unaware of the fact that the governor and both of my brothers had been killed in a plane crash and I was being sought for. In fact the solution really didn't occur to me until Dakar

Dickey called me *seigneur* in that grubby hotel room."

From the edge of the gaping crowd in the barroom, "Mary Fields puzzled, "Dakar Dickey?"

"The Senegalese who didn't exist," he told her gravely. "My relation's partner in crime as it were. A most unpleasant fellow. I was forced to batter him up a bit more this afternoon before I could get Miss Dale and myself ashore where I immediately contacted my family's solicitors and Scotland Yard who suggested I tell the whole story to the American F.B.I."

One of the F.B.I. men who accompanied him on the wild ride back up the mountain, grinned, "Battered him up hell. He ruined him. And you should see the guy. He's six-foot-three and weighs two hundred pounds or better."

The youth on the bar made light of what he had done. "No credit to me, you know. I learned all that sort of thing as a captain of commandos. Had to stay alive." He continued, "Anyway it was Dakar Dickey who, acting under my relative's orders, put chloral in my tea, made certain I had powder stains on my hand by substituting an inferior gun for my own, then drove me in my own car to that clearing where I was supposed to be found by the sheriff's posse and promptly dispatched to the lethal chamber as soon as the blonde had told her fictitious story."

He paused to squeeze Sally's hand and sip at the cup of tea.

"It was the perfect frame," Sheriff Dale took up the story. "And I admit it had me fooled until around five o'clock this afternoon when the San Francisco F.B.I. office phoned me that Sally was safe and told me the score. We even had a body by then with two bullet holes in its head that checked with the gun we had taken away from Barrows. Montgaden," he corrected himself.

THE youth on the bar looked at the scowling gray-haired man handcuffed to the blonde. "That's going to take a bit of explaining, Harold. But then you are good at that sort of thing. I've heard the governor say a dozen times that you could lie your way out of hell."

"He'll have a chance to try," one of the F.B.I. men said coldly. "Probably some bum

he picked up off skid-row. The local sheriff isn't to blame because it was identified as Smith. With Smith's diamond on the body, its condition, and the positive identification by Smith's wife, the dead guy found in the shaft was Smith."

Sally explained, "There wasn't really any Smith. That was just a name and a character that Clyde's cousin assumed to 'die' under so Clyde would go to the lethal chamber and he would inherit his estate as the last of the Montgadens. He knew no one would recognize him as Smith with the black dye off his hair, the pads gone from his cheeks and clothing, and that pair of horn-rimmed cheaters that he's wearing. Besides he didn't mean to appear again at all. He wouldn't have if Dickey had shown up as scheduled to report our bodies had been left, wherever he was supposed to leave them."

"That was smart reasoning," an F.B.I. man said. "Montgaden convinced us that Dickey and the blonde were the weak spots in the murder chain and that when Dickey failed to show up Harold would beat it back up here on the assumption the man he had tried to frame had got away from Dickey and would look up the blonde again in an attempt to get the truth out of her. We've been waiting in a car outside the Inn since shortly after seven waiting for Harold to show."

"Then I almost didn't recognize him," the youth on the bar admitted. "I didn't while he was posing as Smith. It's been years since I have seen him, the black sheep of the family, not in good repute, you know. Always mixed up in some swindle or another, the last we heard of in French West Africa."

The handcuffed man made one last weak attempt to clear himself. "It's all a damned lie," he bluffed. "I don't even know what the punk is talking about. My name is Brown. I was a friend of Smith's and I merely drove up here tonight to see if there was anything I could do for his wife."

Montgaden shook his head. "I'm afraid that won't wash, Harold. You've been in too many mix-ups before and when I talked to Scotland Yard I asked them to forward your fingerprints which rather stymies that story, for old crime's sake one might say."

"I'll talk," the blonde screamed. "I'll talk. He told me it would be easy. He told me I'd

wear diamonds and live in a castle. But I didn't kill anyone. All I did was put on that act and lie about him being shot while all the time he was busy stuffing the body of the bum he dressed in his clothes into that old mine shaft."

AN EXCITED buzz of conversation drowned her out. One of the F.B.I. men asked Ogilvey if he could use his office and guided the handcuffed pair into it. Grinning, Clyde jumped down off the bar then lifted Sally down beside him. Hesitant, Cam Fields tapped him lightly on the shoulder.

"Just one minute, son. Miss Dale mentioned an estate. It is valuable enough for this relation to go to all this trouble to frame you so he would inherit, not you?"

The youth nodded. "Oh, yes. As a younger son I never expected to see any of it. I intended to make good on my own. But there's pots and pots of it. A shipping line, a few mines, and mills. Heaven knows what all. Hate to go back in a way but afraid I must. I am the last of the line and I know the governor would want me to carry on the family name." He puzzled, "Don't know why Harold simply didn't shoot me or have me shot but he must have figured, as the next in line to inherit, that his own past record was too bad."

Smiling sweetly, Mary Fields crowded up beside her father. "But tell me, Mr. Montgaden. What did that awful woman mean by saying he promised her that she would live in a castle?"

"She probably meant one of mine," the former desk clerk told the banker's daughter coldly. "The family has one in Scotland, one in Wales, and several more in Britain. Uncomfortable old things. But you see a title goes with the pots of money. That's what *seigneur* means in France. And knowing my father and brothers were dead and that I was Lord Montgaden it rather slipped out of Dickey's mouth."

She gasped, "Lord Montgaden."

He winked at Sally. "Silly things, titles. Most undemocratic. Shan't use any more than I have to. But then, on the other hand, *Lady* Montgaden doesn't sound too badly."

He attempted to guide Sally out of the crowd surrounding them and so flustered she could scarcely speak. Mary Fields blocked their way. "Oh, but Lord Montgaden. You must—that is, I—I'd love to—well, won't you come to dinner at the country club?"

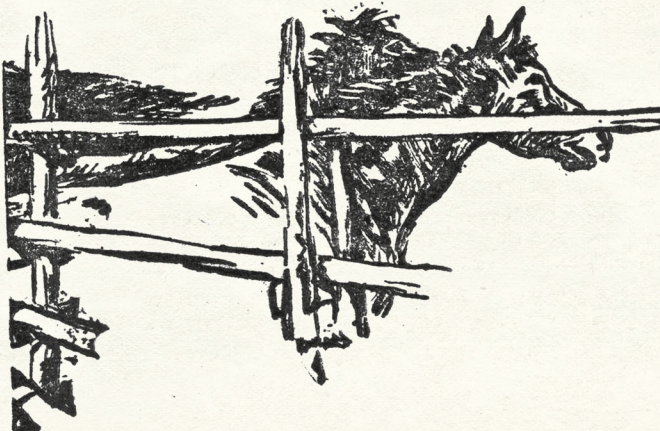
"Thank you," he told her coldly. "I'll make it a point to give him your invitation the next time he comes into the shoe store."

Then he and Sally went out of the bar-room, on the cool, wind-swept porch of the Inn and she was in his arms and he was kissing her.

Her eyes shining, Sally told him finally, "Mister, not only can you vote, you also win a good cigar."

He said he would save it for a purpose and perhaps even buy a few boxes more to go with it.

She wrinkled her nose at him. Then laughed.



*Andy Bow Did Not Consider Himself an Amateur Detective,
but Certain Happenings Around His
Gas Station Aroused His Curiosity*



MURDER WEARS A MUFFLER

By GIFF CHESHIRE

A GUN blasted exactly as Andy Bow swung off State 90 onto the big hard stand of the Twiss Corners service station. The crash was sharp and swelling in the freezing night air. There had been three

men beyond the pumps, cut from Andy's view by a gray sedan. Andy ground to a stop just as the sedan spurted away. On beyond, another car was parked by the air hose. A man shoved excitedly out of it as Andy strode across the pavement.

The station attendant lay face down between them, his cap upside down in pooling blood. Both the men he had been talking with were gone. Andy bent, and one glance was sufficient to show him that the operator was dead. There was a bullet hole squarely in the middle of his forehead.

The other man had halted beyond the body and removed a stubby cigar from his mouth. He lifted a fixed gaze from the dead man to Andy.

"Holdup. I seen the whole thing."

Andy stared at him. "I saw part of it. Looked to me like it was my pulling in unexpectedly that started them shooting. They weren't paying any attention to you."

"The guy told me to keep quiet, and I kept quiet." The man replaced the cigar and moved it from one corner of his mouth to the other with his lips. "Like a fool, this dope tried to grab his gun. He's young and wanted to play it brave, I guess. Not me."

Andy stepped back. It was a neat, efficient-looking place but not large. He saw that it got its name from the fact that the secondary highway crossed State 90 here. There was an empty store building across the highway, and catty-corner from the station was a drive-in lunch. On the fourth corner stood a large, old-fashioned house painted white and nearly concealed by shrubbery.

A girl had emerged from the lunchroom, Andy saw, and now she raced up. Though the night was bitterly cold, she wore only a neatly starched, yellow waitress' uniform and her legs were bare. Fine, honey-colored hair whipped about her pretty face as she bent over the station attendant.

"Roger!" she said, in a soft, moaning voice. Then she straightened to look at Andy. "Who did it and why?"

Andy shrugged. There was shock and grief on the girl's finely chiseled face, controlled by a resolute courage. Though he didn't understand, he sensed instantly that the dead man had meant much to her. She whirled then and ran into the service station and a moment later was dialing the telephone.

The other man glanced at Andy. "Calling the law," he grunted. "Well, since we seen it, I guess you and me've got to stick around to tell them about it." He was a

big man, though young, with high cheekbones and a crooked nose and cold, sensual lips. His eyes were too closely spaced, and something in them troubled Andy.

Andy stepped inside the station. The girl had finished her call. She hung up and turned toward Andy. "They'll be here right away."

Andy nodded. "You knew the man?"

"Yes. I—I was engaged to marry him."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Andy. "The man out there says they tried to stick him up and he tried to grab the bandit's gun. Spunky."

Her eyes flashed. "Roger Cline was no coward. Do you mind waiting till the sheriff gets here? I'm Ginny Young and I run that lunchroom across the road."

"Did Cline own this station?"

Ginny Young shook her head. "No, it belongs to Miss Twiss who lives in the house over there. Roger ran it for her." Her eyes clouded then. "Oh, why did it happen?"

Andy's heart went out to the girl. She obviously was deeply shaken, yet she had good control of herself. She was the kind who would give way to grief only in strict privacy, and he admired her. He left her there and stepped outside and smoked a cigarette.

The big man had climbed back into his car and was slumped behind the wheel as if trying to nap. It was nearly an hour before an official county car bearing a deputy sheriff came growling in from toward the city.

The officer made a routine check-up. "Conditions're sure getting bad around here," he said finally. "Did you get his license number?"

Andy shook his head. "Splattered with mud." He described the car while the deputy jotted it in his notebook.

"A plain stick-up," said the big man.

"That seems to be across now," said Andy thoughtfully, watching a scowl climb onto the man's face.

"Coroner'll be here pretty soon," said the deputy. "I don't figure you guys need to wait if you'll give me your names and addresses."

"Jepson," said the big one. "Turkev Jepson to my friends, and you can get me at the Oak Arms in town."

Andy gave his name and that of a hotel

in the city where he had made reservations. With a gentle smile to Ginny Young, he lifted his hat and climbed into his coupe, swinging out onto the highway.

TWISS CORNERS was about a dozen miles from the city, he had discovered from a road map, the highway cutting through a canyon in forested hills. In town Andy found his hotel and storage for his car and went tiredly to bed. He still had a remote troubled sense when he awakened early the next morning. He shaved, showered and donned a change of clothes, then went out for his breakfast. Abruptly he decided to return to Twiss Corners for it, at Ginny Young's place.

The quest for a future had brought Andy into this northern part of the state, a search for some small business he could possibly acquire under his veteran's benefits. It dawned on him, as he drove out, that a certain Miss Twiss would be needing a replacement for Roger Cline, and Andy Bow kept thinking of Ginny Young. But mostly he thought about the other man who had witnessed the shooting. There was something odd about Turkey Jepson.

When he reached Twiss Corners, Andy found the service station locked, though several cars stood before the lunchroom across from it. He swung his car across the intersection and parked with the others. He stepped inside. Ginny's eyes widened slightly as she recognized him, but there was an impersonal look on her face.

There were a few tables scattered along the wall, and a dozen stools at the counter. Half of these were occupied. Andy took a stool somewhat removed and, when she came to him, ordered his breakfast.

He dallied until the others gradually cleared out.

When the last had left, Ginny came up to him. "Probably you think I'm callous to be working so soon. But that's how I am. I've got to keep busy."

Andy nodded. "It's the best thing. Tell me, did you know that big fellow who was there last night?"

"Turkey Jepson. Not well, but he eats here once in a while."

"What does he do?" asked Andy.

"I don't know except that he comes through here quite a lot. He bought gas

over at the station sometimes, too. I had an idea he is a traveling salesman."

Andy pondered this thoughtfully. "Tell me. My being a stranger, do you suppose this Miss Twiss would be dead set against hiring me for the station? I'm looking for a job."

"Why, I don't know," said Ginny. "There's already been an applicant, this morning. He ate breakfast here and mentioned it, then went over to see her."

"The news sure travels," said Andy.

"It was in the morning paper." Ginny's eyes grew abstract while something continued in her mind. Suddenly she stepped out from behind the counter and moved to the public telephone in the far corner. She dropped a coin in the slot and dialed a number and in a moment said, "Miss Twiss? This is Ginny Young. Listen, don't hire that man until you've seen another who's over here now. I'll send him right over." She hung up and turned back to Andy. "Go over and see her, and—good luck."

"Thanks." Andy stepped outside and crossed the highway. He saw that the Twiss house was very old but pin-neat, white with its shutters a light green. The yard, though cluttered with shrubbery and flower beds, was carefully tended. He stepped across the porch and lifted an old-fashioned knocker, and in a moment a little old lady stood peering at him in the doorway.

"Miss Twiss?"

"Yes, young man. "Step in."

Alameda Twiss was as old as her house and just as fresh and neatly tended, and Andy liked the pert, intelligent face and the crinkles of humor about her alert eyes. He saw those eyes give guarded scrutiny to the discharge button in his lapel. He walked behind her through an old-fashioned hallway into a large parlor.

Andy frowned slightly. The other applicant was still here. The man sat in a big leather Morris chair by the window. He looked at Andy and scowled. He was middle-aged, with a slack jaw, and his clothes were none too neat.

Miss Twiss turned toward him, saying, "I have your address, Mr. Vogan. I'll get in touch with you if I want to see you again." There was dismissal in her voice.

The man stared at her with temper mounting in his eyes, then shrugged and rose

from the chair, catching up a battered hat. He strode across the room, ignoring Andy, and out.

"Glad you came along, young man," said Miss Twiss. "I was about to hire him, even though I didn't like him. It's hard to get help now. What's your name?"

"Andy Bow, Miss Twiss. I'm wondering if you'd like to sell the service station."

She lifted her eyebrows, a flicker of disappointment in her eyes. "Why, no. It's my only income, and I'm too flighty to have a lot of money all at one time. But I pay a good salary. Have you had experience in a service station?"

Andy nodded, grinning again. "Yes, but maybe not too much. During summers while I was going to school. But I think I could handle it, all right. However, I'm interested in finding my own business." He knew that his discharge button and the fact that he presented a neater appearance than had Vogan had sold her on him. He asked himself suddenly why he shouldn't take up the proposition Roger Cline had let go of so violently.

The same thought was apparently in Miss Twiss' mind. "I shan't last much longer, Mr. Bow. The arrangement I had with Cline was that he had an option to buy the place upon my death. I'd make you the same offer."

"That's trusting me a long ways," said Andy, "but if you're willing, I am."

Andy had the feeling of having taken a jump into the dark, an hour later, when he left the Twiss house with the key to the service station in his pocket. He crossed the highway and moved his car over to a back corner of the parking, then unlocked the buildings. Everything was just as Roger Cline had left it the night before, and even the blood he had spilled in front had been sluiced away by somebody. Andy turned on the big electric heater and found coveralls. Miss Twiss had agreed to come over presently to check the contents of the cash register and see that the station was turned over to him properly.

Business gave promise of being good, for no sooner had he lent the air of activity to the place than cars began to swing out of the steady, city-bound stream of traffic.

It was early that afternoon when Turkey Jepson pulled past. He did not stop at

the station but swung across the intersection and parked at an angle in front of the Twiss house. The big man lumbered out of the car, brushed through the gate and disappeared into the shrubbery. He was back in fifteen minutes, striding angrily. He climbed into his car and growled on down State 90.

Almost immediately Miss Twiss emerged from her shrubbery. She had a light shawl about her shoulders and moved with surprising briskness across to the station.

Andy chanced to be free at the moment, and she said, "Well, what do you know? That man wants to buy the station and he offered me half again what it's worth! He was plain put out when I turned it down. What do you make of it?"

Andy glanced at her closely. "He was the other witness to the killing, last night. Maybe this place just looks like a good business set-up, and he had the same idea I did."

"Then why was he so put out?"

Andy shrugged, concealing the excitement she had put in him. From the start there had been an odd ring to Turkey Jepson. "Well, if you've got a good chance to make money on it, I wouldn't hold you to our agreement."

"Something about the man ruffled my feathers, or I might have been interested. But I told him definitely no."

IT WAS late that afternoon when Turkey Jepson pulled again into the station, directly behind an old relic of a sedan driven by a small, mousey man. Andy filled the relic's gas tank, and the man followed him inside to pay the bill. Andy was surprised at the incongruity when the man pulled open a billfold for the money. It was stuffed with currency.

The man gave Andy a five, and when Andy had made change tucked the billfold carelessly into his hip pocket. He stepped out and across to the car and was in the seat when Andy yelled, "Hey!"

The billfold had fallen to the paving, and Andy stooped to pick it up. He handed it to the man, who thanked him casually, started the motor and pulled away. He left Andy scratching his head.

Jepson pulled up to the pumps. "Well, so you're back here in business."

"Why not?"

Jepson shrugged. "No reason that I know of."

"I heard you tried to buy the place."

Jepson looked at him closely. "So I did. It's a money-maker."

"What's your line, Jepson?" asked Andy.

"This and that." Obviously, he meant to say no more, Andy serviced his car, and Jepson paid for it and drove off.

THE next two days passed quickly, and Andy was convinced that the Twiss Corners service station was a profitable business. It drew heavily from the working crowd rush in the mornings, as did Ginny's lunchroom, and again in the evening. Yet there was consistent good business throughout the day as residents from the scattered suburban areas and farmlands beyond the corner came and went.

There was a grease rack and small repair shop on the back of the hardstand, and Andy found there was considerable light repair work. A room in this rear building had been fitted up for sleeping quarters, and Andy moved in at once, taking his meals at Ginny's. She remained friendly but indifferent with him, and he sensed that this came from her grief over Roger Cline. The second day after the murder she remained locked up for the day, which was Cline's funeral, yet the next day was open again. He knew she was a girl who had to lose her sorrow in hard work and steady preoccupation. He respected and admired her for it.

He liked Alameda Twiss and knew their relationship was going to be pleasant, and all in all he was satisfied with the situation.

Then came the evening when the gray death car, with the same mud-smeared plates, pulled again into the station. Without recognizing it, he had seen it parked in front of Ginny's place, doubtless waiting till the coast was clear. Now it growled across the highway. As he came out to the pumps, Andy straightened involuntarily, a cold feeling running up his spine. The driver was the man Vogan, who had applied to Alameda Twiss for the job of running the station, and he knew now that Cline had met his death at the hands of Vogan and the man now with him.

They were aware that he had recognized them and they grinned at him coldly. Vogan

remained behind the wheel, but the other shoved open the car door and got out.

He said, "Inside, Bow."

"So you know my name."

"Sure."

"Did Jepson send you?"

"Who's he?"

Andy backed through the door, unable to read this, anxiety mounting. "What do you want?"

At that moment Vogan called, "Take it easy, Pete. Car coming."

An automobile whipped out of the woods on the lateral highway, coming toward State 90. Andy measured the man Pete, who kept a hand in his coat pocket. Maybe not, but there probably was a gun in there. Andy didn't consider this a stick-up any more than the first one had been. They were after something, maybe his life, for if Andy Bow was out of the picture maybe Miss Twiss would hire Vogan after all, or sell to Turkey Jepson. He had no doubt they were all tied in together.

The approaching automobile slowed for the highway stop sign, and Andy's heart was in his mouth as it wheeled left and pulled onto the hardstand of the service station. Pete emitted a low curse and then stepped back.

"Take care of them, Bow, and don't try anything funny."

Easing a little, Andy hurried out. A man slid out from behind the wheel of the newly arrived car, asking, "Got time to fix a tire, mister?"

"Sure," said Andy. A dry, grim amusement rose in him. As on the other occasion, the pair did not want to work before too many witnesses, and a tire repair job could be stretched out.

The customer moved around and opened the trunk and pulled out a tire. Andy rolled it into the repair shop. He went to work, taking his time. Then, after waiting a few minutes, the gray sedan's starter growled and the car whirled out onto the highway, disappearing toward the city. The situation had been spoiled for them and they had given it up for the time being.

Yet through the next few days Andy's uneasiness would not leave him. They meant to have the service station for themselves and for some reason neither clear nor laudable.

THE decision as to whether he should report the matter to the county sheriff was taken from him when, the morning after the gray sedan's second visit, Andy noticed a county car parked in front of Ginny's lunchroom. He watched for the man to come out, and it was the deputy who had been out to investigate Cline's death. On impulse, Andy motioned him over.

"They were back."

The deputy was young and lean, and he stared. "Tried it again?"

Andy shook his head. "If you mean to stick me up, no. And I don't think they ever tried to stick up Roger Cline. I think that was a front to kill him, and that that man Jepson was parked there to tell a story of how they'd tried to hold the place up until Cline got rambunctious."

"What makes you think so?"

Andy told him all about it, Vogan's attempt to get the job, Jepson's effort to buy the station, and the fact that Vogan was one of Cline's killers. There was the matter of the man who had dropped a billfold stuffed with money in Jepson's presence, seeming indifferent when it was returned, and this could have been to see whether Andy Bow was honest or approachable.

The deputy rubbed his chin. "Names don't mean a damned thing, Bow. Looks funny, but damned if I can make sense of it. They couldn't travel very long with smeared license plates, so they must have fixed them special for their visits. And since they got chased off, they might be back again." He grinned. "Next time try to get their number."

"Sure. I'll clean their windshield and plates for them. Andy Bow's Super-service."

"Well, keep in touch," said the deputy, and he left.

It left Andy as baffled and disturbed as he had been before the move. They would try it again. For some reason they wanted possession of the service station, and his memory of what had happened to Roger Cline did nothing to reassure Andy Bow.

Ginny had taken Cline's clothing and personal possessions scattered around the place to his family, yet shortly after the gray death car's second visit Andy made a discovery that struck sharp interest in him. There was a simple desk in the station, where Cline had kept his books. Looking through it one day

Andy came upon an envelope, smeared by greasy fingers and unsealed. Supposing it to pertain only to the station, he looked in it idly and discovered several newspaper clippings.

As he read them, his eyes widened. There were three clippings, all dated in December and January of the previous year. Each dealt with a death, and in each case it had been reported as caused by carbon monoxide poisoning, the drivers and lone occupants succumbing while traveling. Three separate cases in which a car with a faulty muffler proved a death trap.

The first victim had been a man named Vesper, of the radio writing team of Zangwill and Vesper, who had been found dead in a car that had gone off the highway and crashed into a telephone pole. The second was a man named Gideon Odell, who had been discovered in a closed car in his own barnyard, after apparently having been dead twenty-four hours. The third was a woman named Anna Lamark, who also had run off the highway to crash.

It seemed odd to Andy that Roger Cline had clipped these accounts and kept them. Moving on a hunch, Andy took a state road map and spread it on the desk. With a pencil he marked the location of the reported residences of the three dead people, and his eyes widened. They lived in separate localities, but all in the area served by State 90 or the cross-road. Probably they all passed through Twiss Corners to and from the city.

The clippings showed that Roger Cline had had a special interest in those deaths, and now Andy wondered if this interest had cost the man his life. Yet his murder seemed to involve more than getting him removed from the scene, for Turkey Jepson and Vogan and the man, Pete, seemed determined to get possession of the station. It couldn't be merely to secure these clippings, even if they knew Cline had collected them and perhaps had made an odd picture of them, as had Andy Bow.

It gave Andy little illumination. Maybe the victims had merely been Cline's customers, which would explain his interest in their deaths.

Andy slapped his thigh then. Carbon monoxide, from defective mufflers. What if Cline had done repair work on the cars and perhaps discovered signs of tampering. The

next thought shook Andy. What if Cline had done the tampering? Though the idea seemed preposterous, it stuck in Andy's mind. He was convinced that the so-called hold-up had been but a screen for murder, and there had to be a strong reason for it somewhere. And he, himself, was getting deeply involved in it.

One thing seemed to render this insight false. How could Cline have been involved in anything sinister and yet have commanded the respect of a girl like Ginny Young?

WHEN he closed the station that evening, Andy took the clippings and marked road map across to Alameda Twiss' house. She looked them over, frowning thoughtfully.

"What are you trying to make of it, Andy?"

"I don't know. Did you know any of those people?"

"All of them, in a general way. I've lived here most of my life. Vesper had a place out on the Frenchtown road. He and a man named Zangwill were a pair of pretty well-known radio writers in town. Vesper traded at the station."

"So!" said Andy.

"What're you getting at, Andy? You scare me!"

"Did Cline ever do any repair work for Vesper?"

"Why, yes, quite frequently."

"How about the others?"

"Well, Gideon Odell was a retired farmer down toward Ryegrass. He was pretty well-to-do. A widower and queer. Lote—that's his son—still lives on the place, I think. He traded at the station, too, though I don't know what you're getting at. So did Anna Lamark. I went to school with her. She was pretty flighty. Her husband died and left her with quite a piece of money, and then she up and married a man half her age. I warned her myself against men who'd be after her money."

Andy Bow did not consider himself an amateur detective, and he would have had no special interest in the case except for the fact that he unwittingly seemed to have brought danger down upon his own head. Yet now he could build a partial picture, admitting it was entirely guesswork.

Supposing they had killed Roger Cline

only to remove him, with Vogan going immediately to try to secure his job, knowing Miss Twiss would have difficulty in finding a trained man immediately. Then, through the strength of his discharge button and a more pleasing personality, Andy Bow had beaten him out. Turkey Jepson could then have made his attempt to buy the station. That much formed a logical sequence.

Andy was growing positive that it all had to do with the three deaths by carbon monoxide poisoning. He had a mounting anxiety about his own security.

He returned to the station. Roger Cline apparently had been an efficient man, keeping business-like records. Andy got the old job sheets out of a pigeonhole in the old desk and began to work through them. He went back nearly a year to find what he wanted, and at last he had it. Three job sheets, one for each of the murder victims, each for some minor repair work and each for the installation of a heater. And in each case the date was close to the date of the car owner's death, and prior to it.

Andy was rocked by it. Some sure instinct had led him to uncover murder. Yet he lacked proof of anything. The sheriff's office would probably say so. Criminal law could not operate on appearances.

The next morning Andy called the Weather Bureau and learned that on the date of each of the three deaths, the temperature had been well below freezing. Which meant that, with most motorists' carelessness the carbon monoxide victims had probably traveled with their windows tightly closed against the cold. Andy turned from the telephone to stare at the three car heaters he had found in stock. They were of a type infrequently used, operated by hot air tapped from the exhaust manifold. Yet he had examined them all carefully, the night before, finding them well constructed and without fault.

Cold weather was here again. This fact stood out in sudden new meaning for Andy; somehow it lent urgency to the mysterious goings-on around the Twiss Corners service station.

Andy crossed the road for his breakfast late that morning, taking a seat where he could keep an eye on the station. Since Ginny had been so close to Roger Cline, he had the feeling that possibly he could draw

something from her that would throw light. She had grown a little friendlier in recent days, and her grief seemed to be easing.

This morning she asked pleasantly, "How's it going, Andy?"

"Swell," said Andy. "Cline certainly built up a good business."

Ginny nodded. "He was very ambitious."

"It's a good drawing area. A lot of the people on beyond here seem to be pretty well heeled."

She smiled softly. "Yes. Roger used some very clever psychology there. A lot of the old-timers around here are really wealthy, but they got that way through hard work and close saving. Roger made a practice of giving people like that a couple of cents rebate on their gasoline. It's a funny thing. No matter how wealthy they are, people with money go for that sort of thing as much as poorer folks. It brought Roger a lot of extra tire and repair business."

Andy looked at his coffee cup to cover his sudden excitement. It was another link in the nebulous chain of supposition. Cold weather, car heaters using exhaust gases, and now how Roger Cline had drawn the well-to-do to his station. Almost against his will now, Andy Bow was shaping a deadly picture, and he hated to think what the consequences would be to this girl. He hated probing her, but if what he suspected had a basis in fact there might be living people in menace. Certainly Jepson and company were up to something urgent.

BLUNTLY, Andy said, "Roger wasn't a boy who was inclined to cut corners once in a while, was he?"

Anger blazed instantly in Ginny Young's eyes. "He certainly wasn't! What are you getting at, Andy Bow? I thought you were trying to dig something out of me! What is it?"

He shrugged lightly. "Sorry, Ginny. Rebating is considered to be kind of a shady practice, is all." He knew then he had lost what little ground he had gained with her, for dislike now was plainly in her eyes. It saddened him, for the feeling was strong in him that the day was not far off when he was going to have to hand her a shocking blow. It gave him a bleak feeling, for day by day he had realized that he had found the girl he wanted.

Before he had finished his breakfast a dark sedan pulled into the service station. Andy hurried across the highway. There were two people in the car, one an elderly man and the other a dark-haired girl. As Andy came up to the window she looked at him with frank interest from behind the wheel.

The oldster beside her looked expansive and possessive. "Fill her up, fellow." It was doubtless his car, and the old boy was trying to impress the girl. Andy filled the gas tank, checked oil and water and cleaned the windshield, conscious throughout that the girl was watching him. She was attractive in a way in marked contrast to Ginny Young, emanating some animal magnetism that he could feel in his innermost fibres. This doubtless was what had the old man feeling so young, and Andy Bow knew she was consciously applying it to him.

The sedan moved on down State 90, and Andy went back across the highway to finish his breakfast.

He grinned. "May and November, with November doing his best to turn back the pages. Know them?"

Ginny was still not entirely friendly. "The man is old Seth Oman. He owns a lot of property out on Hoople Creek. I don't know the girl, but he's inclined to run around with younger women." Her eyes grew troubled again. "Andy, what were you trying to find out about Roger?"

"Nothing," said Andy, aware now that there was something on her mind about Roger Cline that troubled her. He paid for his breakfast and went back to the station.

In midmorning, the next day, an expensive convertible pulled in at the Twiss Corners service station to stop before the repair shop. Andy finished gassing a jalopy for a pair of teen-age boys, then went back, interest kindling when he noticed that it bore the dark-haired girl who had been there with Seth Oman the morning before.

She climbed out from behind the wheel as Andy came up, exposing two shapely lengths of expensive nylon. "Andy Bow," she announced, in a husky voice, "I had trouble starting my car this morning. Will you look at it?"

Andy nodded, wondering where she had learned his name. She was smiling at him speculatively. He reached for the clip-board

that held his job-sheet blanks, to make it easy for her to get over what she had come for. The convertible was new, probably only a few weeks out of the showroom and quite possibly a present from old Seth Oman. He was willing to bet there was nothing wrong with it.

"Name?" he asked.

"Myrla Rinke. The Oak Arms Apartments in town. However, what has that to do with the car?"

"I keep a record of my work," said Andy. He pushed it, assuming an easy aggressiveness that was not natural to him when it came to women. "I like to know my customers' names and where they live—when they're beautiful."

She smiled, and Andy ran the car into the shop. In a few minutes he had confirmed his impression that there was nothing wrong with it. Either she had wanted to size him up or to attract him, using this natural means of conveying her name and address.

While he worked, Myrla Rinke sauntered about. Twice he was interrupted by customers at the pumps, and as he passed her going and coming her gaze was on him frankly. She wore an expensive fur coat, with a fez-like hat to match, and it only heightened the subtle charm of her long body. Finally he let down the hood, clamped it and turned to her with a grin.

"I don't think you'll have any more trouble with it."

"Fine. How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing, because I did nothing."

"But surely—!"

"Tell you what," said Andy. "Maybe some evening when I'm in town I'll phone you and buy you a drink."

"Any time after tonight," said Myrla Rinke. She got into the car and drove away, giving him a slow smile.

WHILE there was no denying that the girl was exciting, she left Andy mostly baffled. Her visit had been deliberate and probably for a purpose deeper than a tramp's desire to two-time her aged admirer. Bait, maybe, for a deadly trap. Or perhaps an intoxicating argument designed to win Andy Bow to some unrevealed purpose. For she had known his name, and as yet it was nowhere displayed around the service station.

It was this puzzlement that took Andy into the city, that night. He donned his best clothes, grooming himself carefully, then drove through the shadowed canyons to town. He had his dinner there, and afterward strolled the streets, half-undecided as to whether he should go through with it. She had indicated that she would be busy this evening, and it had occurred to him that it might be a good time to investigate her a little.

He found a bar and spent a couple of hours there. Shortly after nine he left the place and went to where he had parked his car and set out to look up the Oak Arms, whose location he had found in the telephone book. He was not surprised to discover presently, that it was in a well-to-do district, a modern and expensive-looking building. He parked across the street and lighted a cigarette. A few people entered and departed from the building.

At last, when he saw an elderly couple turning into the foyer, he slid out of the car, crossed the street and followed them through the door, which the man unlocked. He could see the house directory through the big glass front and, loitering momentarily in the foyer, he spotted Myrla Rinke's name. Apartment 522. He punched the button to bring the automatic elevator down, after the elderly couple had gone up, and ascended to the fifth floor.

As he stepped out of the cage into that hallway, he found himself trembling a little. It was not anticipation of Myrla Rinke's undoubted charms, if she were home, but of something deeper about her that he still could not understand. He moved down the hall past several doors, then abruptly rapped on 522. He was not surprised when he heard a man's grunt inside, and a heavy tread across the floor. The door came open, and Andy and Turkey Jepson stared at each other.

Jepson was in pajamas and bathrobe, and his hair was rumpled. He jerked out, "What the devil are you doing here, Bow?"

"Came up for a drink," said Andy. "You were expecting me sooner or later, weren't you? I just figured I'd show up under my own terms." He had more a sense of satisfaction than anything. He hadn't quite placed Turkey Jepson in the picture, but there had been the deep sense of his belong-

ing there. Then, beyond Jepson and partly cut from sight by the corner where the room widened off the hall, he saw Myrla Rinke take a quick look at him with surprise in her eyes.

After a brief moment, Jepson said, "Okay, fella, come on in—on your terms. You're right. We expected you, but not yet."

Andy stepped inside, pulling off his hat, and walked on to the living room, seeing Myrla Rinke standing over by the far wall, half-turned from him but watching him with an amused yet puzzled look in her eyes. She wore some flimsy negligee, with apparently not much under it. It was doubtless her apartment, in her name and with all the earmarks of feminine occupancy.

"Well," said Myrla, "now that you're here, sit down, Andy Bow. I think we underestimated you."

Andy grinned at her. "Does old Seth Oman know about this?"

She lifted her eyebrows but said nothing.

Jepson had followed Andy into the living room, and now stood there half-blocking his exit. He had lifted fingers to stroke a square jaw, and his small eyes were hard above his broken nose.

"You run quite an organization, Jepson," said Andy. "Hard-looking mugs—beautiful dames—swanky little tuck-aways. What's it all about?"

JEPSON cast him a quick glance, then crossed the room and lowered his heavy bulk into an easy chair. He picked up the cigarette that smoked there on an ashtray, dragged on it deeply then brought his gaze back to Andy.

"Okay, Bow, it's just as good that you come in, tonight. I had a feeling you were a smart boy. What do you know about Roger Cline?"

"Not much," Andy admitted, "except that it wasn't any stick-up the night he was killed. You were there on purpose to tell the deputy sheriff that it was. They were your men in that gray sedan. Vogan, who tried to get the job of running the place the next morning, is your man. When I beat him out, you tried to buy the place. Vogan and Pete came back either to kill me or try to do some persuading, then a repair job came in and scared them off. Then Myrla Rinke came out to

give me the treatment, either to win me over or lure me in here."

"Not bad," said Jepson.

"And not half of it," said Andy. "Cold weather's here again and you've got business to tend to before it's over. That's the rush. Cline was vital to you out there, but somehow he got dangerous to you. I know of three murders beside his, Jepson—Vesper, Odell and Anna Lamark. And Seth Oman's slated to start off this season's business."

"What else do you know?" asked Jepson. His eyes were dangerous.

"That you worked it through* faulty hot-air heaters that jetted carbon monoxide into their closed cars," said Andy calmly. "Cline installed the heaters, and somehow you worked it so it was profitable to your ring. Now, Myrla is slated to marry old Seth Oman, and somehow you've got to get one of your heaters in his car so he'll bump off during the season when a lot of people get it naturally."

Both Jepson and the woman had grown tense. "Why did you come here?" Myrla asked. "If you know so much, why didn't you go to the law?"

"Maybe I've got my own angle to play. Maybe I've been cagey because I'm scared I'll get what Roger Cline got. Why did you kill him?"

Turkey Jepson made a motion to Myrla and she stepped in leg-exposing strides to the wall telephone in the hallway. She dialed a number, spoke briefly and hung up. There was a look of bright danger in Jepson's eyes, a steady rumination.

"And if you figure you can liquidate me here and now," said Andy, "figure it again. I left this apartment number at a bar I was in and told the man that if I wasn't back in a couple of hours he was to send the police here. So let's talk business." It was a lie, for he hadn't even known it at that time.

Jepson relaxed slowly, lighting a fresh cigarette from the stub of another. He smoked, staring at the ceiling. "All right, Bow. If you were just trying to play the boy scout, you'd have gone to the law already. It strikes me you're building your own angle, all right. Maybe I figured you wrong. When you handed that billfold back to my man, that night, I put you down as an Honest Harry."

"I figured that was a test," said Andy. "Or I might have kept it."

"Well, if you had kept it, I'd have made you an offer that night. What's your angle, Bow?"

"I never know till I hit it."

"This could be a good one," said Jepson. "Maybe you're right about old man Oman. And maybe there's even more lined up for the treatment. You could make a nice penny for yourself out there. And you wouldn't get what young Cline got unless you tried to shake us down for more money, like he did, or unless you go to the law, like I was afraid you would. So we talk, and if a word of this gets to the sheriff's office, you're a dead greaseball."

"I know the set-up," said Andy, "and I could already have gone to the law. You're selling murder. How did you make anything out of killing that radio writer—Vesper?"

Jepson contemplated for a moment. "That started it. Him and Zangwill couldn't work without one another. Vesper got the ideas and Zangwill dolled 'em up. But Vesper was a lush and slipping bad. Because they needed each other, they carried insurance on each other, and finally Zangwill figured Vesper was worth more to him dead than alive. A guy we both know put him in touch with me. I knew the young punk out at the Twiss Corners service station with a loose screw. It was easy when I heard Vesper traded there. And the insurance company paid off without a squawk."

There was a chill feeling in Andy as he listened to this calm, businesslike account of cold-blooded murder. "And since there were other wealthy people among his customers, it went on and on."

"That's right. Gideon Odell's only heir was a son who wasn't any good. The boy was willing to kick through with a nice fee when we showed him how easy it'd be to get hold of everything, himself."

"I can figure Anna Lamark out myself. The rich and flighty widow who married a young man. It was your man."

"Sure," said Jepson, grinning.

"Last year's business accounted for," said Andy. "Now you've got to get Myrla married to Seth Oman and him killed before cold weather's over. And I suppose she won't risk marrying him till his death's assured. For that you have to have the Twiss

Corners service station. Which means me. What did you have in mind for me?"

"We had a slug, but maybe it's different now. Look. Myrla's been working on him, complaining that his car's cold. Now you sell him on the idea of buying one of them hot-air heaters you got out there. But before you install it, you drill a little hole in it where it'll never be found. Myrla won't be along that day, and before he's home he's dead. It works, Punk. That's what happened before. And if you were just trying to find out, let me tell you you'll die the day you take any of this to the sheriff."

"What could I prove?" asked Andy.

Jepson grinned now. "That's what's good about the racket. A lot of people get knocked off from exhaust gas every winter. And we leave no trail. If the law picks us up, finally they have to turn us loose, and after that something happens to anybody who talked out of turn. You go home, Bow, and don't do nothing till old Seth Oman shows up and asks you to put in a new heater. Look inside of one and you'll find a pipe where you can drill a little hole. Since it's a new heater, everybody thinks it was the old muffler that did it." He sighed. "Only thing is, we can pull only two or three a winter. So we have to make 'em juicy."

There was a low rap on the door, and Myrla went to open it. Vogan came in, and Andy knew it was in response to her telephone call. Vogan did not remove his hat and kept his hands shoved deep into his overcoat pockets. There would be a gun in there.

"What you got here, Turkey?" he asked.

"Maybe we won't need you," said Jepson. "He's got sense, or he'll learn some. We let him run loose for a while."

"We been wanting to get him alone. Looks like this is it."

"Not yet," said Jepson. "Not unless he's too smart for his own good."

Andy left, feeling far from as composed as he managed to look. He knew he would have to go to the sheriff now, with nothing tangible to offer. Jepson would be bound to suspect it, if an investigation was started. Or if he and his henchmen were arrested and the case against them not proved, it would be bad for Andy Bow afterward. He almost regretted the reckless impulse that had led him to go to Myrla Rinke's apartment, yet

he knew that more than one life depended on his having the courage to act.

EARLY the next morning Miss Twiss drove out of her garage in her ancient coupe and drove across the street to park before Andy Bow's repair shop. It was a slack moment, and as Andy came up, he asked, "Well, where are you going?"

"Into the city to shop," she said. "Andy, you'll have to show me how to work this heater Roger Cline talked me into buying, last spring. I never did use the thing. I don't know how to turn it on."

Andy opened the door and stared at the heater, which was exactly like the ones in stock. "You say Cline high-pressured you?"

"Well, he sold me on the idea they warm up faster than a hot-water heater, and I like it nice and warm. But I got the flu and didn't use the car any more before warm weather."

Andy straightened, looking at her. "Miss Twiss, your car isn't safe to drive. You take my car and go do your shopping, and let me check this baby over for you."

"My goodness, what's wrong?"

He shrugged. "You never know, but let me look it over before you use it."

"I don't like to use your car."

"I want you to."

Andy watched her drive away in his car, presently, and he still frowned in deep thought. With the heavy trade, it took quite a while for him to get the heater out of her car and torn down. It had the hole Turkey Jepson had mentioned, where it could be seen only by completely taking it apart.

He kept thinking of how Roger Cline had an option to buy this profitable business in the event of Miss Twiss' death. It looked like he had undertaken a little job on his own. Yet this was a murder that hadn't happened, and would in no way involve Turkey Jepson.

Then he emitted a sharp whistle and hurried to the telephone. He dialed the sheriff's office in the city and asked for the deputy who had investigated the Twiss Corners service station hold-up, a few weeks before.

The man chanced to be in the office, and in a few seconds said, "Tom Owens speaking."

"Listen," said Andy, "this is Andy Bow, out at Twiss Corners. I've got something

hot for you, if you can come out right now."

"Be there," said Owens, and the receiver clicked on the hook.

The deputy's car pulled into the station in less than half an hour. As the lanky young Owens crawled out, he grinned at Andy.

"What've you got, fella?"

Andy showed him the tampered hot-air heater, designed to let deadly carbon monoxide fumes into the car. "This one didn't come off," he concluded, "but three did. I don't know if the heaters were fixed afterward, but if you can run them down there's a chance we might find one or two still like this one." He gave Owens a fill-in, concluding, "But that'll only tie the murders to this service station and to a dead man. It'll build incriminating evidence against the heirs in each case, but only circumstantial evidence. But if they don't kill Seth Oman through this station, they'll find another way. So you've got to do something."

Owens stroked his jaw. "With this much, we probably can tie it all together in court—if there're still tampered heaters in the death cars. That I'll find out. As for you, you'd better watch yourself."

"Don't I know it?" said Andy. His gaze strayed unconsciously across the highway to Ginny Young's lunchroom. That was the part he hated worst, for Ginny had put all her clean young faith in Roger Cline. The deputy left for the city, looking thoughtful.

Tension mounted unbearably in Andy as he finished a busy day. He was just locking up that evening when the telephone rang and Tom Owen's voice came over the wire. "You had something, Bow. We located Vesper's car, and it's still got a haywire heater on it. We're still after the others. But the big business is this. The city cops've picked up Zangwill and're trying to break him down. The accomplices outside of Jepson's gang're the ones to work on. They can't take it when the heat's on. I had an idea you might like to be in on it. That Lote Odell still lives on his old man's place, and he falls in my bailiwick. I'm going out to see him and I thought you might like to come along."

"Sure," said Andy. "How soon?"

"Right away."

Andy had his supper, finding it difficult to meet Ginny Young's eyes, and by the time

he returned to the station Tom Owens' car whirled in from the traffic on the highway.

"The town's jumping," he said. "I'm scared Turkey Jepson and his mugs're going to fly the coop before we have enough to justify picking them up. They sure as the devil will if they find out what happened to Vesper, or that we've been out working on Odell. But that's why we've got to hit it hard."

At that moment the telephone inside the station rang urgently. With a frown, Andy unlocked the door and stepped in. There was a pleading voice on the wire.

"This the Twiss Corners service station? Say, I'm out of gas about a couple of miles out on Thompson's Road. How's to bring me out enough to get in there?"

Andy scowled. He was anxious to make the errand with Tom Owens, yet he had a decent concern about anybody being caught out in the country out of gas. He said, "Who is it?"

"Johnny Andrews. You gas me up, once in a while."

Andy did not place the man, but he said, "Okay, mister, I'll be right out." He hung up and turned to the deputy. "Well, I've got to do a little job first. Some bird's out of gas on Thompson's Road."

"We could go out to Odell's that way," said Owens. "Take the man enough to get on to the city, and we'll go on from there."

Andy filled a five-gallon can and, as he came out with it, the deputy said, "We'd better take my car. I've got some artillery in there." They climbed in and roared out on the right, intersecting county road. A mile out, Owens said, "This is Thompson's Road," and turned left. The road pointed off through rolling, benighted farmlands. They followed it for half a mile then, ahead, Andy saw the dim parking lights of a car.

"There he is."

A man stood beside the car on the driver's side, and he made a motion with his hand. It was a sedan. Owens pulled abreast and swung out on the right side. Andy climbed out, lifting out the can. He carried it around in front of the car, then a gun exploded, and he pitched forward, ploughing into the graveled road.

He wasn't hit. In the last split second he had seen a menacing move from the man who stood by the car door and unconsciously

had hurled himself: It was a trap. The slug had torn through the light metal can and gasoline gushed. The man was prowling forward and, as he lay tensely trying to figure it out, Andy realized they had not expected him to have company and surely did not know there was an armed deputy sheriff in the car.

In the next moment Tom Owens cut loose with his automatic. The stalker went down on the road. Andy did not know how many were in the waiting sedan. Yet apparently this man had been the driver, who had emerged to stand by the wheel door. There was a frantic scrambling inside the car when it was realized that the trap had backfired. Andy crawled back around the deputy's car. Crouching he made his way to the door and opened it.

Owens had lowered the door glass on his side and was firing at the windshield of the sedan. Suddenly fire was returned from in there.

"Glove compartment!" Owens rasped.

Andy opened it, and his fingers closed about the grips of another automatic. He took it and moved on around behind the car. Someone had worked his way behind the wheel and Owens stopped him with a crashing slug. They gave up trying to get away then. The sedan's doors burst open and a man piled out on either side with a blazing gun. The windshield of the deputy's car went out. Out of the corner of his eye, Andy saw Owens slump in the seat. Another man was triggering straight at Andy. Andy stood solid, rage consuming him, blasting back. The man keeled over.

Something took Andy then, spinning him, rocking him, and nearly costing him his balance. Yet he fired once more. Suddenly there was the grim quiet in the night that told him it was over. A feeling of elation leaped in Andy when Tom Owens' voice sounded.

"Some buzzard sure took a chunk out of my ear!"

The door shoved open, and Owens climbed out, lifting his tall figure erect. Andy realized that his own shoulder, which was growing wet with blood and had only a numbed feeling, was not dangerously punctured.

They checked on the others, using the car headlights and the deputy's flashlight. There

had been four men. Pete and Joe Vogan and a man Andy had never seen before and, finally, Turkey Jepson. They were all dead.

"We sure caught a mess of fish!" said Owens.

"Who's the third one?"

Owens laughed lightly. "My friend, that is Lote Odell, the man we were going out to see. Jepson must have got wise that we were turning the heat on his accomplices. You'd made our best witness, and he figured it was a good idea to get rid of you, even if he hadn't wanted revenge. Looks like they picked Odell up first, to keep us from talking to him. Well, you drive my car and I'll take theirs and we'll haul the mess into town."

"There's some small-fry yet," said Andy, "but I guess we've cleaned them out."

IT WAS noon the next day before Andy had courage enough to cross the highway to Ginny Young's place. The doctor had dressed the light wound on his shoulder the night before, and it caused him little trouble except for soreness. His worry now was about Ginny, and finally he could postpone the ordeal of facing her no longer.

The place was empty at the moment, and Ginny had seen him coming. To his surprise,

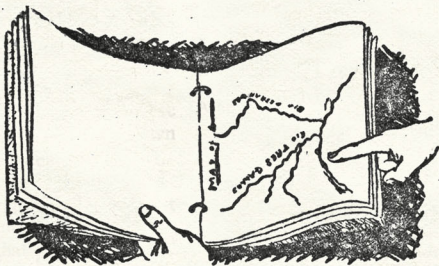
she did not meet him with a storm, nor with the stricken look he had feared.

"Well," said Andy, "I guess you've seen the morning paper. And I guess you hate me. But I couldn't help it. Things stacked up that way from the start, and I knew it. I knew that other lives depended on what I did. Can you forgive me?"

To his astonishment, Ginny smiled tiredly. "Yes, Andy. It's been a terrible shock, yet I felt from the start that you had stumbled onto something I didn't know about over there. It upset me, but deep in my heart I wondered. There were things about Roger Cline I never could understand. Not that I suspected him of anything, yet there was a hard ambition in him, an unconcern for others. I admired his enterprise and his intelligence, yet I never could feel close to him. It used to trouble me, and maybe I sensed more than I realized. I'm glad I found out about it this way, rather than after I'd married him."

Andy let out a long breath. There was tremendous relief in him that she had taken it this way, yet he saw that from the courage she had displayed at the very start he should have guessed it. It was no time to tell her about the things suddenly welling in his own heart. Yet she would be here, catty-corner from him, and he could wait.

It was all there—the fabulous jewel, the map with the spot marked X, the old prospector with the sole knowledge of the hidden horde.



"Treasure Trove in Jezebel"

by

STUART EMERY

in the next **SHORT STORIES**

YOUR BONES IN THE BRUSH

THE STORY SO FAR

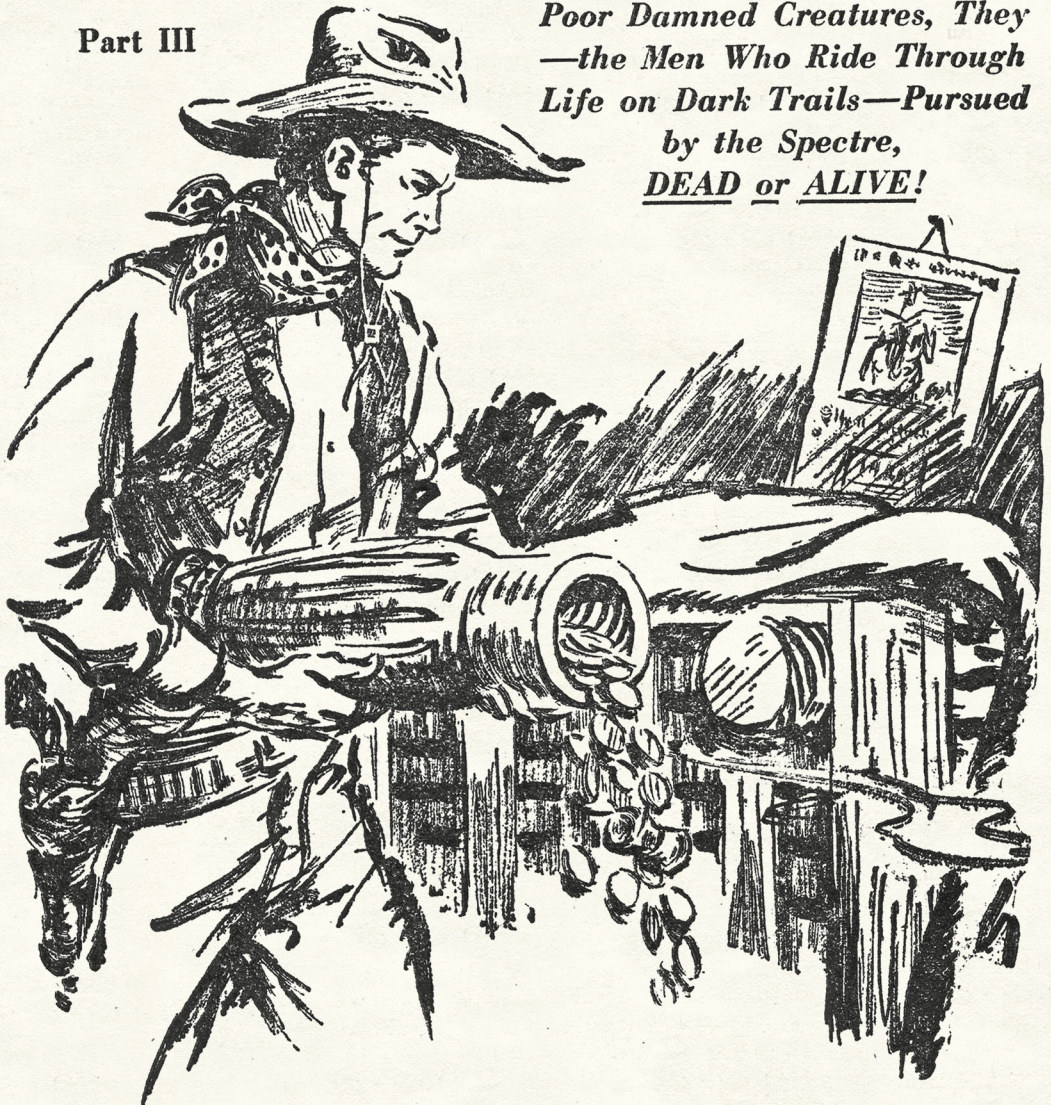
TALL, lanky Blizzard Wilson and thick-set Badger Coe, Rangers, are propositioned by the Adjutant General of Texas for the biggest job of their lives. He tells

to stay alive and hang onto what they've got.

The Federal Government tries to ride herd on smugglers, counterfeiters and the like but the Secret Service can't be bothered with thieves and murderers who hop back

Part III

*Poor Damned Creatures, They
—the Men Who Ride Through
Life on Dark Trails—Pursued
by the Spectre,
DEAD or ALIVE!*



them that the southwest corner of the Lone Star State is crawling with lawlessness. That "Bloody Border" country harbors desperadoes from every state in the Union. The honest folks there are fighting a losing battle

and forth across the line. That is a job the Rangers must do.

Blizzard and Badger have worked undercover ever since they first enlisted; throughout the southwest they are thought to be

By CADDO CAMERON

gunmen, outlaws who time and again have dodged jail by the skin of their teeth. Therefore, the general suggests, they are to go into the border country as outlaws and to be particularly on the lookout for such as Maximo Sarna, Tom Blaney, Scott Ferris and other big lawbreakers. If these important fellows are humiliated the little outlaws will get scared and county law officials will gain confidence.

"Of course," the general adds, "I won't

order you to take this job—for that **might** amount to a death sentence!"

Despite this warning Blizzard and Badger head for the trouble-country and get busy quickly. In rapid succession they hold up Sarna and Blaney and tie in with Border Belle, attractive and smart owner of a wide-open dancehall.

There they talk to Belle, and her friend, Foxy Reynard, who poses merely as a little horse thief. They also meet old Stony



Smith, a vigilante. All are elated at the way the two Rangers, posing as outlaws, have bamboozled some of the big crooks.

Belle wants Blizzard and Badger to throw in with her, saying as how "we could run the border, sure enough!"

Later the two hear of a "job" about to be pulled off against an unsuspecting ranchero. They hide on the ranch, fight back against the bandits and in the melee Blizzard is shot.

After the outlaws have been driven off and Badger is tending his partner's wound, lawman Stony Smith arrives, asks them to join him.

"Darned if we'll work for a deputy sheriff!" they answer.

Blizzard is no more than partially recovered from his bullet wound when the two undercover Rangers hear that Scott Ferris is out after them with a posse of badmen. They change their regular horses for a couple of Spanish ponies, better for brush popping. Willy Ferris pursuing them with Indian trackers, though, begins to close in. To throw their trackers off, the two Rangers head directly for the heart of the enemy, going to Ferris' ranch. There, they ransack things, come up with some important evidence and are helped by a Mexican girl friend of Scott Ferris, who takes a liking to tall Blizzard Wilson. She wants most of the loot, too, and when he refuses and starts to leave she says she'll see him again.

"After all, I must *see* you to *kill* you!" she threatens the big Ranger.

PART III

BEFORE opening the door to the bunkhouse, Blizzard heard laughter in there and what he saw inside explained it. The Ferris men were seated on their bunks smoking and Badger was hunkered down against the end wall of the room, rolling a cigarette and telling one of his big windies.

"—and what I mean, when that there blue bronc finally come back to earth, he hit the ground with his legs like fence posts. My weight landed in the stirrups so hard it busted 'em both. So—what happened? The only thing that could happen. My bones clenched in the saddle seat and

it taken a strong man with a crowbar to pry me a-loose from that old blue bronc. And, d'you know somethin', fellas! So help me—to this day I pack fishhooks on the ends of the bones in my be-hind!"

When the boys stopped laughing, Bully Baker wanted to know, "Blizzard, it strikes me that your puny little pardner is a wall-eyed liar. Ain't he?"

The lanky Ranger answered with a perfectly straight face, "He *could* be, but I've been knowin' the scalawag ever since he was a shirt-tailed kid and I ain't never *caught* him a-lyin'."

That brought on more laughter. Presently, Bully inquired, "But what about them fishhooks in his be-hind? That sounds mighty fishy."

Blizzard grinned, and drawled, "'Tain't at all unlikely, judgin' by the way he sets when there's work to do. Come on, Badger. We gotta ramble far and fast."

The big sergeant groaned, "Oh Lawdy!" and got up. He crushed out his cigarette, and went on, "Shore hate to run off thisaway, fellas, and I'm powerful glad we got to know you. We drop into Border Belle's joint off and on. First time we run onto you there, I'll be right proud to buy."

Bully Baker spoke up, "Just listen to that, boys! He knows that the whole damned country is a-crawlin' with men on a hunt for him, but he comes right out and tells us where to find him. He ain't got a lick of sense, but he *is* a pretty fair fighter for a little cuss."

Badger chuckled and the others laughed.

Blizzard grinned down at Tom and Billy, the men who had come for the remuda, and told them, "We're a-feudin' with Scott Ferris, fellas, but we ain't got a thing against the balance of you boys and we don't want to put you out any more'n we have to. I want to keep you here until we get a good head start, but I don't want you to be set afoot for long, so I'll go out now and strip your nags and leave your riggin' here, then we'll take 'em with us for a short piece and turn 'em a-loose to come home. Afraid you won't find any saddle stock in the horse pasture. Fact is—I'm a-hopin' that by now the Ferris Ranch is as clean of horses as the Gulf of Mexico and it will be if the boys have done what they *said* they'd do."

The Ferris men looked at one another in surprise and swapped exclamations about this bit of news.

Blizzard hastened to add, "If any of you had private horses on the Ferris range and they've been lifted, let me know and I'll see that you get paid a fair price for 'em."

That went over good, all right, as the Ranger had hoped it would.

"Steal 'em and pay for 'em!" chuckled Bully Baker. "You're the damndest horse thief I ever seen."

As Blizzard was at the point of leaving, the two young *vaqueros* got up and came to the door. Each put out his hand, and one said in Spanish, "We want you to know, *Senor*, that we refused to join the hunt for you. That is why you found us here."

After shaking hands, the Ranger spoke in their language, "Thank you, *Senores*, but why did you do that?"

"I am Manuel Torres and this is my brother, Benito," was the answer. "In Laredo recently you broke the arm of Eduardo Hernández, also saved his life from that hangman Stony Smith. We are cousins to Eduardo. You are now a friend to our family. We do not forget."

"Neither will I. *Adios*."

LEADING the two Ferris horses, the Rangers took the trail to Liveoak Spring less than a mile up a slope from headquarters.

"After we water out at the spring," said Badger, "where do we go—where *can* we go in broad daylight?"

"We don't go."

"Huh? D'you mean to say that we bed down right here on Scott Ferris' home range?"

"That's right," drawled Blizzard. "There is ten acres of good timber on three sides of the spring with a million miles of brush beyond, and four animal trails through the chaparral that we know about. We'll take it easy in there today and make our get-away tonight. After tanglin' with that woman of Scott's I shore need to *untangle* my nerves and rest my brains."

"Suits me perfect," said Badger, "but don't forget that we're due to meet Pepe in camp tonight."

"We'll be there. I've got a mighty important job for that Indian."

After hiding the Ferris horses, watering and giving their ponies a feed of the grain each carried in his morral, the Rangers found a place in the timber from which they could watch all approaches to the spring while keeping under pretty fair cover themselves and went to work on the food that Alicia and Grandma Sanchez had put up for them.

Looking thoughtfully at a fried chicken leg, Blizzard declared, "We've done a heap of ridin' and a little fightin', and now we're gettin' along." He continued with a detailed account of what happened in the house. "So you see, we've got some hangin' evidence at last. I figure that those two men that Ferris shot up will testify against him if they're handled right, and Carmelita Castro will testify if she's handled rough."

Badger paused while eating a chunk of barbecued goat, and said, "Shore sounds good. Another thing, the way we've been whippin' Ferris around a stump is causin' a heap of talk among his men. Bully Baker has quit and those fellas that came after the remoother swear that several more of 'em are a mind to pull out. They all say the same thing.

"If they work for a crook he's got to be big enough to hold his own with the law and everybody else and if he ain't, they'll find somebody who is or throw in with a square outfit where they can sleep of a night."

Blizzard sampled a little of the goat, and observed, "The way things are a-shapin' up, I'm mighty nigh certain that Blaney, Ferris and Sarna will soon be fightin' among themselves and Border Belle will get caught in the ruckus. I'm a-hopin' those three bandits get the idea that we've more or less throwed our beddin' in Belle's wagon. They don't love her none to speak of, nohow."

"What makes you think that those three scalawags will get to fightin'?"

"Plain as what's left of the nose on your face," drawled Blizzard. "Each of 'em has throwed a crew of twelve men into the brush to comb us out. Ferris is the roundup boss. If he don't snare us pretty soon Sarna and Blaney will crawl Scott and claw him a-plenty, because everybody knows that they're in the hunt and they'll be gettin' laughed at right along with Ferris. I figure that's mighty nigh sure to happen and I

know what we can do to make certain that it does."

"What's that? Make it easy on me. I'm a total ruin."

Blizzard took a few swallows of the cold coffee in his canteen and went to rolling a smoke. "Suppose Pepe or Foxy sorta spreads the word around Laredo confidential that Ferris has got us circled so damned tight we can't hardly draw a full breath and he's a-closin' down on us fast. Then, all of a sudden we show up in Nuevo Laredo and take Maximo Sarna's dive apart, hop back across the river and deal Tom Blaney a fist-full of misery and make a clean getaway. What d'you figure will happen if we do that?"

Badger fingered a big knot above his right ear, and groaned. "Don't ask me. The way I feel now, after we do all that I won't be around to see what happens. When do we hit for town? Tonight?"

Blizzard grinned at his impetuous friend. "Well, hardly. Roll yourself up in a nice, soft cactus and snare a little sleep. I'll call you when supper is ready."

"What about you catchin' some sleep of your own?"

"Nope. Can't sleep for thinkin' about that infernal woman."

AN HOUR or so later Blizzard put the two Ferris horses on the trail and watched them head for home. After they reached headquarters he focussed his glass on the place and was mildly surprised and greatly pleased to see that no one seemed in any hurry to catch them up and go to notify Ferris of the raid on his home ranch. The hands were grouped in the cooking arbor, smoking and playing the coffee pot and they obviously were disposed to stay there. The Ranger wondered whether the boys were deliberately giving Badger and him plenty of time to get away. Could be. It was beginning to look, he reflected, as if the Ferris organization was falling apart—the wolves deserting their leader, and if he were crippled now they might turn on him. Blizzard spent the balance of the day on guard while his stove-up partner slept. He did a lot of thinking as the hours dragged slowly past and by the time the sun went to bed over in Mexico, he had definitely decided that now was the time for them to

strike their hardest blows—win, lose, or draw. . . . No, there couldn't be a draw. It had to be either win or lose.

The Rangers moved like hunted things tonight. Taking the trail at dusk with the almost positive knowledge that they were now *outside* the circle that Ferris would have had time to complete, they worked their way toward the *inside* where their camp was situated, hampered by an indifferent acquaintance with the country and its roads and trails, and made doubly cautious by the realization that their ponies were not fast. Upon three occasions Blizzard's remarkable hearing enabled them to escape patrols. The farther they penetrated into the circle, the firmer their conviction that this man-hunt was the real thing and by the time their camp was sighted in the moonlight they had experienced all the sensations of the wanted men whom they had so often hunted down in the past.

When at length he saw the trees that marked their camp Badger mopped his face with his bandanna, and growled, "Godamighty! Now I know how it feels to be caught on the wrong end of a man-hunt. For two cents I'd quit ridin' for the law—so help me!"

"Me, too," said Blizzard. "But I reckon it's life. Somebody or somethin' is always on a man-hunt and some pore cuss is always on the wrong end of it."

Enrique Lopez, the Sanchez *vaquero*, was in camp with fresh horses when the Rangers arrived—Blizzard's dun and a blue pony to substitute for Badger's snake-bitten coyote. Also, Alicia had sent more cooked food and a gallon of coffee, and Grandma Sanchez had provided more salve and a bottle of tea.

When asked how he managed to get through the circle, Enrique laughed and answered in Spanish, "Two times they stopped me and each time I told the truth, almost. I said that Felipe had sold these horses and I was taking them to the buyers. Once I lied a very little by saying that I was going to Laredo. Also, I may have lied when they asked who were the buyers. I named two bandits who are known to be friends of Maximo Sarna. I know that they are now in Monterrey."

"You'd oughta be ashamed to lie thataway," drawled Blizzard. He went on to

tell the *Tejano* that it was now too dangerous for him and Felipe to try to keep them supplied with fresh horses and that they'd get along until they could get to the ranch. Enrique protested in both Spanish and English, but the lieutenant stood pat. The *vaquero* was still arguing the matter when he left with the Rangers' tired ponies a few minutes later.

It wasn't long before Jose Terreros rode into camp. Although the guide's lean face was drawn by fatigue and loss of sleep, he moved as though his whippy body were tireless and his fine mule looked fit to travel the balance of the night. After watering and feeding the mule and rubbing it down with a handful of grass, the Indian wolfed some of the Rangers' food. Then he talked.

"Ferris knows that you are camped somewhere within two or three miles of this place," he began in Spanish. "For some time past he has had scouts watching your movements. Ferris is as clever as a wolf. He has mapped all known waterings in this neighborhood and keeps his different bands on the move all the time, working back and forth and gradually closing in toward a central point. From what I can learn, he does not know that you are here, but this is about the point toward which they are working."

"Huh-oh!" grunted Badger. "That's bad."

"Sounds thataway," admitted Blizzard. "Then I take it that the only fixed camp is his'n at Coyote Springs."

"That is true," said Jose. "Each of his bands has at least one telescope and he has hired one good tracker that I know of. They knew the tracks of your big horses, but your changing to ponies has thrown them off temporarily."

Having finished eating, the Indian rolled and lighted a cigarette. "There is much excitement in Laredo tonight," he went on to say. "Early this morning Stony Smith and his Minute Men discovered a bunch of men driving a band of Texas horses toward the Rio Bravo. There was a battle. Three bandits and one Minute Man were killed. Two bandits were captured and hanged on the spot. The outlaws were Tom Blaney's men."

"Bully for Old Stony!" exclaimed Badger.

Blizzard asked, "Any more news, Pepe?"

"Yes, Lieutenant," answered the Indian, "and it is bad. Maximo Sarna has offered a reward of one thousand dollars each for you, dead or alive."

"Well, I do declare," said Badger sarcastically.

"When did you hear that?" asked Blizzard.

"This morning," replied Jose. "It was told to me by a man who thought I was still working for Ferris."

The red-headed Ranger grunted, "Huh! It might be a pious idea for us to go and give ourselves up to Don Maximo and collect that two thousand our own selves."

The Indian's eyes flashed in the moonlight. "If you please, *Senor*, may I go with you?"

Blizzard grinned at him. "Sorry, Pepe. But I've got more important things for you to do. How long d'you figure we'll be middlin' safe in here?"

After a moment's thought, the guide answered, "Unless some tracker accidentally finds this camp, I think it will be three or four days before they get here—perhaps longer. In the morning I can show you a way out of this thicket, which I believe is known only to me."

Blizzard now dropped into Spanish to make certain that Jose Terreros understood clearly, "That, my friend, is something that we need to know. Now, I will ask you to make a long journey. From Laredo tomorrow evening, take the stage to San Antonio and from there to Austin. Go to the office of the adjutant general and give him a package which I shall turn over to you. It is very valuable. Give it to no one but General Steele. It will contain a letter in which, among other things, I tell him about you and ask that you be enlisted in the Rangers again. Answer all of the general's questions if you can. Tell him anything you think he should know. Guard yourself closely, for you may be followed. Will you go?"

"Certainly, my Lieutenant," said the smiling Indian. "From you it is an order to be obeyed. It will be a pleasure, too, for I have not seen the general since I served as his guide and scout in the Big Bend several years ago."

The Rangers laughed. Blizzard said, "I think you know more than I, much more."

in Laredo tomorrow I wish you would let it be known that Scott Ferris says we are so closely surrounded there is no possible chance for us to break through his lines."

Again the Indian's eyes flashed. "Most clever, *Senor!* Afterwards, you will appear elsewhere and prove that he is a fool as well as a liar."

"Hope so," drawled the lieutenant in English. "But can't never tell."

Badger stood guard until dawn so that Blizzard and Jose could get some sleep. Afterwards, he slept while the Indian scouted the surrounding country and the lieutenant struggled with the difficult job of writing a full report to the attorney general. Blizzard not only described what had happened, giving names of valuable witnesses, he asked to have a number of things done—mostly by the company of Rangers camped at Rio Grande City. Cutting a piece from his tarp he used the canvas to wrap the report, the Sarna papers, Diaz jewelry, and the money they had taken from Blaney's poker game in The Border Cantina holdup. Jose left before noon and Blizzard accompanied him part way so as to become acquainted with the secret trail.

Shaking hands when they separated, the Indian said, "I shall deliver these things to the general, *Senor.* Although you found me working for a bandit, I will always be a Texas Ranger."

Blizzard gripped hard. He liked this man. "Jose," he declared in Spanish, "you are an honest man and a Ranger. *Adios.*"

AROUND eleven o'clock that night Badger and Blizzard rode into Laredo, stayed in the shadows on side streets as much as possible and finally tied their horses behind The International. They entered the dancehall through a back door that opened into a lighted passage, listened at the door to the cardroom on their left and despite music and other noise in the main room, caught snatches of Border Belle's voice. Badger knocked and they went in without an invitation.

The room exploded in a burst of gunfire!

The Rangers had stepped quickly through the door so as to avoid meeting anyone in the hall. In the fractional part of a second they had seen everything in the room: Foxy Reynard on one side of the table, Belle on

the other, and two men who were in the Border Cantina a while back and well known to them—Blair Rone, a corrupt county judge from another county, seated in a large chair on their right; and in a chair tilted against the wall on their left, Gip Beatty, a crooked deputy sheriff from the same county. The judge and deputy had drawn their six-shooters, perhaps when the knock sounded, and their gunhands were resting in their laps when the Rangers opened the door. Rone jerked his weapon up, but Beatty fired without lifting his.

Badger Coe and Blizzard Wilson were hunted men now, with a price on their heads and they reacted accordingly. Their nerves were taut and jumpy. All their senses and reflexes were abnormally keen. They were cat-eyed, hair-trigger gunfighters under a constant menace, keyed up to the point where they'd strike without conscious thought at touch, sight or sound. Badger had jerked his body to one side, half turned, drawn and fired almost before he knew it. Gip Beatty slumped in his chair with a deep gash over his ear from temple to well back on his head. Blizzard had gone in with rifle resting in the crook of his left arm, right thumb on its hammer and finger on the trigger. The first man he had seen was Rone. A slight forward movement of his left arm brought the rifle to bear. He fired an instant before the judge's six-shooter blazed at Badger. Rone slammed back in the chair with a slug high in his breast.

"Steady, Foxy!" growled Badger hoarsely.

The big Ranger was a fearsome object now. Both eyes were swollen and blacked—one almost closed, his lips raw and puffed and twisted into a snarl by the swelling, and he stood there in a half crouch with feet spread, gunsmoke writhing around him and a smoking gun in his hand.

"I don't want any part of you!" muttered Reynard.

Border Belle's hands had clenched on the table. Through swirling smoke her long white arms, bare shoulders and bloodless face gave her the look of a beautiful woman who had died in the grip of horror and turned to marble that way.

Blizzard dropped a hand to Badger's shoulder. "Did they wing you, boy?"

Without shifting his eyes from Reynard for an instant, the sergeant answered gruffly,

"I ain't hurt. Reckon my crabbin' it thataway bamboozled 'em. Rone notched my arm. Beatty blistered a rib and it burns like hell. Wish the son-of-a-dog would wake up and start somethin'!"

"My God!" cried Belle. "Haven't you had enough?"

"No!" rumbled Badger. "Sarna puts a bounty on us and right away these damned reward hunters—!"

"Be still!" snapped Blizzard. "Belle, go into the dancehall and tell 'em a lie about the shootin'. Don't want anybody to know that we're here. Send somebody after a doctor—a man who'll keep his month shut. We'll carry these fellas upstairs—use the outside steps. Foxy, you show us a room. Make 'aste, now!"

Neither Border Belle nor Reynard showed the slightest hesitancy in obeying the lieutenant's orders. She hurried into the main room and by the time the Rangers had disarmed Rone and Beatty and picked them up, she was singing out in her rollicking fashion, "Everybody listen E-v-e-r-y-b-o-d-y! The drinks are on the house! Everybody to the bar! Foxy just shot two of the damned rats that have been stealing food from the kitchen and generally making life miserable for The International! Get your feet in the trough!"

The doctor came and went. Judge Rone would live and Beatty would be up and around in the morning. Belle, Foxy and the Rangers returned to the cardroom. She told Reynard to go and get a bottle of wine and fetch it himself, locking the door behind him.

When the little fellow had gone she leaned quickly across the table and asked Badger, "Why did you throw down on Foxy after the shooting?"

The big Ranger answered promptly, "I was spoilin' for a fight and he's a man with a gun."

Blizzard's keen eyes were fixed on the woman. "Why did you want to know?"

She shrugged, tapped a Mexican cigarette on the table, and answered carelessly, "Oh, I just wondered."

"Wonderin' never did hurt nobody." Blizzard grinned and added cryptically, "And sometimes it's a big help."

Border Belle took a long drag at her cigarette, leaned back and blew a smoke ring at the ceiling. "High Pockets, you and this

fighting grizzly here are a damned hard game. Mighty glad I'm not bucking you. If you'd throw in with me, five years from now we'd own the border."

"What in hell would we do with the thing?" asked Badger.

She thought for a few moments, flashed her brilliant smile, and declared, "By that time we'd have all of everything we wanted, so we would clean up the damned border and give it back to the law. Our sins would be forgiven and we'd be heroes on both sides of the line."

Foxy came in then and bolted the door.

While he was pouring wine, Blizzard asked him, "How did you make out yesterday?"

The little fellow's sharp face lighted with the enthusiasm of a master craftsman describing a great accomplishment. "Perfect!" he exclaimed. "If there's a horse left on the Ferris range it was hidin' in a gopher hole. Four hundred! That's how many we lifted from Texas and dropped in Mexico. The whole border will be talkin' about it inside of a week. Just between us four, Tom Blaney and Maximo Sarna are a-laughin' fit to kill, sorta gettin' square with Ferris for laughin' when you taken *them* into camp."

"They'd laugh a heap louder," drawled Blizzard, "if they were to find out that while you were a-liftin' Scott's horses, we cleaned a little rawhide trunk under his bed. Amongst other things, we got the Diaz jewelry."

"You *did*!" said Foxy. "I've been wonderin' whether he had sold that stuff."

"Oh, Blizzard!" cried Border Belle. "I've heard all about those wonderful jewels. Let me see them, won't you? Give me just one little emerald, or something, please!"

The redheaded Ranger's long face was politely apologetic. "Mighty sorry, Belle, but we need 'em. Besides, part of the things are half-way promised to another woman—half-way, that is."

"What woman?" she asked sharply.

"A woman that was fixin' to kill me," answered Blizzard, "so I had to buy her off. She's powerful pretty and her name is Carmelita Castro."

Belle didn't say a word. Neither did Foxy Reynard. They simply looked at one another.

Trying to stir up more trouble in the border underworld, Blizzard added, "Carmelita don't like you none to speak of, Belle. Fact is, she'd atold me where to find the balance of Scott's stuff if I'd a promised to get shed of you and Foxy."

"Well," she asked softly, "why didn't you promise?"

Blizzard slowly stroked the high bridge of his long nose, and drawled, "Thought about it some, but figured that Ferris probably didn't have enough left to pay us for our trouble. Foxy would be mighty hard to wipe out and women are tough—what I mean, *tough*."

Border Belle wasn't in a mood to joke. "What did you do with the Diaz jewelry?"

"Planted it, naturally, planted it deep."

Elbows on the table, she leaned toward him and put on her most innocent face. "Look, Blizzard. You boys are taking some terrible chances now and you're liable to get killed any minute. If you do, those wonderful jewels will be lost forever. Hadn't you better tell me where to find them, just in case anything *should* happen to you?"

Blizzard thoughtfully fingered his mustache. "Shore I'll do that . . . *if we get killed*."

"Damn you!" snapped Belle. "I hope you do!"

Foxy laughed silently.

FIGURING that Border Belle and Reynard would continue to be a big help on this job, the slippery Ranger went on to say, "Tell you what I *may* do, Belle. We don't know the first thing about peddlin' that kind of stuff, so chances are that we'll turn it over to you and Foxy to sell for us and give you a fair percentage of what you get for it. Would you do that for us?"

"Why, of course," declared Belle. "Peddling such things is dangerous business, but we'll do it for you and get you the high dollar."

"Yeah," said Badger, "and keep the high dollar if we don't watch you." To Blizzard, he added, "Let's us ramble before these crooks talk us out of somethin'."

Belle pouted in a way that helped her good looks.

"Good idea," agreed the lieutenant. "Foxy, what did you say is the name of the

monte sharp in Sarna's Cantina Rio across the river?"

"I didn't say," answered Reynard, "but his name is Tiburco Gonzales. You ain't goin' over *there*, are you?"

"Uh-huh, figured maybe we'd pike a little monte tonight," drawled Blizzard, "and sorta exercise our money."

"Hell, man!" protested Foxy. "You'll be walkin' right into the lion's den. Sarna himself is in Nuevo Laredo. He was in town this evenin' and I heard him say he'd spend the night on the other side."

"Bully!" growled Badger. "I want to talk to him about the bounty he put on our hair. A thousand dollars ain't enough. It's a plumb insult to men like us. We're worth more'n that in any man's country!"

Belle laughed. "I'll say you are."

"Looky here!" exclaimed Foxy. "I just thought of somethin'. The word is goin' around that Scott swears he's got you jaspers corralled so damned close you can't never get out. Won't the border hoo-raw him when folks find out that you're a-drinking wine in Laredo tonight while he's a-closin' down on you away out yander in the brush!"

Blizzard grinned. "Before mornin' everybody will know that we've been here a plenty," he drawled. "Just you set tight, keep your mouth shut and listen. You'll be hearin' things. See that the news gets to Ferris first thing in the mornin', will you?"

THE Rangers rode cautiously to the river. Sarna's reward had made of them preferred targets for any man who could knife or shoot from ambush and more keenly than ever they now experienced the sensations of men who rode through life on dark trails, pursued by the spectre—DEAD OR ALIVE. They went to Indian Crossing above the site of Old Camp Crawford, near which the government was now building Fort McIntosh. The Rio Grande was low, exposing a huge slab of limestone rock that marked the crossing: a rock worn by the tread of moccasined feet hundreds of years before white men came and subsequently host to the feet of smugglers, the armies of both countries, California-bound gold seekers, freighters, raiders (Indian, Mexican, American) moving in both direc-

tions with their livestock booty, and this old and tolerant rock had welcomed the fleeing footsteps of fugitives from both justice and injustice. The moon was unkind to the Rangers tonight. As their ponies splashed through the muddy stream and labored across the heavy silt and sand of its wide and naked bed, they tried to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible; but the smiling old man in the sky crept from behind a cloud and mischievously turned his brightest light upon them.

"Hot damn!" growled Badger. "That old moon makes a fella feel like he'd woke up stark naked at a Sunday School picnic."

"Shore does," agreed Blizzard, "but it ain't likely to do us any hurt now. Folks don't know that we're in town. Comin' back is when we want the moon to go stick his head in a cloud, or somethin'."

The Rangers knew their way around the Mexican town and had no difficulty in reaching Cantina Rio without attracting attention to themselves. They dropped reins over hitching posts off to one side, out of the light. The saloon occupied a long, low adobe with a door and two windows in front, a bar running the length of the room on the left of the door and gambling games against the wall on the right. Standing back from the windows, they looked the place over. Other than two bartenders, two men behind the roulette table and a monte dealer, there were only six men in the place—two at the bar, one at the roulette table and three at the monte bank not far from the door and quite near to the right front window. The tallest of the three was Maximo Sarna!

The Don's back was turned as he stood there piking his own game, meanwhile chatting with the dealer and the men at his elbows. The Rangers could hear everything that was said.

Upon losing a bet, Don Maximo exclaimed in Spanish, "Tiburco! You are winning my money—*my money!* You forget that you are working for me."

Tiburco Gonzales, the fat monte sharp who had murdered at least one man in Chihuahua, smiled at his boss and declared, "That is true, *Senor*, but you forget that you pay me to win and if I do not win, you do not pay me."

Don Maximo nodded his aristocratic

head. "That is my way of doing business, Tiburco. I pay only for what I get, and I get as much as possible without paying for it. For example—those American bandits. I have tried diligently to have them killed or captured without paying for it. So far failing in that, I am now offering a reward of one thousand dollars each for their persons or lives."

One of Sarna's companions spoke up, "Everyone says that Ferris now has them hopelessly trapped in the *brasada* and it is only a matter of hours before they are killed or captured."

"So I have heard," said Don Maximo, "but they are clever, most clever. I have bet Scott Ferris one hundred dollars that my reward catches them before he does."

The Rangers moved quickly from window to door and strode in, Badger leading. Three steps carried him to within arm's reach of Sarna's back. It happened so rapidly and unexpectedly, none of the startled people in the *cantina* sounded a warning before Badger spoke.

"You win, Don Maximo!" he growled. "We're here to collect that reward!"

Sarna whirled and struck like a snake attacked from the rear. The big Ranger drove a short uppercut to his chin as he turned. An instant after the blow landed, Don Maximo's six-shooter exploded almost in Badger's face. It blasted the roof beams, for he was falling when he fired. The slender *Tejano's* knees collapsed and he wilted where he stood. Badger had already whipped out both guns and whirled to face the room.

"No! *Hombre!* NO!" Blizzard's sharp voice split the echoes of Sarna's shot. A man at the bar froze with his hand under the silver-embroidered jacket he was wearing. Quickly, the tall Ranger continued in Spanish, "Our quarrel is with Maximo Sarna only. No one else will be robbed or hurt if you do not interfere."

All eyes were on him now. He stood long, gaunt and fearsome beside the door, holding his rifle midway between waist and shoulder level, and somehow its muzzle seemed to threaten every man in the room. No doubt they had heard tales about that rifle, greatly exaggerated, making it more dangerous than it actually was. Also, there was Badger with a brace of six-shooters

that had earned a reputation for themselves, and a bruised and battered face that wasn't pleasant to look at. The bartenders kept their hands in sight and everyone else now took pains to show that he had no hostile intentions.

"Tiburco Gonzales!" commanded Badger, speaking Spanish. "You heard me say that we came to collect Sarna's reward. Count us out two thousand dollars gold. Put it in that canvas bag behind you."

"This is not my money, *Senor Bandido*," protested the monte sharp. "Don Maximo will kill me if I obey you."

"You may tell Sarna that I shall kill *him* if he harms you," rumbled the sergeant. "Remember Chihuahua and an Arabian mare, Tiburco! Count the money!"

The gambler's poker face deserted him momentarily. Stunning surprise and the panic of a fugitive gripped him. He went to counting money rapidly.

Blizzard mentally patted Badger on the back for remembering what Foxy had told them about Tiburco having murdered a man in Chihuahua. By using that as a club, the Ranger had connected Reynard and Border Belle with the holdup.

Badger took the bag of gold pieces and backed to the door, covered by Blizzard's rifle. Before leaving, the tall Ranger told them in Spanish, "We are going now. We will ford the river at Indian Crossing. If pursued, we will shoot to kill. Should you wish to learn the cause of our quarrel with Don Maximo, ask him. He will lie to you, for he is ashamed to tell the truth about it. *Adios, caballeros.*"

As they galloped away, Badger demanded, "Why in hell did you tell 'em where we'd cross? All Mexico will be shootin' at us."

"Don't hardly think so," replied Blizzard. "If I hadn't told 'em nothin', they'd a hit for Indian Crossin' first off. As it is now, they won't believe me and we'll be in Texas before they find out that I *always* tell the truth."

"Huh!"

Which proved to be true and it wasn't long before the Rangers again tied their ponies behind The International. Entering through the back door, they found Foxy and Border Belle drinking with a bunch of men at the rear of the bar. A dance had

just ended and the musicians were having a beer. An all-night crowd was whooping it up a-plenty, and a three-quarters drunk became a hero when he saw them first, and bellered, "Yander they come! Them thousand dollar pilgrims! Yippee-e-YOW!"

Badger swung the money bag aloft, and yelled, "Hi-i-YI!"

Blizzard stopped at the entrance to the short hall, grinning. Foxy Reynard's keen little eyes darted from the Rangers to the crowd and back to Border Belle.

She lowered her glass to the bar, slowly shaking her blonde head. "It beats me! Ab-so-lutely, beats me! What are you damned fools going to do next?"

THE spectators pushed forward and pressed around them on three sides. Blizzard was standing with his rifle so that no one could get into the passage behind them. Noise fell to where a normal voice could be heard.

Dropping the heavy bag onto the bar beside Belle, Badger winked at the crowd and told her, "We sashayed over to Cantina Rio and collected that two thousand dollars reward from Maximo Sarna. Keep it for us, will you? We've got some ridin' to do and that much hard money slows us down."

He flourished a hand at the room, and called out, "So long, boys and girls! Wish we could stay and have some fun, but we gotta ramble now."

"Yander they go!" roared the three-quarters drunk. "Them ramblin' pilgrims, Jericho bound! Go . . . down . . . *Joshua!*"

With a backward jerk of his head Blizzard motioned to Foxy and Belle, then hurried down the hall and turned into the cardroom. Badger bolted the door behind them.

Foxy and Belle started to ask questions, but Blizzard stopped them. "Mighty sorry, but we've still got plenty to do and no time to do it in. Whereabouts does Tom Blaney do his sleepin', when he does any sleepin'?"

Border Belle answered. "At home. His house is two blocks east on this cross street. It's an adobe, plastered and painted white with blue trim, the only painted house in the block. You can't miss it."

"Hope not," declared Blizzard. "Who has he got livin' with him? Whereabouts

does he keep his valuables. Tell us somethin' about the inside of the place, will you—if you know?"

"I'd ought to know," said Belle dryly. "I used to live there. He's got an old Mexican and his wife for servants. They sleep in the back room on the southwest corner. It opens onto the porch that runs all the way along the west side of the house, and another door from their room opens into the central hall. The whole front of the house is the living-room. Tom's bedroom is next on the east side. It's got an outside door, too, and in hot weather he sleeps with it wide open. The screen door is hooked. His inside door opens into the hall and he generally leaves that open. All outside windows in the house are barred, of course."

"Much obliged, Belle," drawled Blizzard. "That ought to be a big help. But you clean forgot to tell us where he keeps his valuables."

She looked him in the eye speculatively, while a tricky grin did no harm to her face. "No-o, I didn't forget. I simply wasn't sure that I wanted to tell you. I've been saving Tom for myself. But I've lately found out that he doesn't keep much at the house, so I might as well tip you off. Not long ago he bought a safe and keeps most of his money in that, down at the saloon. At home, it took me a long time to locate his hideout. Tom's bed is a huge thing with legs ten inches square. All four of them screw off close to the bed-frame and the joint is so nearly perfect you can scarcely see it. Each leg is hollow for twelve inches or so down. It didn't do me any good to find that out, though, for the bed is too damned heavy for me to lift. Go and help yourselves, boys, and if you make a cleaning don't forget poor Little Old Belle."

The Rangers got up to leave. After thanking Belle, Blizzard told Foxy, "If you get a hold of any news for us, we'll be back at camp before long."

"At camp!" exclaimed Reynard. "Ferris has got you surrounded out there. Now that you're away from the place, it's plumb foolish to go back."

The lanky Ranger grinned down at him, and drawled, "Maybe not as foolish as it looks. When Scott hears what happened in town he'll figure that we've done quit the brush and more'n likely he'll sorta-scatter

out to look for us somewheres else. You said you'd let him know right away."

"You betcha I will. Got a man ready to ride."

"Another thing," continued Blizzard. "I calc'late that Sarna and Blaney will be so all-fired mad at Scott for lettin' us give him the slip and come down here and raise hell, they'll pull their men off'n this roundup. Can't never tell, but I figure that's what'll happen."

Both Belle and Foxy agreed that it probably would. She went on, "Instead of going back to the brush after you finish with Tom tonight, (If he doesn't finish *you*) why don't you rest up here tomorrow, then do me a little favor."

"We'd shore like to do you a favor, Belle," declared Blizzard. "What is it, or who is it that needs to get done?"

SHE laughed, and replied, "Some voters up in Rio County. There's a sheriff election coming up and my man isn't as popular as he used to be. I need one or two big, tough men to go and talk to some voters after dark. You boys are just what I've been looking for."

Blizzard pondered the matter for a moment, then said, "Afraid that would take us too far from the job down here and make it look like we're on the run. But I know a first-rate man for you, Belle. He's plenty tough. Look what he done to Badger. He used to work for Ferris, but he quit and his name is Bully Baker."

"By Dogies!" agreed Badger. "Old Bully is just the fella you want, Belle. They don't come no tougher and he's a plumb square man if I ever seen one."

"You're right," declared Foxy. "Bully hasn't been on the border long, but I know him. We'll get him for that job."

As the Rangers mounted and set out for Tom Blaney's house, Badger inquired, "Why did you tell her that Bully Baker is a good man for that job. If I know men, that's just the kind of dirty work Old Bully would hate to do."

"Uh-huh, I know," admitted Blizzard, "but I think I know an honest man when I see one and I've got a suspicion about Bully Baker."

"Huh! Me, too. I suspicion that he hits like a mule a-kickin'."

THE Blaney house faced south on a corner lot, other houses across streets on the south and west, and one two lots distant on the east. The Rangers dismounted in front of the place and tied their horses there. Moving quickly over soft grass that muffled their footsteps, they went to Tom's outside door on the east. As Belle had prophesied, it was open and the screened door was hooked. Listening there, Blizzard heard a man snoring in the room. After a moment's thought, he decided to see if they couldn't finish this job without waking the old Mexican couple in the far corner of the house rather than to go around there now and capture them and run the risk of rousing Tom Blaney while doing it.

The east side of the house was dark and the hook inside the door was hard to locate. Blizzard didn't want to cut any more screen than absolutely necessary. Meanwhile, a dog set up an infernal barking at the house directly across the street and other dogs at once cut loose near and far. Blizzard thought the snoring stopped, thought the bed creaked, strained his ears, but couldn't be sure because of the dogs. He found the hook, quickly slit the screen with his knife and unhooked the door with its blade.

As Badger was at the point of going in, Blizzard whispered in his ear, "Take care. I ain't certain that them damned dogs didn't wake him up and he might've heard me cut the screen."

Badger nodded. As usual in such circumstances, he thought fast. Fixing his gaze on the dark interior of the room, he waited for a moment while his eyes adjusted themselves, then jerked the door open. He sprang from the threshold as far into the room as he could. During the split second that he was in motion he saw the white of bed sheets, saw a large man lying naked there and he saw the man jerk a gun from beneath his pillow. It exploded in a burst of flame and smoke that hid everything. Unhurt, Badger landed crouched near the foot of the bed. His six-shooter was in his hand when his feet touched the floor. He saw a naked arm that looked white in the smoke and darkness and it was jerking the gun out of its recoil for another shot. He fired at that arm. A gunfighter of Badger's caliber wouldn't miss at such short range. The arm stopped in midair, fell to the bed

and the revolver clattered on the floor. The big Ranger was beside Tom Blaney before he could roll over or sit up.

"Be still!" growled Badger softly. "Or I'll split your skull with a gunbarrel!"

Blizzard had gone in, hard upon his partner's heels. Closing the door behind him, he strode to the inner door and glanced down the hall. A man was coming at a trot. The Ranger drew back into Blaney's room. An old Mexican stopped at the threshold, fumbling with his belt buckle, coughing in the smoke.

Blizzard dropped a hand to his shoulder, said quietly in Spanish, "You will not be hurt, *Hombre*, if you keep silent. Come in."

Badger spoke up from the bed, "My bullet just grazed the bone in Tom's arm, but it cut an artery. I'm a-holdin' it to keep him from bleedin' to death. We gotta do somethin' quick."

Blaney's voice was shaky from shock, but truculent, "Hell of a lot you robbers care whether a man bleeds to death!"

"Shut your damned mouth!" growled Badger. "Want me to let you leak yourself dry?"

Blizzard told the old Mexican in Spanish, "Please light a lamp in here, then go into the hall and call your wife."

The man obeyed. His wife replied that she would come quickly.

"Thank you," said the lieutenant politely. "Now, in order to save your master's life I am going to trust you. Go and bring the doctor immediately. You will not speak to anyone about what has happened here. You look like an honest man and I believe that you will keep your word. Will you promise?"

"Yes, *Senor*," answered the Mexican. "I promise to speak only to the doctor and only about Don Blaney's wound."

"Good! You may go."

The tall Ranger looked down at Blaney, and said, "You'd better pray that he don't try to fetch the law. Pull a sheet around you with your good hand. Badger will help you to get up and set in a chair. Don't ask me why. Just do it!"

Cussing steadily in a weak voice, Tom Blaney allowed Badger to help him to an easy chair. A moment later the old woman arrived. She uttered a little cry, made a move to turn and run.

Blizzard placed a hand on her arm, and said in Spanish, "There is nothing to be afraid of, *Senora*. We quarreled with your master. He has been wounded. Your husband has gone to get the doctor. You will remain quietly here until he returns. Be seated, please."

The Mexican woman sat down. She looked from Blaney to the Rangers with a puzzled frown on her intelligent old face, and inquired, "If you fought with Don Blaney, why are you trying to save his life?"

"So that he may live longer in fear of death," answered Blizzard, "and thereby suffer more."

Without another word, he went to work on the bed. Pulling it out from the wall so that its high headboard wouldn't catch, he lifted the heavy thing and heaved it onto its side. Blaney unloosed a string of oaths so loud, Badger threatened to brain him with a gunbarrel. The lieutenant tried one of the bed legs. A hard wrench twisted it and from there it unscrewed easily. The hollow appeared to be packed with cotton, but beneath the cotton it was half-filled with gold coins. Blizzard was disappointed not to find papers. He wanted evidence rather than money. Nevertheless, this had to look like a genuine robbery, so he took a pillowcase and dumped the money into it. The other leg also contained gold, no papers. Righting the bed and turning it onto its other side, he took off one of those legs. . . . Papers, including a daybook bound in flexible leather so that it could be rolled! He hastened to examine the last leg. . . . More papers! He put them all into the pillowcase, knotted it and placed it by the door. Blizzard felt mighty good now. Hanging evidence, more than likely. To hell with those infernal dogs out there! Let 'em bark. If they woke up the whole damned town so that he and Badger had to make a run for it, they'd go away from here with what they came to get.

Tom Blaney spoke up, his voice that of a man who knew that he was licked, "Looky here, fellas. Take the money if you're a mind to, but leave me them papers. They won't do you no good."

Blizzard said harshly, "Can't never tell. We'll keep 'em until we're dead certain that they won't do us no good."

If Doctor Baker was astonished by what

he saw in Blaney's room, he didn't show it. No doubt the weazened little frontier practitioner had learned to mind his own business and have eyes only for his patient. After a glance at the wound, he declared, "Tom, you can thank this gent for saving your worthless life. Hang onto him for a minute, will you, big fella?"

The burly bandit leader clamped his pale lips. At the moment he looked as if he'd rather die than to do anything else.

While the doctor was opening his instrument bag, Blizzard spoke up, "I'm a-wonderin' whether this here lady can't take my pardner's place. You see, Doc, we just stuck up Tom Blaney and I figure we'd oughta show this here town our dust."

The little doctor glanced quickly up at him, lifted one eyebrow, and snapped, "Why, of course! Don't let the law find you here. Take care of yourselves, boys."

Blizzard picked up the pillowcase, turned to the old Mexican man, and offered his free hand. "Thank you, *Senor*. You are an honest man. Some day I hope to repay your favor."

"It is nothing, Don *Bandido*. Go with God!"

AS THEY rode away toward their camp in the *brasada*, Badger declared, "Strikes me that we done a pretty fair night's work, considerin'."

"Considerin' what?"

"Considerin' that I done all the work and mighty nigh all the thinkin'."

"Thinkin'? Can't hardly believe it."

"Huh!" grunted Badger. "Wasn't it my idea to turn that there Sarna money over to Border Belle in front of everybody so's Don Maximo would hear about it and come a-boilin' down on her? That's all he can do. He got robbed in Mexico, so Texas law won't help him none. Likewise, everybody will be laughin' so all-fired loud at the way we collected his rewards he'll be crazy mad and you can't tell what all he'll do to Belle. Which means that we done started trouble between two of the big dogs. I'm right proud of that idea."

As a matter of fact, it wasn't Badger's scheme. Blizzard hinted at it and the big sergeant jumped on it and carried it out. Nevertheless, the lieutenant told him seriously, "You shore got a right to be

proud. If you've done any more thinkin' I'd sorta like to hear about it."

"Me," declaimed Badger, "I think so damned steady and fast, my brains run hot if I don't rest 'em and let 'em cool down ever so often. Take, for instance, the way I'm a-behavin' nice and gentle towards all the little fellas—the boys down at the Ferris Ranch, and the Mexicans over in Cantina Rio tonight, and the old couple that work for Tom Blaney, a-trustin' the old Mex the way I did. Why d'you reckon I'm treatin' 'em thataway? You wouldn't savvy, so I'll tell you. I want the little dogs to think that we're one of 'em, pore down-trod mavericks a-fightin' the big fellas because they've done us dirt, and every time we sock the big dogs and don't get hurt none to speak of, the little dogs get ideas. D'you understand, or do you?"

"I'm beginnin' to catch on," drawled Blizzard. "What d'you figure to do next?"

"Sleep, if I can live long enough to get any more sleep!"

Blizzard frowned at a faint glow on the eastern horizon, made some mental calculations that didn't ease his mind. They couldn't possibly break into the circle and get back to camp before daylight. True—he anticipated that after tonight's unpleasant experiences, Blaney and Sarna would pull their men out of the man-hunt and he also expected Ferris to give up combing the *brasada* and scatter his force here and yonder in the hopes of waylaying them somewhere; but word of tonight's happenings would have to get to the brush before any of these things took place, and that would take time. Meanwhile, Badger Coe and Blizzard Wilson would get shot or caught and hung if they didn't take care. Another thing contributing to the lanky Ranger's uneasiness was the fact that they were now riding wide open country and had a lot of it to cross before reaching the big thicket in which their camp was situated, and to be caught out here on tired ponies in daylight would mean almost certain death or capture. Of course, he reflected, they could have hidden out in Laredo or nearby. This, however, would've been extremely dangerous because of the probability that, with so many people around they'd be seen and tipped off to Sarna or Blaney or the law, each hazardous to them, since con-

finement in the local jail would undoubtedly result in a mob and a lynching.

A clump of mesquite lifted its feathery head out of darkness on the prairie a short distance away on the left, a familiar landmark. Blizzard recalled that one of the trails to Liveoak Spring and the Ferris Ranch pronged off south just beyond the mesquite and a thirty-minute ride on that trail would carry them to the brush and comparative safety. He pondered the matter for a moment. The stars were hunting cover out yonder for the glow in the east was crawling rapidly up the sky, and the thicket ahead was a long ways off.

"Day is bound to catch us before we get to camp," he said, "so I calc'late it'd be a smart idea to hit the trail for Liveoak Spring. Likewise, it's so damned close to Ferris' headquarters nobody will figure that we'd be foolish enough to hole up there."

"Shore," agreed Badger. "That's what I've been thinkin' ever since we left town."

"Why didn't you say somethin'?"

The big sergeant answered gruffly, "It's time you learned to do your own thinkin'!"

THE sun was up by the time they reached Liveoak Spring. Blizzard's glass showed that everything was quiet down at ranch headquarters, indicating that Ferris had not yet come home from the brush or wherever he was. Badger watered the ponies and rubbed them down with grass. The lieutenant went through the timber to where they had stopped when here before and carefully examined the ground for signs which might suggest that someone had discovered their hideout, notwithstanding the precautions they had taken to remove any evidence that would give them away. He found nothing, so they fed their horses some shelled corn, ate sparingly of the cold food they had with them and settled down for the day. Badger swore that he was dead for sleep and at the same time dying of curiosity to see what came out of Blaney's bed, so he'd stay awake to find out.

Neither was interested in the money, except that it constituted a problem—how to get it back to Blaney without arousing suspicion. Papers, evidence—that's what they were hungry to find. Blizzard laid the large, flexible notebook aside to be examined last. Letter after letter proved definitely that Tom

Blaney had contacts in both the U. S. and Mexico for the handling and sale of stolen livestock, extending as far south as Mexico City as a market for fine horses, north through Kansas, Nebraska and into the Northwest where stocker cattle were sold, and he had been in communication with three men who obviously bought beef cattle stolen in Mexico and Texas and traileed to California! Some of these letters were crude and a dead giveaway, but others were so cleverly worded as to be of little use as evidence. A few provided full names and addresses, some only given or nicknames; but, in the hands of the attorney general, all would be traced to the writers without much difficulty. One of Blizzard's most prized discoveries was a sheaf of maps evidently drawn by several different men who knew their particular localities. One routed a herd from lower Chihuahua north through Paso del Norte (El Paso) into New Mexico Territory, showing waterings and where the best grazing would be found. Other maps covered less remote sections of the West, routing herds through counties where notations showed that livestock inspectors could be bought or bluffed and avoiding others that were dangerous. Blizzard knew a number of the "right" inspectors, usually sheriffs, some of whom he had always thought to be honest.

"It just goes to show," he muttered grimly, "that it ain't no ways safe to judge a man by what you hear him say and see him do. It's what you *don't* hear and see that counts."

One of the maps and its explanatory notes told a thief how to take a band of stolen horses from southern Louisiana all the way across Texas to a ford on the Rio Grande between Laredo and Eagle Pass. Several smaller maps marked obscure trails and waterings in the brush country between the Nueces River and the Mexican Border, and of great importance—the locations of hidden pens for gathering and holding stock.

"Hot damn!" exclaimed Badger. "Old Tom Blaney shore is big chief of the thieves, ain't he?"

"He's one of the chiefs," stated Blizzard, "and his saloon in Laredo is damned good cover for him. He looks more like a saloon-man than a cowman."

Having finished the loose papers, Blizzard went to work on the book. Unfortunately for Blaney and many of his associates in crime, he was a methodical man who kept records of his transactions in stolen stuff—brief descriptions of Texas stock traded for Mexican cows and horses and vice versa, certain of the more prominent brands and marks being enumerated as in a brand book and the unreadable Mexican brands reproduced. The record showed that he had done a lot of trading with Ferris and Sarna. In this daybook he kept accounts of receipts and payments in cash, and the Rangers were particularly interested to find that Blaney had at various times paid fairly large sums of money to Border Belle *after she had left him and bought the International*. No explanation accompanied these entries, but a name always appeared. Blizzard frowned over this until he discovered "Rone" and "Beatty" several times in connection with payments, then he had the answer. Tom Blaney had paid Belle to influence the man whose name was noted after the amount—bribe money.

"This little old book," muttered the lieutenant, "is a first-rate rope to hang a whole slew of county officers along the border if the good citizens ever get a hold of it."

"Why not slip it to Old Stony Smith?"

"We'll see about that," answered Blizzard. "Hadn't ought to do it because we're lawmen, but we'll see."

He was gratified to find a number of Blaney's payrolls in the book; valuable evidence for they gave the names of thieves who had worked for him and those now in his service on both sides of the border. The Rangers were astonished to see the names of two cowmen whom they knew—a foreman with an outfit away over in Refugio County, and a certain well-known trail boss.

Blizzard thoughtfully returned the papers to the pillowcase, untangled his long legs and stood up. He grinned down at Badger, and drawled, "You can hit your blankets now and dream about all the hell the Rangers will raise when the general gets what we've already got and some more that we're goin' to get."

"More?" growled the burly sergeant. "How'd you expect me to sleep when I know that you're a-cookin' up more deviltry for me to *think* out and *work* out?"

Nevertheless, he was sound asleep inside of five minutes. Blizzard took his telescope and moved into some undergrowth from which he could get a good view of Ferris Ranch headquarters and at the same time be reasonably safe from discovery by a man with a glass down there. Still no evidence that Scott and his men had returned. About nine, too, reflected the Ranger, if Foxy Reynard had kept his promise and sent word to the brush about last night's happenings in town. A few cattle trailed to the spring, watered and drifted away. A doe brought this year's twin fawns and gave them a drink, took one herself then, flopping her big ears lazily she stood and watched the little fellows play the game that fawns play in timber, and once she was "It" and they chased her until she leaped entirely over a bush barrier that was too much for them. Blizzard imagined the old doe was laughing when she trotted daintily back to the spring for another sip of water.

And he thought, *They say you're wild and uncivilized. Missus Doe, but you get a heap more out of life and do less harm than most civilized folks in this hellish border country.*

TIME passed that way until a bunch of riders jogged into ranch headquarters on tired horses. Blizzard focussed his glass on them, bringing the scene right up to him at that close range. Scott Ferris led the party, riding by himself. The wolfish little man's hat was pulled low over his face as if he were crouching in its shadow and he sat his saddle as though poised to spring. Two men who had been working on the corral gate dropped their tools and came over to meet him. Their hats were on the backs of their heads and the Ranger recognized their smiling faces—Manuel and Benito Torres, the *Tejanos* who had refused to take part in the man-hunt. Ferris jerked his horse to a halt and his followers stopped where they were. He stepped down smoothly, quickly, but the others dismounted slowly and stiffly as men will when saddle fatigue rests heavily upon them. Scott Ferris dropped reins, hitched up his belt and waited for the Torres brothers. The men behind him remained by their horses.

Blizzard's heartbeats quickened, for he could see that Ferris was in a murderous

mood. Frustrated at every turn and made the laughing stock of the country, the vicious little man would try to regain his prestige by making himself more to be feared than ever before and wanton killings from which he escaped unpunished would carry him far in that direction. The Ranger had known other badmen who behaved that way under similar circumstances.

They had met and were talking now, Ferris and the *Tejanos*. Careful to note that the Torres brothers had no weapons in sight Blizzard clenched his jaws and steadied the telescope against a limb, and waited. He sensed that murder was stalking the friendly cowhands. He was keenly conscious of his rifle leaning against a bush close at hand, but the range was too great even for him. Of course, he could go to shooting and drop bullets down there and cause a distraction that would postpone a killing, but that would merely set Ferris and his bunch hot on the trail of him and Badger and accomplish no lasting good. Besides, it would undoubtedly jeopardize their success on the job they had to do. Blizzard didn't hesitate to take all manner of long chances, provided he thought that the job required it, but he could be extremely cautious for the same reason and regardless of consequences. Nevertheless, he now fought a battle with himself. It wasn't easy to sit there doing nothing this way.

Presently, the *vaqueros* were shaking their heads and gesturing with empty hands after the manner of their Latin breed. They backed off a few steps and Blizzard imagined they were retreating before the bandit leader's threats. Suddenly a thunderhead of smoke exploded between him and the *Tejanos*. One of the Torres brothers staggered, bent at the middle as if struck a terrific blow. The other threw an arm around him, lowered him to the ground, stooped over him. Scott Ferris stood perfectly still in the smoke, feet spread, head thrust forward a little as though he were peering intently at something. The men behind him hung onto their horses and made no move to interfere. The *Tejano* now lay quietly there. His brother arose slowly, reluctantly it seemed, with head bent. Then he whirled on Ferris. Through the glass Blizzard saw him waving his arms, shaking his fist and could almost hear him

screaming curses in Spanish. The young *vaquero* looked frantically around him. Suddenly he leaped aside, picked up a club and charged the gunman! Again the thunderhead of smoke. The Torres boy spun half around, lifted the club, then fell face downward. Scott Ferris holstered his gun and walked briskly toward the house. Sweat trickled over Blizzard's forehead and into his eyes.

He heard a man cursing hoarsely. It was *his* voice he heard.

Four men carried Manuel and Benito to the bunkhouse. The others gathered at the horse trough. One mounted, dallied the well rope around his saddlehorn and drew water by riding back and forth while another tended the bucket. The Ranger wondered what they were saying down there. Those men were outlaws, but the average Western badman considered it beneath him to shoot an unarmed person and he'd have little respect for any man who did. There were many, though, who loved bloodshed for its own sake and such men would admire Scott Ferris for what he had done. Frowning down at the scene Blizzard resolved that, if possible, he'd get the names of some witnesses who could be persuaded to testify against the murderer. If Ferris should escape conviction for the Diaz killings maybe the law could pin this one onto him, but it would be a waste of time and effort to bring him to trial in this country while the criminal element was in control of its legal machinery. The tall Ranger's long, bony face set in vicious lines. How much more satisfying and simpler it would be to meet Scott Ferris with his own ruthless violence and send him to hell in a cloud of gun-smoke. Blizzard Wilson, the man, wanted to do it that way; but Lieutenant Wilson, the Ranger, said "NO!"

LATE in the afternoon Badger was on watch while his partner slept. Through the telescope he saw men dig a wide grave in the shade of a huisache where it would be cool working, and he looked on while two bodies were placed in there and the hole filled and the ground leveled off and leaves and dead limbs and other rubbish piled over it. Badger Coe's dark eyes blazed, muscles knotted on his big jaw. He made himself a promise and he'd keep it,

for he liked those *Tejano* boys who would not go out to hunt him.

Shortly thereafter he saw Scott Ferris and six men ride away on the main trail to Laredo. He'd like to go to town tonight. Blizzard wouldn't stand for it, though. Blizzard was a lawman—always a lawman.

But, when they were saddling up soon after sundown, Badger made known how he felt about it. "He shot them boys down like dogs and he buried 'em like dogs. I aim to meet him gun-to-gun and I can't hardly wait to do it. He's a-headin' for town. Let's go back tonight. I want Scott Ferris to eat breakfast in hell in the morning."

Blizzard tucked the end of a *latigo* through a cinch ring, shook his head. "I feel thataway about him, too. I'd give a pretty to get the son-of-a-dog in my sights. But it ain't the smart thing for us to do. If you cut him down folks will simply say that Ferris was the slow man. They'll give you all the credit for wipin' him out. You don't need that credit, but the law needs it a plenty. Where they know you, most crooks are already afraid of you and your guns. It's our job to make 'em afraid of the law."

"I reckon you're right," admitted Badger, but recollect—if the law don't get Scott Ferris, he's mine!"

"You can have him."

The Rangers shook off their somber mood while riding to their hidden camp in the *brasada*. They didn't forget the scenes witnessed at the ranch—never would, and their feelings toward Ferris underwent no change; but long experience with sordid life in the underworld and the vicious criminals who inhabited it had taught them that to brood over such sights made their own lives miserable and served no useful purpose. When the time came, they'd make Scott Ferris pay for his crimes—or try to.

Blizzard half expected to run onto outlaw bands patrolling the trails for them, but encountered none. Apparently the organized man-hunt had been abandoned for the time being, at least, and Ferris alone didn't have enough men to ride circle on such a large area of chaparral. He could, however, keep a few small bands of picked men in the brush and the Rangers kept a sharp lookout for them. Upon sighting the

small *sendero* (opening) in the brush and the huge *mésquite* under which they did their cooking, they were surprised to see the faint glow of a small fire beneath it. Blizzard shifted his rifle from the pommel of his saddle to the crook of his left arm. Badger loosened his six-shooters in their holsters and pulled his hat lower over his face to keep the moon away. It couldn't be Jose Terreros. He hadn't had time to make the round trip to Austin. They rode slowly, ready for almost anything—except Foxy Reynard.

"Howdy, fellas!" he sang out. "Pile off and wash up. Supper is mighty nigh ready."

"Where in hell did you come from," asked Badger, "and how long you been here?"

"I come from town and I ain't been here more'n an hour," answered the little thief. "Nothin' would do Belle, but I had to fetch you a pack of grub and stuff, so I waited to make certain that all the boys on circle out here had left the brush. They've gone, every last man of 'em."

The Rangers took care of their horses and returned to the sumptuous meal that Foxy had put out, mostly cooked food from The International.

"Powerful fine vittles," declared Blizzard with his mouth full. "We're shore much obliged to you and Belle. Anything happened in town since we left?"

"Anything? Man—everything!"

"Sounds excitin'," observed Badger. "Wait till I amputate this here turkey leg, (shore is a noble gobbler), then go ahead and tell us about it."

Foxy was bursting to talk, and began, "First off, let me tell you about Tom Blaney. So help me—I never seen the beat of it. Naturally, long before sunup this mornin' the whole town knowed what you-all done to Tom last night and nine out of every ten men and mighty nigh all the women were a-laughin' out loud or up their sleeves about it. Blaney has rode a high horse up and down the border so long, nearly everybody was plumb tickled when you set him afoot thataway."

"Do tell?" drawled Blizzard. "Maybe we hadn't oughta done it to pore old Tom."

In the firelight Foxy's sharp face showed him to be aghast at the thought of anyone

not doing such a thing to Blaney. "You don't mean *that*!" he exclaimed. "Best thing ever happened to the border. About noon today Tom showed up at our—at The International with his ears down and his arm in a sling, lookin' as pale and peaked as a hog with the cholera. What I mean—Blaney is plumb cowed and a-hidin' from the sight of God, man and the devil. Swears he's through. Allows he's got all the money he can ever spend. Wants to sell out. Wants me and Belle to buy The Border Cantina. We do. I use money that I got for Ferris and Sarna horses. Belle says for me to ask you, 'Now, don't you wish you'd a-throwed in with us?' That's what Belle says."

"And what d'you say?" asked Blizzard.

"I ain't a-sayin' nothin'," replied Foxy Reynard. "I'm afraid of you hair-trigger gunslingers. Me—I'm just a runty little horse-trader a-makin' out to get along the best way I can in a powerful tough country. Now, I've got me a half interest in a joint that it takes a *man* to handle. It's too much for me. I'm huntin' a man."

He paused, looked straight at each of the Rangers, and continued. "Sorta figured I might try Bully Baker."

"You won't make no mistake," said Blizzard. "Bully is a plumb honest man."

"I don't want no *honest* man," declared the little thief. "I want a fightin' man."

He's that, too."

"Well," said Foxy, "if he's too honest I reckon it'll soon rub off. No man can ride with me and stay honest very long."

He went to rolling a cigarette. "Now, about Maximo Sarna. You'd a-died a-laughin'."

Foxy paused, and Blizzard said, "Betcha I would. It must've been funny."

"What in hell's so funny about Maximo Sarna?" rumbled Badger. "He didn't look noways funny to me when he went to leather like fork-ed lightnin' last night."

Firelight danced in Reynard's sharp little eyes and he laughed without a sound "Wait till you hear this—just wait. You hadn't been gone thirty minutes before Don Maximo walked into The International with a lump on his jaw and hell in his neck. You know how he struts. Well, he's a-struttin' big and a-talkin' mean and right before everybody he orders Belle to hand over the money that you-all banked with her."

"Lawdy!" said Blizzard. "That's bad. She gave it to him, didn't she?"

"Yeah—her nightcap. Three fingers of Old Crow smack in the face!"

Badger roared. Blizzard snickered through his long nose.

"That's when the fun started," continued Foxy. "Don Maximo ain't got no better sense than to haul off and slap Belle. While he's sorta blinded by that good whiskey, I get the drop on him. Then Belle—she tells Hod Simms and Mike Mullins, her strong-arm boys, to take Sarna and pitch him headforemost into the street where the dust is good and deep so's he'll splash proper, and she invites everybody to come outside and watch him splash. We go. Don Maximo splashes, all right. After that the drinks are on the house and Belle pours her another three fingers of Old Crow."

Foxy laughed as long, though not as loud as the Rangers. Presently, he said, "Then Belle got tight. It taken Hod and Mike all of ten minutes to get her upstairs. Hod lost a tooth and Mike is packin' a shiner today."

WHEN they finished laughing, Blizzard inquired, "When does Tom Blaney figure to pull his freight?"

"We don't take over until today a week," replied Reynard. "Tom allows he'll leave right after that. Thinks his arm will be all right for travelin' by then."

"Seen anything of Stony Smith lately?" asked the lieutenant. "Betcha he won't be sorry that Tom is out of business."

"Run onto Stony this afternoon," replied Foxy. "Told him about our deal with Tom and he didn't seem to be noways sorry. He asked a heap of questions about you fellas, but I didn't tell him nothin'. Didn't know nothin' to tell him."

"Too bad," drawled Blizzard. "By the way—we lifted a little hard money off'n Blaney, three thousand or so, and we'd sure like to have you take it back to town and hang onto it for us. Mind?"

"Glad to."

"Another thing," continued the Ranger. "A while back you told us that Belle knows that Sarna's *caporal* is wanted in San 'Tonio for murder and in Monterrey for knifin' a policeman and in Mexico City for stranglin' a woman, and he knows that Belle knows. Ain't that right?"

"Yep, and his name is Pablo Garza. I found out those things for Belle."

"Sorta figured you did," drawled Blizzard. "I'm a-wonderin' whether you couldn't persuade Pablo to tell you if Sarna has pulled any big jobs lately. If he has, maybe he ain't had time to get shed of his gatherin's."

FOXY'S sharp face broke into a wide grin. "You shore are a slippery old scalawag. Of course, I can find out from Pablo. He comes into our place—into The International right frequent. Got a girl in there. Likewise, I can tell you somethin' that's right interestin'."

"Betcha it is," said Badger. "What is it?"

"You've heard of The Polite Bandit, as the papers call him," answered Foxy. "Well, gents, that's Maximo Sarna!"

"The hell you say!" exclaimed Badger. "Why, he's the road agent that always says 'Excuse me, please,' when he shoots a man and he ain't never shot a Mex or *Tejano* driver or guard unless the fella put up a fight."

"That's Don Maximo."

"I'll be damned!" said Blizzard. "Didn't he stick up the San 'Tonio-Corpus Christi stage a month or so back and shoot the driver and guard for no good reason at all?"

"Wel-l, Don Maximo would swear that he had plenty reason," answered Reynard. "They were a-cussin' him out. He's proud, powerful proud."

"Huh!" grunted Badger. "That there Polite Bandit, as they call him, has been raisin' hell all over Texas for five years or better and the law ain't never so much as sighted his dust. Makes me sorta jealous."

Foxy laughed silently. "Thought I'd surprise you. If I was a road agent, I'd be jealous, too. But I ain't nothin' but a two-bit horse-trader."

Blizzard grinned, and asked dryly, "How come you to tell us about Sarna, and if you were goin' to tell us why didn't you do it first time we let you know that we're out to get him? Maybe that ain't a fair question, though. Don't answer it if you ain't a mind to."

Reynard shrugged. "I don't mind. I didn't tell you first off for the simple reason that ever since I found out about him three

year ago, Don Maximo has been payin' me to keep my mouth shut. I did, too. I'm honest thataway."

"Uh-huh," drawled the redheaded Ranger. "It shore pays to be honest in a case like that. So now that Sarna has stopped payin', you ain't got no call to be honest no more and you'd kinda like to get square with the cuss. Or maybe I'm wrong."

"You're dead right!"

"Figured I was," said Blizzard. "You and Belle have helped us a-plenty, so you can bank on us a-helpin' you as much as we can with anybody—specially Mister Sarna."

Foxy Reynard got to his feet quickly, effortlessly in the way he always moved. "Kinda thought you'd like to know about Don Maximo. Well, I gotta hit the trail. No tellin' what's comin' off in town with things a-boilin' the way they are."

He paused with thumbs hooked in his belt. Firelight reached under the big hat which rode so deep on his small head it bent his ears out, and the glow gave to his sharp face a reddish tint that made him look even more than ever like the little red fox of the Texas Hill Country. Badger recalled that those little foxes sometimes got hydrophobia.

"D'you know, I want to like you pilgrims," said Reynard wistfully, "but I'm afraid of you. Maybe it's because I haven't been able to get anything on you that the law hasn't already got. Maybe that's why I'm afraid of you . . . maybe."

Badger chuckled. "There's plenty to get, Foxy, plenty."

"Yeah," drawled Blizzard, "if you know just where to go to get it."

"I'm sure of that," declared the little man.

"We aim to rest up here a week or so," said Badger. "If you get anything on us, let us know."

"Don't worry. I will!"

As Reynard started away, Blizzard told him, "We sorta figure that things will happen in the next few days and that's why we're a-restin' up. Fetch us the news off and on, will you, Foxy?"

"You betcha. I'll be back before midnight tomorrow."

"Better make it the night after," said Blizzard. "We may not be here tomorrow. Got a little ridin' to do while we're a-restin' up. And, say! I want you to figure out what

all this grub and stuff that Belle has sent us is worth. We won't take it for nothin'. You tell her that we'll come in there and shoot up the damned place if she don't let us pay our way. Tell her that."

"I will, but I'd a heap rather you did."

Again he started away, stopped and came back. "There's another thing. Don't amount to much and I mighty nigh forgot it. Maximo Sarna has upped his reward to Fifteen Hundred apiece for you fellas and there's a lot of boys around town who figure that's right nice money for the time it takes to pull a trigger. They're a-talkin' about it some. Thought maybe you'd like to know."

"It is sorta interestin'," drawled Blizzard. "Much obliged, Foxy."

When the little thief was out of hearing, Badger remarked, "It was mighty dumb of Foxy to come right out like a fool and tell us that he's been tryin' to get somethin' on us. I thought he had more sense than that."

"THE smarter a man is, the better he can play the fool," declared Blizzard. "Don't never forget that about Foxy Reynard. But, right now I've got somethin' more important to worry about."

"What's that?"

"Stonewall Jackson Smith."

"Him? How come?"

"Yep, Old Stony," answered Blizzard. "It's taken me quite a while to make up my mind about him and I ain't dead shore even now, but I've got a mighty strong suspicion. Ever since Old Adam and Missus Eve got kicked out of The Garden there's always been more or less men all over the world, from China both ways clean to Texas, who made theirselves out to be leadin' citizens a-workin' for the good of the country, a-stompin' thieves and bandits and outlaws, and everybody that didn't see the way they did or happened to have anything was an outlaw fit to be stomped for the good of society. Such bein' the case, these here public benefactors stomped the pore cuss and taken everything he had. They didn't take his stock and land for the good of the country, though. They taken that for their *own* good, they bein' law-abidin' citizens and him a horsethief. And so, when the law finally gets the upper hand, as it always does, these pillars of righteousness are he-roes and nobody dast tell the truth about 'em. I've got

an idea that Stony Smith aims to make a pillar out'n himself."

"You don't say?"

"Yes, sah," continued Blizzard, "and it's our job as lawmen to do what little we can to make the old High-and-mighty change his ways. We won't be able to do much, I know, but we'll give him somethin' to think about."

"Uh-huh, probably set him to thinkin' about hangin' us."

Blizzard ignored his partner's sarcastic suggestion, and went on, "Likewise, you'll recollect that we've been countin' on gettin' some help from the local law and good citizens soon as ever we showed 'em that the big crooks ain't too big to be hurt. Well, we've done showed 'em a-plenty. We ain't through yet, but I calc'late it's time the honest and mighty-nigh-honest and ought-to-be-honest folks got busy and did a little somethin' to help themselves. That's part of what I aim to tell Old Stony."

"Tell him?" asked Badger. "D'you aim to uncover us and let him know that we're Rangers?"

"Of course not," answered Blizzard. "I'll have to figure another way of gettin' it over to him and it won't be easy to do. We may have trouble with him and that tough bunch of his'n. Get the fishhooks out'n your behind and oil your guns, 'cause we're a-ridin' to the Salado in the mornin'."

Badger grinned all over his big face, impatiently ran both hands through his shock of curly black hair, and exclaimed, "Glory be! Let's go! I'm plumb wore out layin' here in camp a-restin' up."

"Huh! You ain't been here three hours."

THE RANGERS hit the trail at the crack of dawn. The animal path over which they made their way out of the big thicket eventually carried them to Sanchez Prairie and they'd be riding in the open for more than half the thirty-odd miles to Stony Smith's Salado Ranch headquarters. When clear of the chaparral they wished for their long horses, Belial and Solomon.

"Damned if I don't feel like I'm afoot out here where everybody can see me," growled Badger. "If Scott Ferris and his boys were a-ridin' Mexican goats and jumped us, we couldn't out-run 'em on these little old brush-poppin' ponies."

"Nope," agreed Blizzard, "but these here ponies will give us everything they've got and that's all you can expect from man or horse. Be still and let me think some."

The big sergeant chuckled, flicked a fly from his pony's neck, and went on, "D'you know what you and your thinkin' put me in mind of?" He didn't wait for an answer. "We come a-sneakin' into this border country, upset everything, get everybody to fightin' with himself and everybody else, then we go and hide out in the brush and get our rest while they fight. So you put me in mind of a long-legged, redheaded old spider a-settin' in his web just a-thinkin' and a-waitin' to see what he snares."

"Hunh! No decent spider would sink a fang into some of the things we'll catch down here."

After sighting a few riders on the prairie and taking cover in draws off and on, not for a moment forgetting that they were wanted men worth fifteen hundred dollars apiece, the Rangers safely reached Salado Creek with its timber, brush and broken country. It was well past noon when they rode into Stony Smith's headquarters. Halting under a tree at the edge of a long meadow, they looked the place over before going further and decided that it was a mighty prosperous looking outfit.

"Damned prosperous," observed Badger, "bandits and hard times, regardless."

"Shore is," agreed Blizzard. "I've got an idea that bandits are more or less afraid to pester Old Stony, and hard times do him more good than harm."

"What're you drivin' at?"

"When bandits and hard times hit the little fellas," answered the lieutenant, "men like Stony Smith loan 'em a few dollars and take mortgages on everything but their wife and kids knowin' full well that they'll never be able to pay, or they buy 'em out for a song. Thataway the big fellas gather in land and stock mighty cheap. Maybe I'm wrong about him, but that's my idea."

Two men were seated on a bench under a tree near one of the bunkhouses and two were greasing a wagon at the tool shed. The Rangers rode on. They soon recognized Stony Smith on the bench, the other being a stranger to them and the men working on the wagon were Mexicans or *Tejanos* whom they didn't know. When they walked their

horses into the yard Stony and his companion got up and moved out to meet them.

"Well, I'll be everlastingly—!" exclaimed the old cowman. "Ralph—so help me, it's them gunslingin' pilgrims! Light and set, boys."

Returning his greeting, the Rangers stepped off and dropped reins. Blizzard put out a hand, remarking, "We're kinda short on time, Stony, but we'd like to make a little medicine with you if you don't mind."

"Shore, and I like my medicine strong," said the grizzled oldtimer. "Boys, this here long-legged, slab-sided critter is my cow foreman, Ralph Watters. He's a bad man to monkey with."

Smith didn't need to tell the Rangers about Ralph Watters. They knew him by reputation—a fighting cowman who had shot himself into and out of many a scrape up and down the cattle trails, sometimes on the right side of the law, more often on the other. The cow foreman's deep-set eyes held a twinkle and a grin played around beneath his drooping mustache.

He offered his hand, remarking dryly, "I've heard a-plenty about Badger and Blizzard. Likewise, I've several times crossed the trail of Buffalo and Pelican. D'you boys happen to know 'em?"

These were names under which Badger Coe and Blizzard Wilson had earned sizable reputations as gunmen and outlaws in other parts of the country.

Badger grinned and shook hands. "Never even heard of those two scalawags," he lied, "but I can tell you some hair-raisin' stories about Ralph Watters and his six-shooters if you're a mind to listen."

"No foolin'," drawled Blizzard. "A deputy U. S. marshal in the Chickasaw Nation told us a few of those stories about Watters. The marshal swore he'd spend the balance of his days a-huntin' the cuss."

Everybody laughed, Old Stony loudest of all. "Say, boys! I see we're goin' to have us some fun. Throw off here tonight and put up your ponies."

"Much obliged," said Blizzard, "but we ain't got the time. We still got a heap of work to do before we get hung. D'you want us to make medicine here, before Ralph?"

"Why not?" demanded the old man. "He likes his medicine strong, same as me."

"Suits us," said the Ranger.

Watters pulled another bench over to face theirs.

If seated there, the Rangers would have nothing at their backs. With a dry grin, Badger dragged the bench around so that the bunkhouse wall was behind them.

BLIZZARD leaned his rifle against the bench beside him. He went to rolling a cigarette. His long, bony face was serious now, his cold gray eyes were hard. In looks, actions and speech, he'd play the part his job called for; and, moreover, he meant most of what he was about to say.

"You know that we came down here to get square with Sarna, Blaney and Ferris for dirt they done us and our friends," he began quietly. "Don't ask me what they done. Ask them. They'll be ashamed to tell you, or they'll lie like hell about it. Anyhow, when we first got here folks told us they were too all-fired big to be hurt by the law or anybody else. We've already proved that ain't so and we ain't noways near through with 'em yet. We aim to ruin those crooks before we wipe 'em out complete. We're goin' to hurt 'em in any way we can, make 'em look like two-bits worth of dog meat every chance we get. We won't have nothin' to do with the law ourselves, but whenever the law can hurt 'em we want it to do it. We don't ride with law-abidin' citizens either, but we want to see honest folks get onto those skunks and give 'em hell."

"I'm for you mistah," growled Stony Smith, "all the way from here to yander."

"Bully!" said Blizzard. "Then it's time you got busy and did somethin' about it. I know that you busted up one of Tom Blaney's bands the other day. That hurt Tom, too, and we're much obliged to you. But, why don't you get after Ferris? He's a-staggerin' on his feet. His men are ready to hit for the tall timber. If a deputy sheriff was to show up down here and arrest two-three of 'em and slap 'em in jail and hang onto 'em, the balance would light out."

"Hang onto 'em, hell!" snapped the old deputy. "Try and hang onto 'em!"

Blizzard grunted disdainfully. "Huh! That don't speak well for you and your men and the honest folks in this country. Somebody told us that you're a-ramroddin'."

the fightin'est outfit on the border. Looks like somebody lied."

Ralph Watters spoke up in a low, easy voice, "Mister, you're a-talkin' some."

Badger's deep bass was equally calm, "He is, Ralph, and I'm a-sidin' him all the way. But there ain't no percentage in you and me havin' trouble. I know you're good, but I ain't afraid of you and I'll gamble that you feel the same way about me."

"That's a fact," said Watters quietly. "But fightin' talk is fightin' talk and when I hear it I fight, win-lose-or-draw, or the other fella eats crow—one of the two."

"My partner come here to speak his piece and he's goin' to speak it," declared Badger politely. "If he says anything that ain't true, he'll eat crow and swallow it whole; but, if the truth is fightin' talk, then Ralph, we're due to fight!"

Old Stony dropped a hand to his foreman's knee. "Take it sorta easy, Ralph. Everybody knows that you'll fight and you don't have to commit suicide to prove it. Be still now. I'm curious to hear what all this long-geared, knobby-kneed, redheaded bone pile has got to say for hisself. Make your talk, Santypeed!"

"Figured I would," snapped Blizzard. "If the law and those who pretend to be good people in this country were worth a damn, they'd fill every jail on the border inside of a week with men that are a-packin' the Sarna, Ferris and Blaney irons. You know who they are. If you were worth your salt as a vigilante leader you'd get two-three more companies organized under good captains and you'd guard your jails, both outside and inside."

"Inside? What d'you mean?"

"Be sure and guard 'em inside so that crooked officers like Rone and Beatty can't open 'em from the inside," retorted Blizzard. "Understand, we don't give a hoot how many crooks you turn a-loose just so they ain't Sarna, Blaney or Ferris men, and if you *really want* to hold them you've got to put your crooked lawmen in with 'em. You supposed-to-be-good citizens talk big about law and order and you stomp a few two-bit bandits, meantime you're a-pinnin' badges on a damned sight bigger bandits. Why in hell don't you clean your own pigpens first?"

Old Stony Smith was so mad he couldn't

spit. Ralph Watters looked soberly at Badger and hid a grin behind his hand. After a few tries, the old man blurted, "If you know so all-fired much, tell us where to start cleanin' pigpens!"

Blizzard brought out his book, and said, "Ralph, take your tallybook and write down the names I call off. All I can give you are their last names, except one of 'em and I shore know all of his names."

He called the roll of names taken from Blaney's daybook, gambling that they were lawmen whom Border Belle had bluffed out or paid off—ten of them. From time to time, Old Stony exploded, "I knowed it!" or cussed in surprise or disbelief. In conclusion, Blizzard asked if they weren't all lawmen.

A note of respect came into the old man's voice, "They shore are! Now, tell me. How did you—?"

Blizzard interrupted coldly, "Hold on! Here's another one . . . Stonewall Jackson Smith!"

"WHAT!" roared Stony. "Why you—!"

"Keep your hand away from that Colt or I'll blow you apart!" rasped Blizzard. "If they ever convict you for all the law-breakin' you've done and had done, you'll still be in the pen when your great-grandchildren are old and gray. Be still! I know that you're a-fixin' to say that it's strong men like you who tame a wild country like this and make it fit for weaker folks to live in. Yeah, and by the time you get through with your tamin' everybody is weak but you. It don't make a particle of difference to us what you do to good people like Felipe Sanchez, unless they happen to be our friends and he is and don't you ever forget it; but while you're so all-fired busy a-grabbin' onto land and cattle for your ownself, you're lettin' men like Blaney, Ferris and Sarna get away with murder. You've been a-wonderin' why we won't work for you. Now you *know* why. We ain't above workin' for a crook, but—By the Eternal!, he's gotta be honest enough to admit that he *is* a crook!"

As Blizzard barked out his last word, Badger's left hand flashed to his holster. Without turning he fired across his body at a man who appeared suddenly at the northwest corner of the bunkhouse. The man flung up an arm and hand that held a gun,

then plunged headforemost into view. The buck-toothed fellow, Snake!

Moved by the reflexes of a gunfighter, Ralph Watters had whipped a hand to his Colt.

It stopped there when the truth struck his consciousness. Things happened too quickly for Stony Smith. It was all over before he could turn his head to look.

He saw Snake fall, though, and growled huskily. "The pore fool! I warned him."

Watters said calmly, "Fast work, Badger, mighty fast. Hope I never have to fight you."

"You won't if I can help myself," grimly muttered the big Ranger. "Sorry I had to down that bushwhacker, Stony, but I didn't have no time to waste. He kicked a rock or somethin' and I heard him comin', or he'd a got me cold."

The old cowman stood up, cleared his throat, and said, "I'm plumb ashamed that one of my men tried to bushwhack you. Reckon he was after that reward of Sarna's."

"Just another man who thought he was good," said Watters somberly. "Might've been me."

Neither of the Rangers had anything to say.

Stony Smith scowled down at Blizzard, and told him, "You're an insultin' devil and I hope I get to tie the knot that hangs you, but there's a heap of truth in what you say. You tell me that I ain't worth my salt. Just keep an ear to the ground, damn you, and you'll know that you're a liar without me tellin' you!"

He turned away. "Come on, Ralph. We'll carry pore Snake and put him in his bunk."

THE RANGERS cut back to Rancho Sanchez, watchful as wolves every foot of the way, wanted men to whom any moving thing might be a menace. There they changed to fresh horses—Blizzard's bay and Badger's coyote—bought more shelled corn for their ponies, learned that Belial and Solomon were all right and the snake-bitten coyote would soon be itself again, declined many urgent invitations to stay the balance of the night, and returned to their camp in the *brasada*. It was the safest place for them now. With the words, *Fifteen Hundred Dollars Dead or Alive!* continually intruding upon their thoughts, the thorny and stif-

ing embrace of the chaparral had a comforting feel.

As alert as the wild things that made their homes beneath the canopy of the brush, Badger and Blizzard slept fitfully by turns—one or the other always hidden in the branches of the old mesquite that towered over their camp, searching the brush with keen eyes aided by the telescope whenever in doubt. They kept this up all day and until ten o'clock that night, when Foxy arrived. The Rangers were glad to see the little thief, for he always brought a laugh with him and they needed a laugh tonight.

Brimming with news, he could scarcely wait while Badger poured him a cup of coffee. "Fellas—what I mean, hell has done boiled over! Just hold on till I tell you." He buried his sharp face in a quart tincup for a moment, then continued, "It's Scott Ferris. D'you know what he went and done? While I was out here the other night, he come a-rampsin' into The International and shot up the joint!"

"NO!" exploded Badger.

"Can't hardly believe it," drawled Blizzard.

"But he did!" declared Reynard. "The dancehall was full and a-runnin' over, too. Every window in the place that wasn't wide open was took out by fellas and girls a-leavin' headforemost when Old Scott cut loose. Ain't it the damndest thing you ever heard of?"

"Shore is," agreed Badger.

"What made him do that, d'you reckon?" asked Blizzard soberly. "He didn't have anything particular against you and Belle, did he?"

"N-no, only he *had* got sorta burnt out on payin' Belle for legal advice, as a fella says," answered Foxy. "But, wait—let me tell you. Belle, she's a-settin' at a table with a judge from another border county and a sheriff from somewheres else a-talkin' business, when in comes Ferris. She swears he looks nine times more like a hydrophobia wolf than he generally does. Anyhow, he comes straight over to her and his looks make everybody in the place get set to hunt cover, and then he tells her what she is—which everybody knows but won't say out loud—and he accuses Belle of bein' in cahoots with you-all which is just one reason why he don't like her or anybody that even speaks

to her, and right now he's a-fixin' to show everybody how he feels about it. At that he pulls both guns and goes to shootin' straight and frequent. Scott don't throw down on nobody particular, just busts lookin'-glasses all to hell and bottles and he perforates whiskey barrels and when he's a-backin' out'n the door he takes a crack at the lights, and what I mean—he don't miss nothin' he shoots at."

The Rangers were politely sympathetic.

Foxy took a few more swallows of hot coffee, and went on, "Nobody gets hurt except Belle. Her pride is crippled down a-plenty, which is mighty nigh as bad as if he'd a-drilled her with a forty-five. Today, that woman is a mess. It has hit her so hard she swears she won't get tight until she sees Scott Ferris laid to rest with a lily in his hand and six foot of dirt in his face. That's what he done to Belle, and fellas—it's awful!"

Badger coughed into his cup, blew hot coffee back into his face and cussed.

BLIZZARD strangled on his cigarette, wiped his eyes, and declared, "In all my born days, I never heard anything like it. Shore is tough on Belle. Too bad you were away when it happened."

"No it ain't too bad!" cried Foxy. "I couldn't a done nothin' but run to cover. I'm just a two-bit horse-trader and I wouldn't stand a ghost of a show against Scott Ferris. Belle is sore at everybody now, 'specially me."

"Why is she mad at you?" asked Badger.

"She allows that if I'd been at home where I belong, I'd a got shot and she's sore 'cause I didn't."

"Mighty bad," observed Blizzard. "Is there anything we can do to help you, Foxy?"

"I'll-tell-a-man there is," answered Reynard. "Belle swears she won't have no more use for me until you-all wipe out Scott Ferris. You'll do that for me, won't you?"

Badger snapped his fingers. "Oh, shore! Just like that."

"Tell you what we *will* do," said Blizzard. "As I figure time, if we're alive and kickin' and within fifty mile of Laredo come midnight tomorrow, Ferris loses all those bets he made. Am I right?"

"You betcha, and the boys are already

talkin' about how they'll collect from Scott."

Firelight picked up a grin on Blizzard's long face, as he drawled, "That bein' the situation, I calc'late we've got to show up in town tomorrow and stay until midnight so's the fellas can collect. If Ferris is in Laredo, we'll make it a point to expose ourselves to him. Will that help you any?"

"Bully!" exclaimed the little man. "It'll help me and hurt somebody else a-plenty. But, wait! You can't do that! I clean forgot to tell you—worried about Belle the way I am—Ferris kittied five hundred for reward money, makin' you rannies worth two thousand dollars cold cash apiece, dead or alive! That done it. I never had any idea there were so many reward hunters on the border. Likewise, I didn't know that you-all had' so damned many friends in Laredo. We've had a dozen or more fist fights in town today, all on account of that there reward. Some want the money. Some don't, and they ain't got no use for anybody that does. So they fight. Differences of opinion regardless, though, many a man with a horse and a gun will be combin' the brush for you come light in the mornin'."

"Did you run onto any of 'em tonight?" asked Blizzard.

"Nope, but a bunch is out here somewhere," replied Reynard. "One of the girls said a fella told her he had six men a-ridin' with him and they aimed to camp in the thicket tonight so's to get an early start."

"We're mighty thankful to you, Foxy," said Blizzard, "and you can tell Belle that we'll be seein' her before midnight tomorrow."

The horse thief got quickly to his feet. "Time for me to hit the trail. Belle said not to stay long." While turning away, he halted suddenly and looked back. Through the branches of the mesquite the moon took a shot at his face and missed, but the tiny fire had better luck. It's light found his keen eyes and discovered undisguised suspicion in them. "Come to think of it," he said, "late this evenin' Belle heard that you jaspers had been at Stony Smith's Salado ranch and shot Snake Thomas. Tonight she's a-wonderin' why you're hangin' around that crooked old lawman. Belle's a-wonderin' a plenty, she is."

"Too bad," drawled Blizzard. "Go on

back and tell Border Belle that I said that men—women, too, have gone to hell for wonderin' about things that didn't concern 'em. Just tell her that for me, Foxy. So-long."

As he thoughtfully watched the little horse thief ride away in the moonlight, Blizzard observed, "Wouldn't be at all surprised if somethin' happens before long."

Badger was stretched on his blankets with hands clasped behind his head. He chuckled, and said, "You damned old red-headed spider."

THE big sergeant was on guard and Blizzard was sleeping at three o'clock in the morning, when Jose Terreros rode into camp on his mule. They were practically there before Badger saw them or heard a thing. The Indian had stripped himself of leather, which was noisy in the brush, and the mule seemed to set her dainty hoofs down as if she were aware of the necessity for extreme caution. Jose's thin face lighted with pleasure and one of his rare smiles displayed the strong teeth that looked so white against his dark skin. When he came over to shake hands a faint glow from the fire picked up the new red cloth that bound his head and a red satin sash knotted about his waist, its tasseled ends hanging at his left hip. Other than to exchange greetings he had nothing to say for the time being. After unsaddling he allowed the mule to roll, watered it at the spring branch, rubbed it down with grass and gave the animal a feed of corn at Blizzard's invitation.

Then he returned to the fire and fell to eating the cold food that Badger had set out. Afterwards, he gave each of the Rangers a fine cigar, lighted one himself and went to talking in Spanish only.

"General Steele sent these cigars, *Senores*," said Jose. "They are from the box on his desk."

Badger smoked blissfully. "The adjutant general of Texas smokes good see-gars. How is the old son-of-a-gun?"

Jose grinned. "He is pleased with you, much pleased, and he thinks often of the dangers you are facing. He would be greatly worried if he knew that many men are now preparing to search this part of the big thicket for you."

"How did you find that out, Pepe?" asked Blizzard.

"I heard about it in Laredo," replied Jose, "for the town is talking about it as they talk of bull fights in Mexico and with some men, this hunt for you is a *fiesta*. Many more will have nothing to do with it and there are quarrels with fists and cuttings. I know of three small bands that are now camped on the edge of the *brasada*, waiting for light. One is near the hidden trail to this water—four men who were awake and talking very big, already spending the four thousand dollars reward. They are fools without ears or eyes. I could have cut at least two throats before they knew I was within ten feet of them. But, *Senores*, one is a good tracker and I am afraid they will find our secret trail."

"You are a fine scout, Jose," said Blizzard in Spanish. "We will let the man hunters sleep and hope that mosquitoes carry them away, while you tell us about the general. Is that not so?"

The Indian grinned. "It is, my Lieutenant. As I said, the general is much pleased with you."

A boyish twinkle came into his eyes, and he added, "I think that he likes me, also, for he bought me new sash and bandanna. I am a Ranger again, *Senores*, guide, scout and tracker, and my commission has 'Corporal' on it, thanks, I am sure, to the nice things that the lieutenant said about me in his report."

Blizzard grinned. "I didn't say anything that wasn't true, Pepe. What does the general think about the situation down here?"

THE Indian answered as if he were quoting something memorized word for word, "The general thinks that everything you have done is excellent and what you propose to do is perfect. He immediately sent a message to Captain Williams at Rio Grande City instructing him to do the things that you requested, and in future the captain is to obey whatever verbal or unsigned orders I deliver to him. The general is most anxious that the captain or no one else shall learn that you are Rangers and he wishes you to communicate with Williams only through me. I have Ranger identification to show him."

"That old general will do to ride the river

with," declared Badger, "and besides, he's a damned good egg."

"And you ain't talkin'," agreed Blizzard. "Did he send us any orders, Pepe?"

"None, Lieutenant," answered Jose. "The general said that your judgment is better than his in this case, because you are better outlaws than he. I cannot say it as he said it, *Senores*, for my tongue does not like English, but he hopes that you will continue to create a very big hell on the border."

Badger laughed in his booming fashion, regardless of man hunters.

Blizzard snickered, and allowed, "Uh-huh, and I'm hopin' and prayin' that we don't get burnt by our own hell."

Jose grinned, went on to say, "The general wants you to know that Captain Williams has a man working under cover in this vicinity. He is a new man in the Rangers and the general does not know what name he is using. That is all I have to report, Lieutenant, and I hope you are pleased."

"Perfect," said Blizzard. "Are you too tired to ride today?"

Jose smiled. "I am not too tired. I am not as tired as a man should be. A tired man lacks the energy to get into trouble and he sleeps well."

Badger laughed. "Then I never ought to get in trouble."

"D'you think you can get out of here between now and daylight," asked Blizzard, "and not take dangerous chances?"

The Indian shrugged. "One always takes chances when riding the *brasada*, but my Faquita moves as silently as the panther and she smells danger from afar. We will get out easily, *Senor*."

Blizzard now dropped into Spanish to make certain that Jose didn't miss a word, "I wish you would take some papers to Captain Williams at once. Speed is necessary, but your safety is of first importance. Remember that, Jose. After the captain has studied the papers he should immediately send them to the general by a reliable man. You must leave here while it is still dark, so I will not have time to write a letter. Will you listen carefully and then repeat what I tell you?"

"Yes, my Lieutenant, I will listen and remember."

"Please tell Captain Williams," con-

tinued Blizzard, "that these papers were taken from Tom Blaney. And tell him—" The Ranger went on to explain the meaning of some of the entries in Blaney's day-book, described the most important recent happenings, named a few valuable witnesses who must be apprehended when the time came and requested that certain other things be done by the Ranger Company. In conclusion, he grinned and asked, "Can you remember all that, Jose?"

With a perfectly straight face, the Indian repeated word-for-word everything that he had been told.

Badger declared, "If I had a head on me like your'n, Pepe, I wouldn't waste my time in the Texas Rangers. I'd go to throwin' monte or dealin' faro and get rich."

Jose smiled, got to his feet, and said, "Think of all the fun I would miss by not working with men like you, Sergeant, and the lieutenant, also my Faquita."

As the Indian moved silently away in the brush, Badger observed, "I'll swear, he don't make no more noise than a ghost ridin' the spirit of a mule."

"That's a fact," agreed Blizzard, "and I'd give a pretty if we could turn ourselves into ghosts and our ponies into spirits. What I mean—we're in a jackpot."

"Why don't we get to hell out of here, now?"

"Even if we could get away from this thicket now," answered Blizzard, "some of the outfits that are on their way here to comb the brush would be sure to spot us when we hit open country and ponies can't outrun 'em. But, suppose we did get clear—where could we go?"

"Damned if I know," admitted Badger. "We've simply got to show up in Laredo sometime today."

"Yep, so here's how I figure it," continued Blizzard. "This thicket covers a heap of country. There ain't enough men in Texas to circle it solid and complete and Ferris knows that we're a-hidin' somewheres in this general neighborhood, so I calc'late he won't make the mistake of tryin' to throw a circle around us a second time. If he's smart he'll have his men ride out all the animal trails and cow paths in this part of the thicket. I know that is one devil of a job, but, after all, *we* found this here waterin' in two days' ridin'."

"Sounds sensible, all right. I'd kinda like to know what we'll do."

"In the first place," said Blizzard, "we'll hold our ponies under saddle, feed 'em corn and not water 'em too heavy for hard ridin' in the heat. We'll stand our guards with the glass, but we'll be mighty careful not to go any higher in the tree than we have to so's to see over the brush. There's bound to be spyglasses a-huntin' us. If we see that they're sure to close down on us before dark, we'll make a run for it and shoot our way out if we have to. I'd a heap rather do my runnin' in the brush than in the open on those ponies. The main thing, as I see it, is to be certain that the man hunters are buried deep in the brush before we make a break."

Badger's big mouth pulled a lop-sided grin. "Strikes me that we're due to have some of the fun that Pepe was talkin' about."

WHILE he fed and saddled the ponies, Blizzard fixed a hot breakfast and smoked every shining place on his brass telescope so that it wouldn't glitter in daylight. They finished eating, filled their canteens with coffee, put food for themselves and grain for the horses in their morrals, and the lieutenant was on guard in the mesquite by the time day spread its warning colors across the eastern sky.

Badger stretched on the ground under the tree and tried to get some sleep. Their rest having been broken by riding and standing guard at night, he needed sleep. Try as he might, he couldn't sleep. After a while the sun came up and he was wide awake, listening, lying there and looking at the naked sky and listening to the whispers of the brush and the rustlings of small things who moved by day, straining his ears to penetrate the natural voice of the chaparral and pick up foreign sounds. Blizzard had refused to be relieved on watch and Badger knew that it was better this way. Blizzard would see and hear things that he couldn't. But this waiting and doing nothing was hell on a man!

He growled, "I can't see or hear a damned thing down here. What's goin' on?"

"Five men just topped the ridge east on the cart road," answered the lieutenant. "They're a-takin' to the brush."

Aware of his younger partner's impatience, from time to time thereafter he described the things he saw. . . . "That makes four bands that I've seen since daylight and no tellin' how many more were already in the brush. . . . Three riders crossin' that big *sendero* about a mile east, comin' this way. Durned fools to show themselves in the open thataway. Ought to know that we're on the lookout. . . . Huh-oh! On that rocky slope where the brush is thin west of here, five more a-headin' toward us. Ain't more'n half a mile off. . . . I've tallied six hats with heads under 'em a-quarterin' back and forth from a half to a mile south. They're a-ridin' out trails like we thought."

It went on that way. Badger listened and tried to picture what his partner saw. Wished he could get into a tree himself, but one man in sight at a time was enough risk. Waiting like this brought sweat and the heat brought gnats to make it worse. Coffee didn't help. Besides, they couldn't have even coals now and the pot was cold. He poured a cup and handed it up to Blizzard, though, and Blizzard allowed that it sure hit the spot. Damned old santypeed! No nerves. . . . WHAT? Can't smoke now? Godamighty! . . . Oh! They may be close enough so that a keen nose could pick up tobacco smoke and—Hell! Badger got up and strode belligerently out to the ponies. The horses were saddled and bridled, but the Rangers rode with Texas grazing bits so he held the animals on grass for an hour just to have something to do.

Coming back, the big sergeant dropped to the ground under the tree, and asked, "How does it look now?"

Blizzard answered cautiously, "Bad! Mighty bad! They're a-ridin' the trails on all sides of us. Can't even guess how many of 'em. The only thing that has saved us so far is the fact that this here thicket is chock full of horse tracks, mustangs that feed on prairies close by and cow hunters a-workin' the brush for wild cattle. If we'd been a-forkin' our big horses they'd a-tracked us down long before this, but our ponies' hoofprints ain't no different from a mustang's. Another thing that helps us—it's damned hot out there now and men and horses are a-feelin' it. I've seen several of 'em cut back to the nearest water."

"It's infernally hot down here, too," said

Badger. "How much longer d'you figure we'll have to wait like this?"

"Hard to tell," grimly replied Blizzard. "The deeper they are in the brush, the better our chances to make a getaway. We'll wait right up to the last second a-hopin' that they miss us, but I'm keepin' an eye on our hidden trail at one little spot where I can see it and the minute anybody gets on that we're a-ridin' through 'em or over 'em!"

Badger lay on his back with hands clasped under his head. He looked through the branches of the tree and saw an eagle in the sky, knew it was an eagle by its flight. He wished that he could see what that eagle was looking at down here. The eagle went on its way toward Mexico. Other big birds took its place in the sky—buzzards! Damn the things! *They* weren't going to Mexico—didn't aim to go nowhere now. They soared around and around up there, waiting, hungry, just waiting. *Damn the things!*

Blizzard had stopped talking. Badger wanted to know, cautiously asked a question, got no answer. He closed his eyes. To hell with it! He'd go to sleep if it wasn't for these infernal gnats. He didn't know how long he laid there that way before he heard a little sound in the tree and looked. Blizzard motioned for silence, climbed down rapidly.

He snatched up his ducking brush coat. "Three riders a-comin' on our private trail," he said rapidly. "That ain't the worst of it, either. A Mex tracker leadin' six men found where we come in on the regular trail from the cart road the other night. Recollect, out yander a short piece, it crosses a little openin' with good grass? The tracker stopped there and looked the ground over and they're a-arguin' now. The Mex knows that any loose horse would throw off and graze there, or anyhow slow up to grab him a mouthful. Naturally our ponies didn't, so the Mex is a-pointin' this way and arguin'. We ain't got no time to waste."

Buttoning his coat, Badger rumbled, "Bully! Let's go!"

They put their ponies on the hidden trail, Badger leading. This trail went due north through chaparral so high and dense as to hide it completely and the brush locked thorny arms above a rider's head so that he was invisible, except at a few points

where it thinned out. The trail's green walls were virtually impassable. The Rangers knew that to meet a bunch of men in here might prove disastrous, since they couldn't make a run for it either to right or left unless the encounter happened to occur at one of the few openings, but this enclosed trail afforded the only avenue of escape over which they might move unseen by a man in a tree with a glass. The trail reminded Badger of a tunnel into a bear's den and he centered his attention upon what lay ahead to the exclusion of everything else.

This animal path was carrying them deeper and deeper into the thicket, which extended northward for miles, taking them onto unfamiliar ground where they knew nothing about trails or water; but they intended to follow it rather than to turn west and leave the thicket over a dry wash that Jose had pointed out to Blizzard. It was on this wash that Blizzard had seen three riders a short time ago. The hidden trail intersected it about two miles from camp and he hoped to pass that intersection before the riders got there wishing, if possible, to avoid giving themselves away by gunfire. However, he wouldn't push their ponies in order to do it. Somewhere on the trail ahead they might run into serious trouble demanding all the speed and stamina these little brush horses could muster.

THE Rangers were soon a mile or so from camp, sweltering in the heat and their heavy clothing, tormented by gnats, walking the ponies and making as little noise as possible, riding in silence because, for all they knew, another trail might burrow through the brush within fifty yards of them. From somewhere in their rear, three shots tore through the whisper of the chaparral!

Badger halted. "Now, what the—?"

"They found our camp," grimly replied Blizzard. "Some fool cut loose. It'll take 'em a little while to find this trail, then they'll come a-boilin' down onto us. Better take it at a foxtrot from here on. We'll hope that we beat those three fellas to the crossin' on the wash, but we won't kill up our horses to do it."

The ponies went into an easy jiggle, wanted to go faster. They seemed to sense the moods of their riders, for their nostrils

flared and their ears were never still; and Badger swore that his little coyote had one eye on him all the time as if it were trying to read his mind, or maybe tell him something. The Rangers again rode in silence. The big sergeant had loosened his guns in their holsters and kept reminding himself to slip the thong loops back over their handles if he had to make a run through the chaparral, or this infernal brush would disarm him. Blizzard strained his ears to their utmost, for his eyes were of little value in here. Aware that the three shots—a frontier signal for help—would draw all who were close enough to locate the sound, he knew that when they got through milling around and lined out in pursuit there would be so many as to make it plain suicide to turn back. No matter what they ran into ahead, if they couldn't find a way around it they'd have to go through it. They were not far from the dry wash when both Rangers heard voices ahead and off to the west a little ways!

Badger reined in. "We can't make it without them spottin' us."

"Reckon not," said Blizzard calmly, "so—Huh-oh! Listen! . . . Yep, they're a-comin' behind us." He grinned over his pony's ears at his burly partner. "We're in for it, boy. How're you feelin'?"

Badger grinned back. It wasn't often that his solemn friend called him "boy" and it always meant serious danger at hand. The big fellow's grin grew to a chuckle, and he answered, "I'm loaded to the muzzle with buckshot and old horseshoe nails, Pappy. Let's go!"

"Then ride—and I mean *ride*!"

Blizzard didn't need to tell Badger what to do now. The fight was on. In the heat of battle the curly-headed Ranger thought as fast as any man and moved much faster than most. Stretched along the off side of his pony's neck and riding with the ease of a man half his weight, he sent the tough little horse flying down the trail. Riding in the same fashion, Blizzard followed just far enough back to avoid the rebound of threshing limbs; but, upon sighting the wash through a crevice in the brush, he closed the space between them and hit the opening with his bay at the coyote's heels.

The dry watercourse was fifty feet wide and naked. One hundred yards west on the

Rangers' left three men were coming at a gallop—one leading, two abreast close behind him. At the instant the coyote leaped from the chaparral into the wash, the leader's gun roared and a bullet tipped the brim of Badger's hat. A fractional second later both Rangers fired. Shooting from the backs of plunging ponies, neither wasted lead on a map at that distance. Each drove a bullet into the leader's horse. It collapsed. The two ponies behind it somersaulted over it. In the act of firing, the riders were thrown hard onto coarse gravel and coarser cobbles. With head and neck stretched as if it were reaching for cover, the little coyote dived into the brush on the far side of the wash with the bay at its tail. A few moments later Badger looked back. Blizzard signalled a halt. They stopped abreast in a tiny opening just large enough for the ponies.

The big sergeant was breathing hard. Blood trickled from a thorn wound on his cheek, into his mouth, but it didn't quench the fire of battle in his eye or mar the grin on his face. "Easy," he said, "plumb easy."

"Shore was," agreed Blizzard, "but it's a long time till dark. Listen!"

Above the rapid breathing of the ponies, and their own, arose the popping of brush and the pounding of hoofs. It would take a lot of men and horses to make that much noise, thought Blizzard, and he wondered whether the gunfire would draw men from other directions—particularly from the north, ahead of them. Try as he might, he could hear nothing ahead.

"So damned much noise behind, I can't hear what's in front of us," he muttered. "Reckon we'd better go and find out. Let's strike an easy lope for a while, but don't keep it up too long. Damned if I want to be set afoot in the brush by a rode-out pony. Keep an eye peeled for likely side trails and sparse stuff that we can get through. My glass told me that the brush thins out up yander a ways."

The Rangers rode blindly into whatever lay ahead of them. Blizzard assumed that the pursuit would suffer a delay at the wash while they talked it over, but not for long and the man hunters would resume the chase with no thought of saving their horses, there being so many of them. Suddenly,

the Rangers found themselves dangerously exposed in sparse chaparral. The trail had been little more than a tunnel and Badger had just thrown himself onto the side of his horse to dodge a low-hanging huisache that would have flung him from the saddle. Like any good brush hand he hadn't closed his eyes when he ducked, but the foliage momentarily cut off his view ahead. Three more jumps and the coyote landed on practically open ground!

It was a low rise where the soil was rocky and poor and vegetation thin for five hundred yards in all directions. Badger set his pony down, spun it back into the brush beside the trail. Blizzard followed. Too late, though. On their right, northeast four hundred yards, two men were riding easily; and north, directly ahead, three more were coming at a trot. All five evidently saw the fugitives, for they lifted their horses into a gallop!

Blizzard sprang down, jerked his rifle from its scabbard. "Lead the ponies back into the brush and hold 'em behind that boulder. Don't argy! Git!"

Badger obeyed, for he realized that protecting their horses was vitally important. Moreover, this was a job for his rifleman partner, who had few equals at either snap shooting with a rifle or slow fire. Blizzard dropped to one knee beside the trunk of a mesquite. His rifle leaped to his shoulder and cracked. The nearest rider, a big man on a high black horse, lurched drunkenly in the saddle and his mount whirled aside. Again the ripping report of the rifle tore through the chaparral. The next closest man, one of the two riders coming from the northeast, dropped reins and clutched the horn of his saddle with both hands. His bay reared, plunged away and the rider fell. In the meantime, the remaining riders had jerked their guns and were emptying them at the smoke of the Ranger's rifle. Bullets gnawed at tree limbs and cut foliage around him. When the second man went down the others stopped firing, dropped low in their saddles and went racing away toward the nearest chaparral—one east, two west. Blizzard let them go, watched them dive into the brush and disappear. The echoes of gunfire had scarcely rolled away, when yells came screeching up the trail from the south!

Blizzard strode quickly back to Badger

and the ponies. "Comin' up the trail behind us and they ain't far off. Get here before we can cross this openin'. Foolish to try it anyhow. Three men in the brush a-layin' for us. Looks bad. Strikes me that our only way out is to circle and cut in behind 'em and go back the way we came. What say, boy? Game to tie into the brush on a coyote pony?"

Badger's dark eyes flashed and his big face broke into a reckless grin. "I was born a-poppin' brush. Follow me if you can, Gran'pappy, and you'll come out stark naked a-packin' a crown of thorns. Let us ride!"

THE Rangers led their horses deeper into the chaparral, quartering off west away from the trail. Before they had gone far the pursuing man hunters went crashing past and when the noise stopped, Blizzard knew that they had reached open ground and were no doubt talking with those who had survived the recent gun battle. He listened anxiously to learn whether they decided to carry the pursuit into the brush where there were no trails. So long as a fugitive was moving slowly and not literally tearing holes in the chaparral and making a big racket while doing it, tracking him might be a slow and tedious process in which the tracker was certain to lose ground; and although it required self control to mosey along this way when burdened with the knowledge that maybe fifteen or twenty hangmen were hunting them nearby, the Rangers curbed their impulse to mount and make a run for it. Badger suffered far more than Blizzard. While he zig-zagged in search of the easiest places to get through, enduring the intense heat of late afternoon, buried in vegetation so dense as to shut out every breath of breeze, bitten, stung, or slashed by almost every growing thing he touched and tormented by hordes of gnats that found his mouth and nose in spite of the bandanna he had pulled over his face, the big Ranger felt the sweat streaming down his body and legs and into his boots and he knew that it wasn't entirely due to the heat. Whenever he had to ride his feelings with a tight rein he got this way.

They hadn't gone far, when Blizzard halted. "Hold on," he said quietly. "Listen to 'em. They're a-hittin' the brush! Sounds

like they've fanned out and are a-ridin' hell-bent in this general direction, not tryin' to track us, just a-hopin' to run onto us. They're coverin' such a wide swath it would be dangerous for us to try to work our way out of their path. We've got a pretty fair head start, so we'd better ride. I'll lead."

"Suits me," growled Badger. "Ride!"

Blizzard simply pointed the bay pony in the approximate direction in which he wanted to go, touched it with a spur and gave the fiery little horse its head. The Rangers had ridden for their lives more than once, but each swore to himself that this topped them all. These horses of the *brasada* caught the fever of the chase from their riders and, grain fed and carefully handled up to this moment, they hit the chaparral with all the fine cleverness, courage and stamina of their breed and they did it with utter disregard for themselves or the men on their backs. They attacked the brush as if it were their mortal enemy and, armed to the teeth, the brush fought them with malevolent brutality. *Cejas barbara*, Latins called the thicket, and fierce and barbaric it was, having no code of ethics, recognizing no rules of warfare, tenacious in its efforts to seize and hold captive any creature that challenged its blockade, or to stab and slash and poison all who had the strength and courage to defy it. The ponies left their own hair and blood on thorns and snags to mark their furious passage. Their riders stayed with them, a feat in itself, now on one side—now the other, down, up, forward, back, weaving like drunken men, eyes never closed for the brush killed or crippled the man who shut his eyes when he dodged, moving fast—always fast, insensible to pain, cursing as they rode.

Blizzard got a glimpse of some tall trees on a slight rise. Water, maybe. The little bay was pointing that way. He let it go, made a quick and desperate decision. This couldn't last—this ride through hell. A pony crippled down, a man snatched from the saddle and killed or crippled—one or all of these things were bound to happen at any moment. Lucky so far, but he would not press their luck. Damned foolishness!

A LONG, twisting leap and the bay plunged through a thorny curtain of brush into an animal path roofed by green-

ery. The pony streaked up a gentle slope toward the trees with the coyote close behind and halted under a giant mesquite that towered over the brush surrounding it. Twenty feet ahead a small stream bubbled from the ground. Blizzard stepped off, whipped his rifle from its scabbard.

He spoke rapidly, grimly, "Here's where we make a stand. We gained on 'em—damn 'em!—gained a plenty on that horse-and-man-killin' ride. Water out slow and pluck the little fellas clean of thorns and rub 'em down good. I'm a-takin' to the trees. There's goin' to be hell in the brush out yander!"

Badger protested, "Why can't we both take to the trees and dish 'em a double dose of hell?"

"We've got to cool out the horses or kill 'em up," snapped Blizzard. "Get busy!"

The tall Ranger swarmed up the tree and perched in the fork of its largest limbs. With his lean face and long neck leaking blood from a dozen stabs and gashes, he had the look of a wounded bird of prey that had turned upon its enemies. From here he could look out across the ocean of chaparral and see every ripple that disturbed its surface within the range of his remarkable vision. At intervals over an irregular front of four or five hundred yards there were turbulent spots where a hat or a head occasionally came to the surface as if men were swimming under there and coming up for air no oftener than absolutely necessary. He quickly counted ten such places, some of which were perhaps small groups riding single file. The line of hidden enemies was moving steadily nearer and, if not halted, would soon envelope the spring.

Carefully bracing himself in the tree, Blizzard fired ten shots into the brush out there with a rapidity that might suggest that several men were doing the shooting, each bullet going home to a spot where one or more men and horses were fighting the chaparral. The advancing line staggered, stumbled to a ragged halt. At two points the brush threshed violently as if horses were down and struggling. Men yelled back and forth. While rapidly shoving cartridges into the magazine of his Winchester, Blizzard tried to catch what they were saying.

He couldn't. Two riders or groups of riders started back the way they had come—moving slowly, probably figuring there was no percentage in fighting that rifle for a piece of reward money that would be split so many ways. Gunsmoke suddenly mushroomed out of the chaparral at four different places. Bullets zipped through the mesquite high, low and upon either hand—long range work with six-shooters, for few men liked to carry a rifle when riding the brush. Blizzard drove a bullet at the base of each smoke, paused for a moment to give them time to get up again if they had ducked, then four more shots at the same points.

REFILLING his magazine, he called down to Badger, "The damned fools ought to realize that they ain't got a ghost of a show. They can't move a horse without me knowing it. I can stand 'em off as long as we've got a cartridge left."

"Run 'em off if you can," rumbled the big sergeant. "I don't want to put these here horses in the brush no more. Didn't know there were so damned many thorns in Texas. So help me—these pore little old ponies look like porkypines."

"I'll do the best I can. Hope they've got the sense to run."

He mopped blood from his face and eyes with all that was left of his bandanna, held his rifle so that he could fire at an instant's warning and tried desperately to

catch every movement in the chaparral. Blizzard thought there must be anyhow *one* rifle in the brush and that was what he had to fear. A rifleman could pick him out of the tree if given half a chance to aim, but the marksman would have to show himself by climbing high in the brush unless he cut loose more or less blindly as the boys with six-shooters had done. The Ranger pulled his hat lower over his face against the sun and worked his eyes to the limit. Several times he was fooled by a glossy leaf from which light glanced as if it were steel. . . . A dead limb wouldn't reflect light that way, though. . . . No! . . . What he now saw moving near the crest of a huisache that lifted its head slightly above the chaparral, was a rifle barrel! Somewhere behind it there'd be a man. He waited. . . . Soon the barrel moved downward, levelling off, thrusting through the feathery leaves of the huisache, but the man behind the rifle remained hidden somehow. This called for nice shooting. Blizzard's Winchester froze for a moment longer than usual, taking chances for the sake of accuracy, the pride of a rifleman. . . . He fired. The gunbarrel out yonder jerked violently, fell muzzle-down. The leaves of the huisache shook and trembled as if shocked by what they saw!

Shortly thereafter Blizzard heard men calling to one another out there. Then he saw cautious movements at several points in the chaparral—*going away!*

(Conclusion in the next SHORT STORIES)



in the next issue of
SHORT STORIES

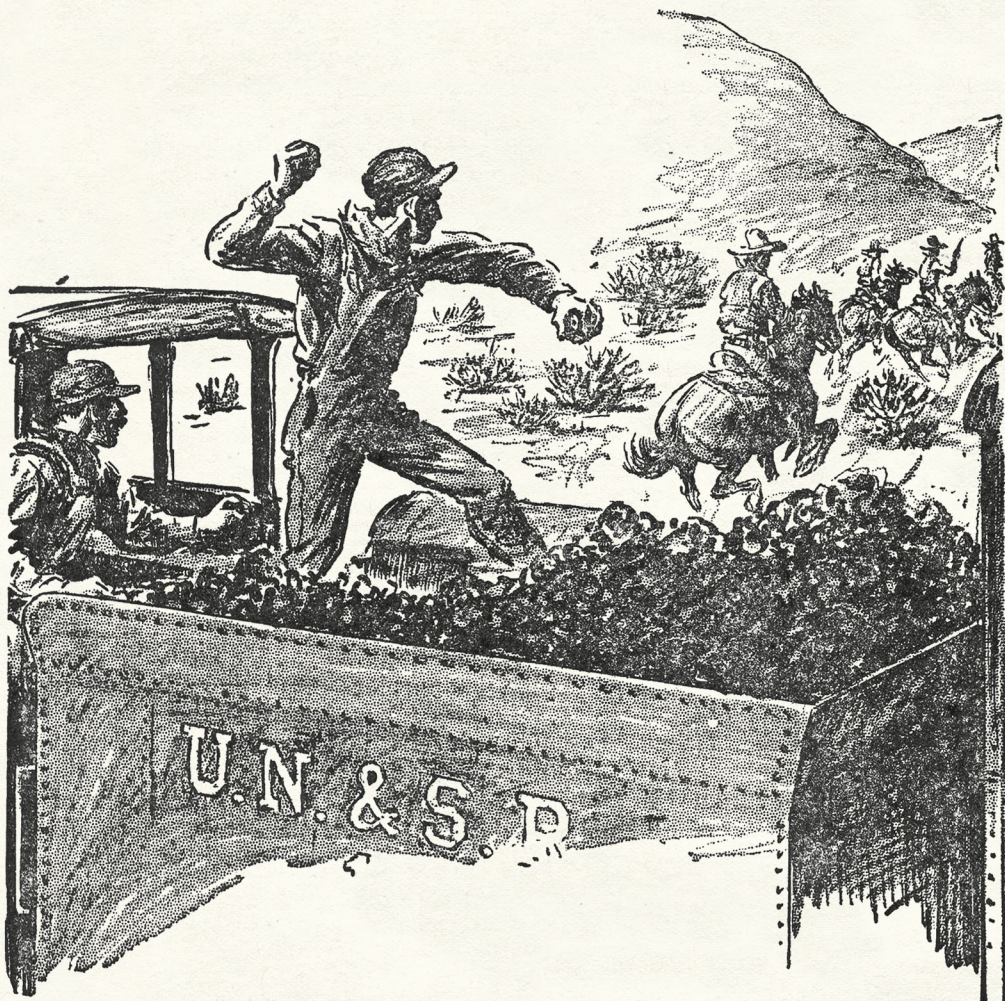
Justice was never delayed in
Silver City.

"COWARDS"

by

W. C. Tuttle

*Lumberton Never Had Been Much of a Cowntown; Still a
Bandylegged Buckaroo Wasn't So Rare That
Anyone Noticed Him Very Much*



THE FIREBALL PITCH

By JOHN E. KELLY

I SEE some professor back East claims baseball is a waste of time and a young fellow figuring on getting ahead should grab himself a job after school and work up to marrying the boss's daughter. The Prof. wouldn't get many votes in Lumberton, not after the State Bank got its money back on a fireball pitch. That was soon after we quit paying the

crews in hard money from the safe in the Division offices upstairs over the depot, and handed out checks instead. But folks in our country liked the feel of good honest coin and our men would highball it to the State, first chance they got, to cash their paper. Dick Durndell, who was firing for Dan Doherty on little old 202, the six-wheel yard engine, came whistling out of the bank,

jingling his month's pay in gold and silver, heading back to work after lunch. A half dozen cow ponies, that hadn't been there when he went in, were standing at the hitching rack in front of the big door, and the riders were crowded together on the sidewalk, talking low under their wide hats.

Lumberton never was a cowtown and we didn't hear much of the Texas lingo that seems to go natural with chaps and high-heeled boots. The crews of the fishing boats out of our Bay were mostly Portuguese and the timbering brought the Swedes. Then we got a sprinkling of Back Easterns, some clear out from Council Bluffs, Iowa, and a native son here and there, white collar folks in the mill offices, counter jumpers and such. But after our line was built north from Uriaiah to Lumberton, the ranchers in Trampas County, lying east of the coast range that shuts off the morning sun in town until nine o'clock, it's that close and high, began to drive their steers over for shipment to market, figuring the cattle would lose less weight on wheels than hoofs.

You wouldn't see a bandy-legged cow-puncher on Main Street every day, but they were common enough that nobody hardly noticed them any more.

Dick paid the buckaroos no mind until the business end of a six-gun jabbed him in the short ribs. A tall dark fellow with a thin hard face under one of those big white Stetsons that cost twenty dollars when a tophand didn't draw that much cash money a month, poked his jaw at Durndell.

"Hand the jingles over, bub," he growled.

Dick was quick with his mitts and quicker with his temper. He had just cashed his check for sixty dollars, good pay for a kid fireman in those days, and he and his best girl, Millie Palmer, were saving every cent for their wedding. Dick had even given up his daily schooner of suds to add a dime to their kitty. The outlaw put out his free hand for the cash, naturally, figuring that Durndell wasn't hankering to die of lead poisoning. Before he could blink, Dick grabbed the gun with his left hand and let fly with a roundhouse punch that caught the dark man between the hinge of the jaw and his ear and knocked him into the hitching rack so hard that the peeled pine pole splintered.

THERE was hell with the hide off then, sure enough, but we had to tell Dick about it afterward. He was out cold from the minute a second buckaroo clubbed him from behind with the butt of his Big Fifty until after the road agents scattered in the brush behind the Fair Grounds with Dick's pay and most of the State Bank's loose cash in their jeans. Like I said, Lumberton wasn't cow country and riding hosses were scarce in town; most of our folks knew more about rudders or logging gear than bridles. By the time Sheriff Noren and his two deputies got their animals saddled and rounded up a posse, the trail was stone cold.

The State lost nigh four thousand dollars in gold double eagles and some silver chicken feed that an outlaw scooped up in his hat as they broke for the street. Even bankers in our country learned to take things like Jesse James said, easy come easy go. I reckon they weren't hurt too bad, for they went right on doing business, and every so often there'd be a heavy chest of coin coming in or going out and the express messenger would check the locks on his car and pack an extra gun. Sheriff Noren couldn't get wind of the gang and the posters he'd stuck up in store windows and back bars, offering two hundred dollars reward, got flyspecked so bad you couldn't hardly read the print and folks took 'em down. Lumberton wasn't what you'd call a hell-raising town, but our people worked hard and played hard, and most every Saturday night there'd be a knifing or a stompin', with the fishermen going in for the first and the loggers doing the hobnailing. So, with always new scrapes to talk about, we soon forgot the bank robbery.

All but Dick Durndell, that is. That sixty dollars was to buy a parlor suite Millie Palmer had set her heart on. And the kid hadn't forgotten how the butt of the Big Fifty had creased his skull. He was honing to get hunk on both counts. Dick was twenty, tall, not too thin, with serious brown eyes and a face that would get him credit in Cashdown Charley's. He had quite a rep in the Sandlot League, where he played with the Railroad Nine, as a center fielder who could nail the fastest base runner at the plate, and relief pitcher with a high fireball breaking a tricky inshoot that made batters jump thinking he was fixing to bean

'em. But after the hold-up Durndell quit the sunset games and turned detective.

The kid got no cooperation from Noren.

"Thet gang is cl'ar outa th' State by now," the sheriff told Dick. "Ef'n they show up h'yar agin, we'll be ready for 'em. You'll only git yoreself hurt, messin' in peace officer's business." And he wouldn't make Durndell a special deputy, like the kid asked him. I could see the sheriff's point. Election was coming up and it wouldn't look good if a young fellow put one over on the regular County force. 'Sides, Noren really believed the bandits had hightailed it for the High Sierra, and a kid loose with a special's star might get to thinking himself too good and throw down on respectable citizens.

Before Dick got smoke in his system and took to firing on the road, he'd worked in the Division offices as waybill clerk and still dropped in, 'specially when he had something biting on him. Noren hadn't got shut of his last word when Durndell dusted down to see me.

"Noren may be a peace officer and all," Dick told me, standing tall before my desk, his brown eyes smoky, "but I'm sure I'm right, Mr. Tead. That gang had it so easy here, they'll be back, 'specially since they know they can catch the sheriff flatfooted with his horse unsaddled."

"But what's it so much to you, Dick?" I asked the kid. "That's Noren's job; you got one of your own."

Dick scowled. "They got my sixty dollars," he said flatly and there was no budging him.

HE took up a regular beat. Just about when the Sandlot League was going into the fifth inning, Durndell would make the round of the Bay Street bars, where visiting cowpokes might hole up for a little razoo with John Barleycorn. Dick didn't drink, but in those free and easy days the barkeeps had their fill of customers, lining the mahogany two and three deep and paid drifters no mind. A man could even get himself a full meal, sampling the free lunch in each whiskey mill, with never a word said.

Evenings Durndell spent with his One-and-Only, then before turning in early, for our day on the rails started at six o'clock,

he'd comb the deadfalls again, looking for a face.

And since Dick's hunch was right and Noren's wrong, one night in Gaolotti's he found what he was looking for. He wasn't sure at first. The face was dark, but turned sideways to Durndell, where the lanky stranger stood hunched over the bar, using his roping arm to h'ist a shot of red eye. A lot of our fishermen were dark complected, and there wasn't a speck of cow-hand rig about the man's clothes. He wore a dark store-bought suit not fitting too well at the neck, and flatheeled shoes, both new. They caught Dick's eye first, but the drinker's hat was a dead giveaway. In those days all railroad men, except engine and passenger crews on duty, wore small soft black fedoras nigh every waking minute. You might say it was their trademark, or brand. What I'm getting at is, nobody else did.

On a short branch line like ours, Dick knew everybody on the Division like you'd know your first cousin who shared the double house with you. The stranger's fedora was black and brand spanking new. It plumb yelled fake. There was a little empty space beside him and Durndell bellied up to the bar and ordered beer in a loud voice. Like he figured, the stranger turned to size up the noisy newcomer, not too much interested, his eyes following the schooner as the barkeep slid it across the board, then climbing Dick's hand and arm to his face.

Durndell saw the thin hard face close-up and knew his man. And the outlaw knew Dick, too. His lips spread in a silent snarl and his pistol hand raced for the waistband of his new pants to peek out the gun cradled against his flat belly, where it wouldn't show. Dick hadn't figured past finding the buckaroo in Lumberton sizing up the lay of the land for another haul. The kid had no gun and he'd be looking into the barrel of the bandit's smoke wagon in a split second. Fast as the outlaw was, his hog-leg wasn't leveled when Durndell doused the beer square in his eyes and brought the empty schooner down on the new fedora so hard that the thick glass shattered and streaked off across the floor every which way.

The outlaw musta had a skull like a grizzly, for he wasn't even fazed. He didn't shoot, I reckon not wanting a brush with the night marshal, but pistol-whipped Dick

something scandalous. The bar was mid-dling full, but nobody'd horn in on a private fight, and those that saw the kid throw the beer figured he'd started the ruckus. Durn-dell was handy with his fists, but the buck-aroo caught every punch on his gun until Dick's hands were bleeding and a couple of knuckles broken. When the kid dropped his guard a minute, the stranger was all over him, clubbing him on the head with the heavy butt of his Frontier model. Dick swayed, groggy. The dark man dropped him with a swift kick back of the knees and added a couple in the ribs for good measure when Durndell was out on the floor. Then holding the crowd under his gun, the out-law backed through the swinging doors and was gone in the night. Nobody was fool enough to follow.

The barkeep brought Dick to with a wet bar rag on the face and a double snort of red eye between the teeth. Home and bed was the place for anybody in his shape, but the kid set out for the jail house, reeling and staggering from the punishment he'd taken.

Deputy Brazor was alone in the cala-boose and minded to throw Durndell in the bull pen when he smelled his breath. A bloody nose had soaked Dick's shirt, a sleeve was torn loose from his coat, and his head

was covered with lumps like a toadfrog's back.

"Drunk an' fightin'," the deputy told Dick, not even listening to his story. "Oney yuh got a steady job, I'd lock yuh up. Go home an' sleep it off."

Noren lived way out on the Bay shore by the Aetna Mills, too far for Dick to walk in his condition. He got back to his board-ing house and fell into bed with his clothes on. He was there three days. It mighta been worse, only Millie Palmer came to hold his hand every afternoon. That buckaroo sure was lucky he didn't cross the girl's path after she laid eyes on Dick; his life wouldn't have been worth a four-card flush.

DURNDELL took quite a ribbing when he showed up for work, but there was good news for him too, for Rafe Eskins, who fired for Mart Camerson on Number One, our daily passenger southbound, was taking two weeks off and Dick took over his shovel. The kid grinned his thanks through his puffed and cracked lips, for the surest way to move over to the engineer's side of the cab is by firing on the main line trains. And Dick and Millie had plans 'way beyond his handling the throttle—Dick sitting at a desk in a white collar—and they were honing to get going.

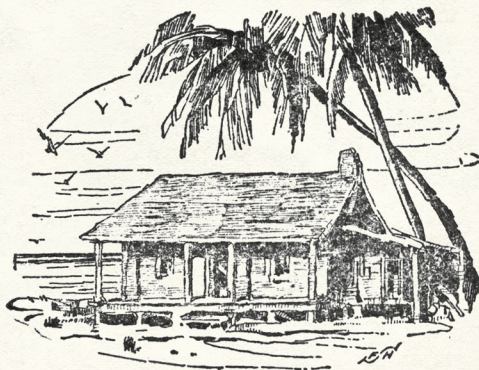
In the still air of the Outer Keys, the crucial sense was that of hear-ing—the man who listened most should manage to come through.

"AMATEURS PLAY ROUGH"

A novelette by

**Richard
Howells
Watkins**

in our next issue



As Assistant Superintendent, I was trouble shooter and business solicitor for the Lumberton Division, and for Dick's third trip south, I'd booked a shipment of bullion from the mines that the State Bank was sending to the Mint. Robin Jones, the express messenger, made a sour face when he saw the heavy chest loaded into his car, for gold drew trouble like sunshine on a honey tree draws a climbing bear. But Noren, though he put no great weight in Durndell's story, had beat through the bars and flophouses for the buckaroo and finding nary trace of the outlaw, gave the highball for the shipment.

About a dozen miles south of town, while our line is still on the bayshore flats, there's a place where the Trampas Trail comes over the mountains, and since the ranchers had started shipping steers by rail, we'd built cattle pens and named the whistle stop Florence. Camerson came 'round the last bend and jammed on his air, for the loading chute was lying across the track and the engineer had no choice but stop or be derailed. Number One had hardly quit sliding on locked brakes when a half dozen buckaroos, the same gang that robbed the State Bank, crawled out from under the pens and unlimbered their artillery, shooting the lights out of the little windows high up in the express car doors and popping at anybody getting too curious in the passenger coaches. The outlaws used a log for a battering ram and smashed in Robin Jones' door, but the messenger put up one hell of a fight. Doc Martin said after it looked like Robin had more lead than blood in him, but he pulled through.

Dick was too busy to pay any mind to the shooting in the express car. One of the gang came over to make sure the engine crew kept their hands off the throttle, and when the kid fireman saw the thin dark face under the big white Stetson, he reached back quick in the tender and smeared his own sweaty face with coal dust. He looked like a headlight to a snowstorm and his own mother wouldn't know him. The outlaw made Camerson and Durndell stand on the coal pile, out in the open, while he stood on the right of way, twirling his big six-gun around his trigger finger and daring them to start something.

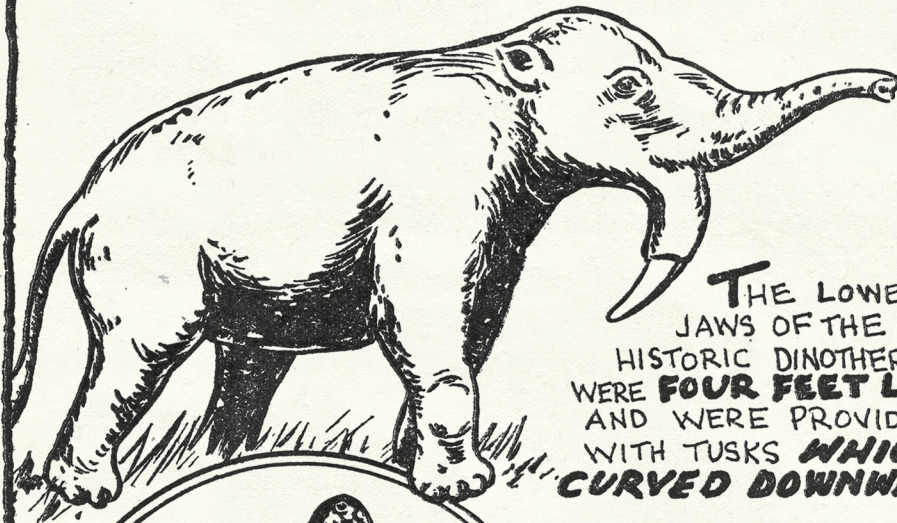
THE rest of the gang got the bullion chest out of the express car, shot the lock off and stowed the gold bars away in their saddle bags. Then one of them came by leading the dark man's pinto and they all galloped down the Trampas Trail through the buckrush, with Dick's enemy bringing up the rear. The kid fireman snatched up a hunk of coal. It was about the size of a baseball, but heavier, and Durndell made allowance for that, throwing it higher. It was as long a throw as he'd ever made on the sandlots, and as sure. The fireball curved up against the blue sky, then dove, going faster every second, straight for the big white Stetson.

The dark man flew out of the saddle like he'd been blasted, and was still cold when they picked him up. No, I don't mean his gang did. First place, he wasn't carrying any gold and then the passengers swarmed out of the cars as soon as the outlaws no longer had the drop on 'em. A lot of travelers in the old days carried guns and the air was thick with lead, mostly bound for Trampas. Anyhow, his gang ran off and left him and that's where they made their big mistake.

When Number One pulled into Uriah, their sheriff was waiting, alongside of Doc Martin and a stretcher for Robin Jones, and the lawdog knew how to make men talk. Though this buckaroo was tough and didn't give up until they say the sheriff opened up his toad-stabber and told the outlaw that since he wasn't using his tongue, he'd just cut it out. Then a posse took the dark man over to Trampas, with his feet tied to the stirrups and a noose around his neck, just in case. They found a cache with the bullion and most of the four thousand dollars.

I did never get it straight whether Durndell got his sixty dollars back, but he did get the reward and for once Millie wasn't for saving the money. She was all for Dick spending it immediately if not sooner, on a preacher, a fiddler band and the best eats in town. Durndell was so happy he nigh asked the sheriff to let the dark man out of the hoosegow long enough to dance at the wedding. Like Dick's pals in the Sandlot League said, "Cupid won the game but the scorecard credited the outlaw with an assist, even if he did play on the other team."

CURIOUSITIES ^{BY} WEILL



THE LOWER
JAWS OF THE PRE-
HISTORIC DICOYLES
WERE **FOUR FEET LONG**
AND WERE PROVIDED
WITH TUSKS **WHICH**
CURVED DOWNWARDS ✓



HOMING
PIGEONS ARE
ABLE TO COVER **600**
MILES IN A DAY ✓
THE RECORD DISTANCE
FLOWN BY ONE OF
THEM IS **OVER**
7,000 MILES ✓

SQUID PROPEL
THEMSELVES ON THE
PRINCIPLE OF A SKY-
ROCKET ✓ BY SUCKING
WATER IN AT THE
COLLAR OPENING
AND FORCING IT OUT
UNDER PRESSURE,
THEY CAN SHOOT
BACKWARD OR
FORWARD ○



YELLOW FIRECRACKERS

By
STEUART EMERY



I

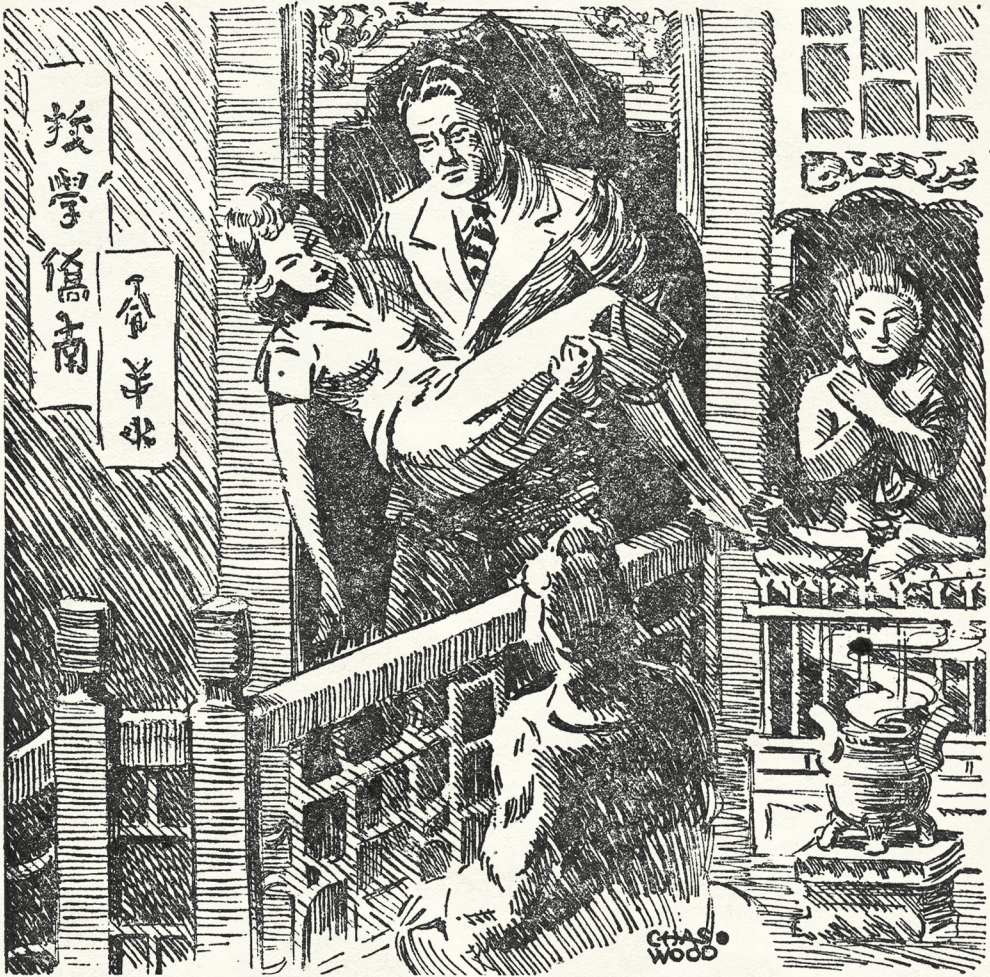
MARK FARR tensed for the shock of the crash as he had tensed so many times in the war. A last-second curse broke from the driver of his taxi speeding at a wild rate along the dingy Bowery in the shadows of the elevated. Brakes shrieked, the driver of the second taxicab, shooting out of the sidestreet and unseen until he cut across the bumper of Farr's cab, made a frantic effort to spin out of the way but it was too late. The cabs locked, went into an agonizing skid that threatened to careen them both and stopped. Farr had readied, waiting with the skill of

an old combat flier for the bump and he had been thrown back against the cushions, half-dazed but uninjured.

The luck was in. It was in not only for him but for the four persons concerned. His driver was scrambling from the front seat to the pavement, the other driver was pulling himself out and a girl was slipping from the interior of the sidestreet cab. Farr reached the pavement as quickly as she did, trying to get his breath back. So was she, one hand to her chest.

This girl met all his specifications. From light-blue beret to slender feet she gave out a vivid attractiveness. She was gracefully built and her dark eyes that matched her dark bob were widely-spaced and steady.

*Some Strange Force Was Abroad in the Crooked Alleys
and Streets of Chinatown, Something Old and Evil*



She would have true mettle and loyalty in her and those were the things that he had learned to prize above everything else in the war. She would be a little younger than he was. Farr's own eyes lightened and his capable-looking young face took on an expression of interest. Office work hadn't as yet taken the poise and the hard leanness out of his tall and muscular frame. He had met this girl by luck, he meant to press that luck. But for the moment they were staring at each other wordlessly.

Their drivers were far from wordless. Farr's operator plunged for the other driver, yelling. "Who d'ya think you are, a disk jockey? Run yaself into my cab!"

"I got the green light, you was runnin'

against the red, squirrel brain!" howled the girl's driver. "You slammed inter me like a pile-driver on wheels."

"I did like hell!" came back the shout. Jaws juttet and eyes flared. This was war on the Bowery within a block of Chatham Square. "Ya wanta sock in the jaw?"

"Hit 'im! Hit the bum! He run you down!"

Raucously the cries began to ring. A moment ago there had been only the usual thin straggle of derelict figures along the murky sidewalks. Now, swelling, the crowd had come. They had boiled from everywhere within eyesight, and plunged out through the swinging doors of nearby saloons. Raddled and liquorous, the crew was

shuffling and scrambling to get to the scene of the Bowery's latest free entertainment—a good fight.

"Stand up ter him. Don't take no insults. He done ya wrong, bo!"

Wild-eyed, Farr's driver slung the first punch and it landed on the jaw of the girl's driver. A windmill right hook swept back and crashed against bone.

"Yah, yuh louse, howya like that?"

"Take this one on your beezel!"

It was unscientific, toe-to-toe slugging and the crowd roared its approval.

"Git 'im, Dempsey!"

Gasping, panting the two taxi drivers milled on, minds focussed on personal mayhem. Farr had his mind focussed elsewhere. On the girl. She was the kind of girl who had no business whatsoever on the Bowery after dark where anything still could happen and apparently was happening. Already in the distance he could hear the siren scream of the approaching police radio car. In a minute more blue uniforms would be all over the place and he and the girl would be hauled up as witnesses at least. He didn't intend to break his appointment in Chinatown to be hauled up as a witness and he certainly couldn't picture the girl in a dingy night court.

"Out of here," he said, turning to her. "We can read about it in the papers tomorrow morning."

She wasn't there. The girl simply wasn't there. One moment she had been beside him but where she had stood was a solid mass of odorous, shrieking Bowery habitués. She had slipped somehow through the enclosing ring and got clear. Which was what he meant to do. He would be too easily identified as one of the taxicab passengers. The red headlights of the police car were lancing the front of the crowd as he skirted it passed its fringe and reached the wall of a lodging house whose dispirited sign bore the legend, "Beds 50 cents." The brakes of the police car went on, two men in blue thrust ungently into the crowd and over all the clamor rose the yell.

"Dempsey got 'im! Wotta socko!"

Farr was out and clear. He was only a block from Chatham Square from which the street of his destination branched. But where was the girl? And then he saw her, a slim figure in the shadows on the opposite

side of the street, bound still deeper into the heart of the Bowery and traveling as though she were heading a direct path for some place. He began to go fast himself on her track, he could see the figures that dotted the block ahead of her and they were not those of either reputable or sober citizens.

He saw one lurch as he went by the girl and stand looking at her. He saw the next figure that she passed make a definite grab at her arm and he turned his pace into half a run. She had passed Chatham Square and was turning abruptly to the left into the maw of a narrow street, its corners flashing with the lights of saloons. Doyers Street, the crooked artery that ran through the heart of Chinatown, bending at one point so that no traveler could see what lay directly ahead of him. Doyers Street of the famous Mission and the infamous Bloody Angle of the bygone tong wars, the shadowed ambush where hatchetmen and gunmen lurked. There was nothing absolutely nothing, that should bring a girl like the one ahead of him into Doyers Street, still unsavory, still potentially murderous.

FARR was gaining rapidly, he was hardly half a block behind the girl as she turned into Doyers. He broke into a fast run, turned the corner himself and slowed to cover the rest of the distance at walking pace. Not twenty yards ahead of him the girl stepped along. The lighted facade of the Doyers Street Mission loomed; from inside it welled hoarse voices raised in hymns, and the street itself stretched barren and empty of pedestrians. A pale moon rode wanly over the rooftops, the badly lighted artery was a gulf of shadows.

Now the girl was going slowly, as though she were approaching a destination. She was looking upward at the rooftops, three stories above the pavement. Then she stopped in front of a dim building with queer gables jutting from it. Farr saw her raise her wrist and look at the watch on it. Her glance veered and took him in.

"Sorry," he said quietly. "But I followed you from the taxi brawl. This is no section for a girl to wander around in alone."

"I am all right," she said in a cool, controlled voice. "As a matter of fact I'm meeting someone here, in front of the house with the gables next the old Bloody Angle."

My brother. At nine sharp. It's nine-ten now. We got into a traffic jam uptown and then that smash came when the driver tried to make up the time."

"Being late for an appointment is a woman's privilege," smiled Farr.

"Not on this one." The girl's face went a trifle taut. "This is vital. When my brother said nine sharp at the gabled house on Doyers Street—he meant it. It's never like him to be a single second late."

"You'll have to wait it out," said Farr. "Do you mind if I wait it out with you? I have an appointment myself to meet a friend over on Mott Street, but it's just to look at a Chinese vase for a wedding gift for a classmate, so we'll call that postponeable. I don't like to leave you here by yourself. If I stayed until your brother shows up—"

"I'd appreciate it." The girl spoke evenly but her eyes were flitting toward the turn of the Bloody Angle hardly more than yards away. There was the dawn of strain in her face, she kept looking at her wrist-watch. A light foot began to tap nervously on the pavement.

"Somehow I don't understand this. I was sure I'd meet my brother here."

"Cigarette?" asked Farr, drawing out the pack. A smoke would do the girl good, he could use one himself.

"Thanks."

He drew his lighter and gave the flame to her cigarette and then to his own. He was flicking it off when it flared suddenly, casting its illumination down into the dingy area of the gabled building. Huddled against the area wall was a blur and the blur was a man's shape. Some drunken Bowery derelict, staggering into Doyers and collapsing in the nearest refuge? The form was inert enough. It was too inert. Farr had seen that betraying limpness before in the war. He swung down the area steps, lighter in hand and held it over the form.

A stubbled face stared up at him, the jaw slack, the eyes glassy and fixed in a last uncomprehending stare. Destruction, sudden and unwarned, had come upon this man in the shabby suit and the scuffed shoes, the garb of any common Bowery habitue. But one sleeve of the ragged coat had been pulled up and Farr could see that the skin underneath was clean and well-tended. The features of the dead man under the stubble

were regular and finely fashioned. They were almost identical in a masculine way with those of the girl.

"Do you and your brother look alike?" Farr threw over his shoulder.

"Yes. There's a remarkable family resemblance. But why—?"

Farr straightened up. He had turned the body—and had seen the dark stain under the shoulder-blade. It was a tough break. "I'm sorry. Your brother is here. He was on time to meet you, but someone else met him first. They got him. Knifed in the back."

She was down the area steps in a flash, bending over the body. The lighter's flame was plenty. She gave a tiny gasp. "It's Edward. Yes, it's my brother, Captain Edward Reid. I'm Helena Reid. He's in disguise. Why—why? And who—who—"

"I can't tell you," said Farr quietly. The girl was fighting for composure and with a magnificent effort she achieved it. "I'd better go through his pockets, yes?"

THE girl nodded and again he bent down. Almost instantly in the lighter's flare he caught the incongruous note, the gay, multi-colored peacock's feather thrust into the band of the dingy hat. He lifted it out and put it in his breast pocket. Nothing was coming up under his exploring fingers. A rumpled package of the cheapest kind of cigarettes, a soiled handkerchief, a brass key common to Bowery lodging houses with a number stamped on it. Then his fingers running over the chest felt a slight bulge. He opened the vest and felt for its inner pocket. There was a safety pin carefully fastening whatever was inside it. He drew it out. He was looking at a yellow paper packet with a pair of dragons stamped on it.

"Firecrackers. Yellow firecrackers and a peacock's feather. Do they mean anything to you?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing. I can't give you any answer on that."

Farr stood back, the firecrackers put away.

"Look out!"

The cry broke from him. In that split second he had caught the shadow rushing down from above, from the roof of the gabled house or one of its windows. It fell silently and it was lethal. Farr's arm went out and shoved the girl so hard she stag-

gered away and just in time. Crashing, the object landed and pottery shards and dirt littered the area.

"Out of here, quick!"

He grabbed at the girl's arm and got her to the sidewalk out of range of any further falling objects. No figure showed on the rooftop, the line of the houses was bare. But a fifty-pound flower pot had been dropped from above squarely for the girl's head and if it had hit its target, there would have been not one but two bodies in the area.

"That flower pot was aimed for you. Whoever they are who got your brother, do they want you, too?"

"It looks like it. And I don't know who they are." The girl spoke swiftly, urgently. "I have to think fast now—I have to act fast."

"We do," corrected Farr, grimly. "I'm declaring myself in. Your brother is in the service, so was I. And we veterans are apt to pay back. Hit one of us—you hit us all. Mark Farr is the name. I'm in a law office. And you?"

"Fashion designing. I have an apartment in town and whenever my brother has been in New York he's camped there. Although he was ten years older than I am we were very close. He was in Counter-Espionage in Europe during the war, liked the service and stayed on, moving all about the country. From El Paso he wrote he was doing motor transport work. Then a little over an hour ago he phoned me at my apartment and told me to meet him here at nine exactly, he had something vital to pass to me to give to army headquarters and tell them it was Mission Potter's Field; they'd know. That's what it sounded like—Potter's Field or Popper's Field. He spoke very hurriedly, said he was in a jam, not to ask questions, he was in a pay booth on the Bowery; he had to carry on alone. I've been sightseeing with him here in Chinatown, he knew I could locate the Angle. So now—"

"We move away from this spot," said Farr. "This looks like Chinese stuff and hardly two blocks from here at the Cathay Restaurant I have a date to meet an old Columbia classmate who knows Chinatown from roof to cellar. He should be able to suggest some kind of a clue—right off that we can work on. If we notify the police

they may question us indefinitely and get nowhere. We'll call them in after we've seen Smiley Lee and in the meantime, I'll drop in at the nearest pay booth and phone Bellevue to send the ambulance to the Angle."

"Yes," said the girl. They had passed the Bloody Angle and were traveling Pell Street toward Mott past softly-lighted shop windows filled with dried roots, jade, silks and porcelains. A crowd of quietly-garbed Chinese and noisy American sightseers filled the narrow sidewalks to overflowing. They were laughing, talking gaily and curiously, mused Farr, unconscious that death had struck in their midst.

II

AT THE top of the narrow flight of stairs leading to the Cathay, Farr passed his hat in at the checkroom. They stepped through the main door, fringed with bead curtains, and into the world of Old China. Low lights gleamed in the incensed semi-dusk, lanterns swung overhead, everywhere gleaming scarlet and black lacquer met the eye. Booths ran along the sides with Chinese paintings on silk dotting the walls. But there the world of Old China stopped and the world of the New China entered.

The bar by the entrance door with its gay, leather-covered, bright stools was of chromium, behind it poised white-coated young Chinese with the aplomb of America. In the ears sounded the pulse and beat of a New York orchestra, not the reedy tuneless piping and whining of Oriental music. The small dance floor was crowded with swaying figures. A smooth-faced youngish Chinese headwaiter came forward instantly.

"Table for your party? By the ringside, do you wish?"

Farr sent his scrutiny to the bar where he expected to sight a familiar figure, but it was not there. "I was to meet Mr. John Lee here," he said. "Do you know him? I'm late."

The headwaiter smiled. "Very well I know the esteemed Mr. John Lee. He is waiting at a table on the balcony." He motioned down the room to where it gave through open doors onto shadowy space.

"Shall I inform Mr. Lee that you three friends have arrived?"

"Two of us," said Farr, surprised.

The headwaiter bowed apologetically. "This other gentleman came in so close on your heels that I thought he was with you. Very sorry, my mistake."

Farr turned. Directly behind him stood an Oriental of forty or so, far too expensively dressed. The waist of his coat was drawn too tightly, its shoulders were too wide, its lapels flared an inch too much. He was barbered to perfection, smooth, suave, and his expressionless eyes were as black as those of a rattlesnake. He had cold ruthlessness written all over him.

"No," stated Farr. "Just two of us. Will you show us to Mr. Lee?"

"I showee you, please." In front of Farr appeared an ivory-faced Chinese girl, one of the smallest, most-perfectly formed girls he had ever seen. A shimmering, high-collared banner gown clothed her, tiny sandals shod tiny feet. On a ribbon around her neck hung the tray of cigarettes. "Me cigarette girl. Misteh Lee velly good customer. You come."

They followed her down the room, past the orchestra and out onto the lanterned balcony, where only a couple of tables held diners. She took them to a table in the corner over the street next to a low wall at which a slim young man with a round face sat alone toying with his drink.

"Misteh Lee, your fiends. You and your fiends likee cigarettes, Misteh Lee?"

"Smiley" Lee looked up, his dark eyes welcoming. His round and deceptively bland face broke into the smile that had given him his nickname. There was perfect courtesy in his expression and gesture. He rose lightly as Farr introduced him to Helena.

"Miss Sally Lee, my delightfully humorous thirty-second cousin," he said to the cigarette girl, "in the presence of honored guests, it is not meet for a young woman to indulge in deceitful badinage. In other words, you get the blazes out of here and try your frightful pidgin English on the regular tourists. If the dean of Barnard could hear you, it would cost you your degree, little blossom from Morningside Heights. Scram!"

"Little Blossom scram," said Sally Lee

demurely. "Don't blame me, she added, smiling sweetly at Farr. "That line is good for many a buck in tips. The tourists expect it so they get it with the two-dollar dinner. Poor little bloken blossom so far from Chinaland."

She tripped airily off on her buccaneering way and Smiley Lee drew out a chair for Helena. "My good friend Mark is late," he said. "But one pardons his tardiness in view of the most charming guest whom he brings to my humble table. Did my friend Mark tell you on the way that I was a Chinese? You seem startled. Of Chinese family, yes; but I am a born American citizen."

"And a damned good one," said Farr. "Second-string quarterback at Columbia when I was on the varsity and he'd have made it but the class got cooped up for the war. Smiley went out to the Pacific right off as a Navy Intelligence lieutenant. He speaks Japanese, Chinese, French, Spanish and, I believe, reads the comic strips in Sanskrit."

"You honor my humble person too greatly," said Smiley Lee. "Lay off the baloney. My English, I fear, Miss Helena, is somewhat stilted, but my American slang is most up-to-the-minute. What refreshment would you care for, or shall we say 'Name your poison'?" His smile grew even more welcoming and polite. The Chinese waiter, hovering close by, beamed also. Here, it came to Farr, was an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness but it was underlaid by stark drama. The waiter left and the drinks came almost instantly. Farr took a long pull on his scotch-and-soda and so did Helena. She looked tense, strained. Farr felt that he might as well go right after the solution to this business.

"We shall put off the inspection of the vase, shall we?" inquired Smiley. "We shall proceed to an evening of enjoyment instead?"

"There's something first," said Farr grimly. He drew the peacock feather from his pocket and laid it on the tablecloth in front of Smiley Lee. "Does this mean anything to you with your knowledge of Chinatown?"

Smiley Lee's round face hardened. His eyes grew steely. They were those of a man, superbly courteous, but capable of dangerous action. He was all driving alertness in

a split second. "It means a great deal to me. It means death is about to strike in Chinatown. Where did you get this most murderous token?"

"It came from the hatband of Helena's brother. The killer has struck already, Smiley. Listen."

Farr spoke at length and Smiley Lee listened with an expression that told he was not missing a word. At the end of Farr's recital he gave a brief nod. "Dead at the Bloody Angle, struck down from behind with the peacock's feather left beside him. It is incredible in this day and age. For, look you, the peacock's feather is the old sign of revenge in the tong killings that ceased a generation ago. Flown from the victim's hearse or a carriage with flowers behind it, it means that the victim's killers are known and are themselves doomed. Left at the scene of a killing it means the debt of death repaid. But the salaried soldiers of the tongs, the hatchetmen, are long since gone, the tongs are business and family organizations on which we of Chinatown pride ourselves. No one would ever want to wake the ghosts of those evil days when Chinatown's alleys ran blood. What contact did your brother have with Chinatown, Miss Helena?"

"None at all that I ever knew of," said Helena. "The last time I heard from him, as I told Mark, he was on an army detail at El Paso. And then tonight he called me on the phone here in New York and told me to meet him at the gabled house in Doyers Street where he would give me something."

"And then he is liquidated and the revenge token of tong warfare is left with him." Smiley Lee's dark eyes grew darker. "There is not only a peacock's feather in this but somehow I detect what is called a red herring. I do not think that your brother was eliminated by a Chinese, I think that he was eliminated by someone fully conversant with the old Chinese ways who wishes the police to think that it was done by a Chinese and is a Chinatown killing, while it actually had nothing to do with Chinatown. But why should someone on the roof or in a window of the gabled house try to liquidate Miss Helena also?"

Farr wrinkled his forehead. The girl had been walking ahead of him in Doyers looking up for the gables. Anyone crouching

above would make her out. "Her face," he said quickly. "It resembles her brother's remarkably. Anyone involved in getting her brother would go for her, I think, if she appeared on the scene immediately. She might know a great deal."

"You are thinking as clearly as usual, my friend Mark," said Smiley. "That would be it. And it means that from now on until we get to the bottom of this business, Miss Helena will walk in the midst of danger. Our next clue the yellow firecrackers you mentioned, yes? Give."

Farr drew the package from his pocket and passed it over the tablecloth. Smiley Lee took it, hefted it and began to feel its tissue between thumb and forefinger.

"This never came from China. It is not the Chinese paper. The dragons are nothing but an adequate imitation. Once more we have the lousy try to implicate the Chinese. One moment—" His dark eyes glittered. "There is something inside this package that is not firecrackers. And I believe from its careful secretion on Captain Reid's person that this must be the object he meant to pass over to Miss Helena."

On the tablecloth, clear in the lantern light, lay the firecracker packet as Smiley Lee put it down and reached for a cigarette. Farr looked up and over the snowy linen and saw stark ferocity. Yards away only, at a table next the wall, sat the ruthless-eyed Oriental who had been mistaken for a member of their party. Now his eyes gleamed, the hand that was lifting his drink twitched away from it and crept toward the betraying bulge under the left armpit of his tight-fitting coat.

FARR got it now. This Oriental gunman had trailed them fast and expertly from the scene of the killing, hidden among the crowd on the street and had been on top of them as they entered the Cathay. He had a gun and Smiley Lee and Farr had nothing. His eyes, fastened on the yellow firecrackers, had a look in them that was unmistakable. He wanted them, he meant to get them and he had the power of gunfire behind him to get them with.

Between Farr and Lee the girl sat, Farr could not talk across her without rousing suspicion. But at his elbow lay the ornately-decorated menu card with its long list of

dishes and he had a pencil in his vest. He drew it out and held the card up, writing on it. Then he passed it over.

"You're the expert on Chinese dishes, Smiley," he said loudly. "Have you any suggestions? Here are mine." Smiley Lee's bland expression never changed as he took the card. Across its wide white margin at the top, Farr had written:

We are watched by Oriental at table beside next wall. He has a gun. He's got us cold if he wants to.

Smiley Lee beamed. "Cold, you say? No, I recommend the hot dishes. Permit me, my friends to make the selection. Your pencil, please." He began to scribble on the card. "Boy!" His voice raised and a waiter popped from inside to the table. "I wish the cigarette girl to take our order. Send this marked menu to her."

The waiter bobbed his head and withdrew. Above the soft murmur of the crowd passing on the street below rose a harsher sound. The clang of a gong, steadily beating at some distance. Farr knew what it meant. If he stood up and looked over the balcony wall in minutes more he would see the Bellevue ambulance cutting its way along the street for the Bowery where it would turn north at top speed. The body of Helena's brother had been found and already it was on its way to the morgue. And the girl knew it too. He saw her go pale. Then she looked at him squarely.

"We'll forget everything but the job, won't we, right now?"

"We had better," said Farr grimly.

"You ordeh dinneh, please?" Once more Sally Lee, the tiny cigarette girl hovered at their table. This time, instead of her tray of cigarettes she carried a silver tray on which three folded napkins reposed. She laid them down gracefully, one in front of each person. "Nice hot roll inside," she tilted.

"Scram, Sally." Warning crackled in Smiley Lee's voice. His bland face was alert. "He's coming, Mark! Inside your napkin, Quick! Rod."

THE Oriental had risen from his seat by the wall. With catlike tread he covered the distance that separated the two tables.

There was no one at all on the balcony to block his progress. The early diners had left. His hand flashed under his armpit and the gun came out, leveled at Farr.

"I take yellow firecrackers," he said in queer harsh English. "Pass over or I shoot."

Farr's left hand closed on the firecrackers that lay in front of him. Death stared at him from the looming bore of the automatic. Smiley Lee was reaching into his napkin but he was going to be too late. The gunman's finger was curling on his trigger. Farr held up the packet, his other hand went into the rolled napkin where the butt of the little gun showed and he gripped it, tilted the napkin and fired through it off the table. It was the quickest snapshot he had ever taken, straight for the hand that thrust the automatic at him. A yell of pain broke from the Oriental as the bullet smashed in. Smiley Lee had his gun out. Two weapons covered the gunman and in the crash and din of the orchestra now thundering into hot music the minor slap of Farr's .28 had gone unheard.

"Grab his gun, Helena," he bit out. "Handbag it." Helena swept the Oriental's dropped gun from the tablecloth and out of sight.

"Napkin for the gentleman, Little Blossom from Barnard," said Smiley softly. "We shall conduct this affair in a most unpretentious manner. Wrap up your wounded hand, my good highbinder, and thrust it into your pocket where it will be hidden. No one has heard the shot. We shall retire to the private office in the rear of this establishment where we shall proceed promptly to put you through a third degree that will make you sing your damned head off. Hear that below us?"

The ambulance gong was sounding directly under the balcony in the over-narrow, overcrowded street. "Bellevue ambulance!" its driver was shouting. "Out of the way, taxi, out of the way, folks!"

"Carrying the body of a certain army officer," said Smiley Lee. "With the presence of which in that ambulance you, no doubt, had plenty to do or you would not be on this young lady's trail. Yes? You will sing?"

The Oriental gunman's head drooped. All life, all courage seemed to have gone

out of him with Farr's shot. He had wrapped the napkin around his wounded hand and drops of red were seeping through it. "I sing," he said. "I look below."

He moved to the wall and stared down onto the street. Both his hands, his good left one and the wounded right, came up and rested for a second on the top of the low wall. His body braced, his feet thrust back and he went out into midair in a soaring jump. Smiley Lee's gun cracked and its slug hit the top brick of the wall, Farr was too taken by surprise to fire. In a leap he was at the wall, gun ready, and looking down. The Oriental had landed where he meant to, on the sturdy roof of the ambulance, not a five-foot jump from the low balcony and moving at a snail's pace directly below it.

Farr saw him collect himself, crouch and slide off the roof, striking the pavement with sure feet. He was off into the midst of the startled crowd, moving so fast that no one apparently had time to gather where he had come from before he was a shadow in the murk that vanished, zigzagging. Farr shoved his useless gun away and turned back to the table.

"Smart thinker," he said. "Smarter than we are."

"Very smart," said Smiley Lee. "They are most smart people we are up against. Now we have one of them, but we don't, yes? Our songbird has flown the bough. He played us for saps."

"So what?" Farr frowned, concentrating. The Oriental gunman, clear link to the killing at the Bloody Angle was gone, but something still remained, the package of yellow firecrackers. "We'd better go into that rear office, after all, Smiley, and open up this packet. You say there's something in it?"

Smiley nodded. "Out back we go, my friend Mark. There is the skull practice to be indulged in."

He rose and led the way through the crowded premises of the Cathay. It rang with music and laughter, dancers were swaying on the floor, and only a few yards away on the balcony death had hovered again. It was the way still of Chinatown, ageless and undisturbed at its core, where incredible things went on happening, reflected Farr. He and Helena followed

Smiley past the bar and down a corridor, to a private door that gave off to the left. Smiley opened and they passed through.

Here was a combination of Oriental luxury and modern office furnishing. A low carved teakwood table and settee stood in front of the window and the carpet was of magnificent eastern texture while filing cabinets proclaimed the twentieth century business system.

"This office is the private retreat of my uncles, the Lees, who own the Cathay, and whose staff is composed entirely of members of the Lee family, the largest Chinese family in New York, all of whom work loyally together. Do you wonder, my friend Mark, why the guns came so fast in the napkins? They came from this office where my honored uncles, as restaurant owners have the permits for them in case of hold-ups and it took me but a moment to write my order for them on the menu and send it to thirty-second cousin Sally Lee, the Little Blossom of Barnard, who is working her way through college with a social welfare major. A most astute, although entirely too humorous, young Chinese American girl of today's generation who has some quaint idea that some day she intends to marry me. A slick chick." He nodded toward the open window that gave onto the night with the wall of a dingy building apparent across yards of space. "Will you please to sit upon the settee there, Miss Helena? You will find it cooler with the night breeze."

Helena crossed to the window beneath which the teakwood settee rested and looked out and down. "What's this?" she asked curiously. "This fire-escape or whatever it is that runs to the next building."

"Another settee. What is known as a 'Chinese settee'. Also another relic of the bad old days in Chinatown when the Triangle was honeycombed with iron catwalks such as the one you see spanning the open air gulf between buildings at various levels. Traveling over such catwalks, then down into cellars and through tunnels from one building to the next it was possible for killers or other fugitives to disappear in one house and come out in another, blocks away. Once Chinatown was a labyrinth, a maze of such getaways, and still many of them remain. I myself could take you out upon that catwalk and bring you to the

street two hundred yards from here over one route that leads upstairs to the rooftops and down into cellars. As children we of the Lee family played over these getaway routes. But enough of this tourist guide stuff. Let us get down to the hard tacks. Bring out those firecrackers, Mark, and put them on the table." He went to the door and stepped into the corridor. "Waiter!"

"What is your honored wish, Mr. Lee?" answered a voice.

"A kettle of boiling water from the kitchen. See that it is full of steam."

The waiter he had called to came in almost instantly with the kettle that he set on a grass mat on the low table. Smiley Lee took up the packet of firecrackers and held it in the steam that poured from the spout, manipulating its folds gently.

"The high class Intelligence job, my friend Mark, yes? It is open without leaving a trace." Deftly he spread the yellow folds wide and bared the array of firecrackers that lay inside. He picked them up, flattening the underside of the paper. On it lay a square sheet of thin tissue that he put in the center of the table. "The hidden object which the firecrackers packet carried. The object, I think, for which Miss Helena's brother was killed. And what an object to kill for. A miniature map of the United States, executed on transparent paper."

FARR stared, uncomprehending, at the onion-skin paper. It was a map of the United States, all right, brought down to scale with the boundaries of the states outlined, without their names, and dots here and there scattered about it, the location of some of which he recognized.

"Cities," he said. "I can spot New York, Philadelphia and San Francisco, and so forth. What does that buy us? Exactly nothing."

"Less than nothing," said Smiley Lee. "Now we try heat, some more of the old Intelligence baloney to discover if there is secret writing."

He stepped to a stand where an antique bronze lamp stood and lit its wick. He brought it back to the table and as the wick burned steadily held the map close to it, passing it up and down and across next to the flame. Nothing whatever, no signs, no writing appeared on the heated paper. "The

total blank. The map is in there, where most assuredly no map belongs, because it is a key to something. But the intellect inquires—to what? And my humble intellect gives no answer."

Farr picked up the firecrackers idly. Some idea was stirring in his mind but it had not formulated into clearness. He began to toy with the firecrackers, one by one. They were exactly the same kind that he had played with as a boy and had seen more times than he could remember and under his probing fingers they were all alike, hard-rolled, small, each connected to the main fuse by its own powder-filled tendril. But were they all alike? Under his fingers a firecracker felt soft, more resilient than the others he had touched.

"These crackers aren't all alike, Smiley. I've found one that's different. Something inside it, do you suppose?"

Smiley Lee extended his hand. "Give me." He took the firecracker Farr indicated. "Yes, this one is different. We test. Cigarette, please."

Farr passed him a crumpled package that held the last of his own smokes and Smiley lit it at the lamp. He disengaged a firecracker, touched its fuse and tossed it into a metal bowl that stood close to him. It exploded with a small bang and smoke emanated from the bowl. He lit the fuse of the cracker that Farr had found peculiar and tossed it in. Farr went taut, this meant something or it meant nothing. He waited for the bang. It did not come. Smiley Lee stepped over and rummaged in the bowl, coming up with the unexploded cracker.

"Fuse has burned to nothing and has entered the firecracker, which did not go off. Therefore aforesaid firecracker has no powder in it. It has something else." He raised the firecracker to his nostrils and smelled at it, expanding his nostrils and his lungs. "The smart, smart operators," he said blandly. "Marijuana. A marijuana cigarette fashioned like a firecracker. Our plot not only begins to thicken, my friend Mark, it begins to sting. Marijuana cigarettes being imported and circulated. Shall we say four or five out of the twenty firecrackers are instead the poisonous marijuana? In the upper altitudes of the underworld they would sell for as high as \$2 apiece which would make a packet of fire-

crackers worth \$10 and if the marijuana contents were tilted to ten a \$20 package, which is not hay.

"But still I think there is something bigger than \$2 marijuana cigarettes behind this to account for one killing and an attempted second. This map has given up nothing to me but it may to the chemicals of my uncle Wong Lee, the celebrated Chinatown chemist, who in his home laboratory around the corner has all the fluids necessary to bring out any kind of secret writing. So we shall restore the package to its original condition." His fingers were busy putting the firecrackers back, folding and regumming. "And I shall step into the phone booth outside and call honorable Uncle Wong. My uncles who own the Cathay would never countenance such an invention of the devil as the telephone in this, their private retreat. Keep this, Mark, until I return in some five minutes or so."

Mark pocketed the yellow firecrackers as Smiley Lee slipped out of the door. The girl leaned back on the settee. The sill of the open window behind her was high and she rested her head against it. She looked tired and wan but game to the core. She was a fighter, it came to Farr. Already that night she had been in sorrow and in danger and she was going on, regardless of it. Some strange force was abroad tonight in the crooked alleys and streets of Chinatown, something old and evil.

"Drink?" he asked. "I can get you a picker-upper. You've been through a good deal."

"We're going through more," she said quietly. "No, no drink. Cigarette."

Farr looked at the low table before him. On it lay the package he had thrown there. "Empty. I'm fresh out. It won't take me a minute to walk down the corridor to the front and get Sally Lee and her trayful of smokes. Take it easy until I'm back."

He stepped out of the door, with a last look behind him at the girl. She had closed her eyes, her head was comfortably on the sill, for the moment she was resting. He closed the door softly and went down the corridor. Against the wall near the entrance to the main room was the glass-encased phone booth and Smiley Lee was in it, holding the receiver to his ear in an attitude of waiting. He went on and reached the edge

of the dance floor. He made out Sally Lee well down the room, holding her cigarette tray over a table of visitors, no doubt passing out a terrific line. It would be two or three minutes before he could reach her. He let his mind drift, conscious only that the music was gay and the scene colorful with no hint of the sinister undertone. Then Sally Lee was in front of him, catching his beckoning signal.

"Poor Little Bloken Blossom of Barnard still plying loathsome trade successfully," she smiled, eyes dancing. "Big butter-and-egg man give poor little Chinatown girl five dollars for tip and askee for phone numbeh. Little Bloken Blossom pat prettily on bald head and say 'Thank you, Daddy.' Give phone number Chinatown police station and say Thursdee is night off. Take all the smokes you want, no charge to Smiley's friends."

Farr thanked her and took a couple of packages, turning. As he passed the phone booth Smiley stepped out and fell in alongside him. "It will be sometime before honorable Uncle Wong can be reached. He is at the Chinese Theatre and its performance is endless. We shall contact him later. After all, the night is young and we have made some progress on our side. As for their side—whoever they are——"

He opened the door to the office and they walked in. On the floor, hurled onto its back, lay the low teakwood table. The oil lamp, was on the carpet, its flame licking at the pile. There was absolutely no sign of Helena.

"They have made great progress," said Smiley Lee and his eyes went hard. "They have got the girl."

III

FARR stood motionless, appalled. Then his reactions swept in and he plunged for the window overlooking the catwalk. It was all too clear how the job had been done in the scant minutes that he had been out of the room.

"Someone spotted us from across the way, Smiley. They had us under watch all along. The moment I foolishly left Helena alone they crept across the catwalk. She was sitting with her head resting against the window sill. A scarf over her mouth, maybe

just a hand, and she was silenced and pulled up and out. How she must have fought, throwing that table over! But it didn't do any good. Yes, they've got her. Chinese settee, you called that catwalk. This is Chinese stuff."

"No, and again no. They simply used a Chinese device they knew of. That gunman was not Chinese, he was a Korean. Many Korean types and Chinese are almost identical. They would look exactly alike to an American but not to one of Chinese blood, which I am. Move fast, Mark, we must follow while we can. Gun ready."

Farr swung onto the catwalk with Smiley Lee right behind him, raced over its short span and hoisted himself in over the window it reached. He stood in a dank, musty hallway, dimly lighted by a single bulb of low power that hung from a cord in the ceiling.

"I lead from now on. I have gone over this route," said Smiley. "Never, never shall I forgive myself for my carelessness. This getaway trail goes down, not up."

They raced down a pair of stairs to the first floor and turned in under them to another flight that led still farther down. Here there was no light and Smiley Lee lit match after match. In their flare showed a dilapidated cellar, its ceiling, walls and floor dim with dust that lay like a fine powder.

"Footprints," said Farr hoarsely.

There was a blur of marks in the thick dust on the stone floor only a few yards away. They seemed to run into a scuffed-up center. Then they straightened out and three separate sets of footprints, two wide and the one between them small, ran side by side for the wall at the far end of the cellar.

"Carried along between two men," husked Farr.

"Drugged unconscious, probably by a hypodermic, here where the stop and the scuffle was made. The heelmarks of Miss Helena's shoes begin to drag as we go along."

They were following fast and the story was plain in the footprints that the dust retained as though it were plaster of Paris. The men's prints became heavier, the girl's lighter, and at times there were gaps in hers as though she was lifted between shoulders, then set down again.

The trail ran legibly until it ended at a huge wooden box set against the wall. "Chinese root bin," said Smiley. "It has a panel opening through the wall into another bin on the other side. Hoist yourself in. She has been taken through it."

Farr swung himself into the compartment and saw the open panel and beyond it, through the brick wall, a metal door. Smiley reached through the gap and pushed. The door resisted all effort.

"They have blocked pursuit. They have shot the bolt on the other side and that door is sheet iron. We have nothing to do but to return and send out the alarm. And the sooner we do so the better, I think, my friend Mark, for the sake of Miss Helena."

AT TOP speed they retraced their steps to the catwalk, crossed it and swung into the office. Smiley Lee went to the door and called out in Chinese down the corridor. A waiter appeared and still in the same Chinese Smiley spoke to him. The waiter darted off and a moment later the dapper headwaiter and Sally Lee came into the room.

"Miss Helena Reid, an honored guest, has been kidnapped from this room, Suey Lee," said Smiley in a low, tense voice. "The Cathay of our uncles, the entire Lee family has lost face. Also Miss Helena is in deadly danger."

A look of rage appeared on the headwaiter's smooth face. All air of badinage dropped from Sally Lee. She looked cool, fast-thinking.

"Turn out the Lee family," she said.

"It is exactly what I am doing. Suey, my cousin, take those Lee busboys out of the kitchen and send them to broadcast the alarm. Send all waiters and bartenders of the Lee family you can spare. Comb Chinatown from end to end and cellar to rooftop for information on two men with a girl in a blue beret, ill or unconscious between them. We traced her footprints this way." He explained swiftly. "Follow those footprints as far as you can from the door in the cellar that blocked us. They must have had a car waiting somewhere nearby or else a taxi. Quiz all taxidrivers at the all-night stands. Offer a \$100 reward for information. Go!"

"I go," flashed Suey Lee and was off.

"So do I," said Sally Lee coolly. "I'm getting out of these China doll togs and into

some real clothes. I'm in on this job to the finish."

"And now what?" asked Farr as the door closed behind Sally Lee. A wild impatience rode him. Somewhere out in the night Helena Reid, the most attractive girl he had ever met, was being held in the hands of men who had not hesitated to kill and would not hesitate to do so again.

"We wait, but not for long. From ten-year-olds to graybeards the prolific Lee family will be immediately on the streets, my friend Mark, and they are certain to turn up something. They will be filled, young and old alike, with purpose to restore the lost face of the Lee family from under whose roof a guest has been kidnapped. The honor of Chinatown is at stake in this business, among other things. For the last twenty years we have worked to live down the reputation fastened on us in the old days when we had many men of evil in the Triangle. We have won to a clear record at last, we have fought and died for our country, America, in the war. And now what? Should the police step in, before it is entirely necessary, the sensational press would smirch the new and shining reputation of our American Chinatown to make a circulation holiday. Let us put off the police until the last resort. You know me, Mark, will you leave this affair to the Lee family for the time being?"

"Yes," said Farr.

Smiley Lee he could trust and he knew it. Smiley had ways and means in Chinatown that would be open to no one else. It would be gruelling hell to sit and wait but it was the only thing to be done. He had had plenty of gruelling waits in a war that, it seemed would never end. He was sweating it out again and so was Smiley Lee. They were not saying anything to each other as the minutes dragged, they knew each other so well that speaking was not necessary.

Farr looked up as the door opened and Sally Lee came in. Gone was the Chinese costume and practically with it every vestige of the Oriental. She was slim, in sweater and slacks and her Chinese complexion might have been a Florida sun tan, her hardly slanted eyes an unusual conformation.

"They are out, John," she said. "It won't be long now. Already the first Lee scout is back. A full street from here old Li Jung,

taking the air on his balcony saw a trio, a girl in the center, come up from an area but he did not follow their course. But we have the street."

Yes, thought Farr, they had the street but where had Helena been taken from that street? When crime rolled on wheels an unimaginable distance could be covered in an incredibly short time. Even now Helena might be five, ten miles away from Chinatown. And he was sitting here, chain smoking cigarette after cigarette. He turned to Smiley Lee on whose forehead tiny beads of perspiration showed.

THE minutes continued to drag. Then Smiley Lee raised his head. There were footsteps, coming fast outside in the corridor.

"A lead at last, Mark, I think."

The door opened and two figures entered. One was a young Chinese of twenty-four or five in Army uniform with a row of battle ribbons on his blouse and the chevrons of a corporal on its sleeve. The second man was somewhere in the thirties, clad in the windbreaker, dingy trousers and visored cap of a taxicab driver. His eyes were close-set and shifting, his chin bluish from lack of a shave, his features tough. A far from savory-looking character, judged Farr.

"Another cousin, Corporal Ling Lee," said Smiley. "He has stayed on in the Army and is now on leave. What is it, Ling?"

"This man knows where they took the girl," said Corporal Ling Lee. "He drove them in his cab. He heard me questioning the drivers at that all-night stand around the corner and asked to be brought to you."

"And you are—" shot out Farr.

"Nutsy Feegan of Brooklyn. And I'd like to see that C reward. Make your money talk, mister, and then I will."

"Here." Smiley Lee drew a billfold from his pocket, selected several notes and passed them into the driver's grimy hand.

"Talk and do it damned fast."

"I come here from Brooklyn with a sight-seein' couple and drop 'em off down this street a bit." The bills went into the windbreaker. "Then I go runnin' on, looking for a sidestreet to turn in and from the sidewalk I git a hail from two dark-complected gents with a drunk lady between 'em wearin' one of them berries, who sprung from nowhere.

So they pile aboard and one of the gents tells me where to drive."

"Where?" shot out Farr. "What street, what address?"

Nutsy Feegan shook his head. "I don't know nuthin' about these dizzy Chinktown streets. They gimme no address, just said drive up three-four blocks, turn right, down one block, keep going, stop, here we are. Like I said I can't give you no street address since I didn't look at 'em but I can haul you in my cab right there to the house with the alley. They went down the alley and in by the side door after a peculiar kind of knockin', luggin' the drunk gal between 'em. After that—"

"The knocking signal," cut in Farr. His mind was racing. "What was it? Do you remember?"

"It was like this." Feegan shambled to the wall, corrugated his over-low forehead in thought, and then rapped three times in rapid succession, waited a second, rapped again, waited another second and rapped for the fifth time. "Three fast, two slow. Like an old-time speakeasy. After which the door opened and swallowed 'em up. I come back and havin' a thirst aboard I pulls my jalopy in back of the all-night rank down street here and steps into the nearest bar for a coupla fast ones. When I come out this Chinese corporal is quizzin' the rank drivers, offerin' a C for information from anybody which seen a young gal, ill or intoxicated and wearin' a blue berry, prob'ly bein' supported by two men and mebbe took a taxi. So I steps up and here we are. You wanta go to the house by the alley?"

"Yes," snapped Farr. "Right away."

Nutsy Feegan's shifty gaze became even shiftier. "I'll take the two of you, that's all. This looks like funny business to me. You bring the law in on this and I'll forget everythin' I ever knew. We trade my way or not at all."

"And why do we have to trade your way?"

"Because I'm out on parole, that's why. If this is hot stuff I can't be mixed up in it in any way. You think I wanta get slammed back inter the stone house where I done four years, not standin' on my head either? You keep this private, I'm your guy. You holler copper I walk out. Deal?"

Farr glanced at Smiley Lee and read his

expression. "Deal, Feegan," he said. "Let's go."

Smiley Lee stepped over to the corner where a beautifully carved desk stood and opened a drawer. "The men with the girl," he cast back. "Can you describe them?"

"I didn't hardly get a chance to look at 'em," growled Feegan. "The street lightin' in Chinktown is lousy and I had my bus to drive. They looked like some kind of wops to me, they spoke a few words in wop talk ridin' behind me."

Smiley Lee came back to the center of the room. He handed a flat metal object to Farr. "Extra ammo clips. May be highly necessary."

"I knew this job was funny business," groaned Feegan. "The minute I drive you guys to the house with the alley I am haulin' out. I got no call to be drivin' guys what packs rods."

"You'll take us just the same," said Farr. "If you want another hundred it's yours tomorrow. From me."

"I'll reach for that."

"And I can not go with you?" asked Sally Lee. "Cousin Johnny, we have had many adventures growing up together."

"Not this time," said Smiley. "We do not know, Cousin Sally Lee, what it is that we may get into at the other end."

A decided gleam appeared in Sally Lee's eyes. It was purposeful. "You do not know how to take care of yourself properly, Cousin Johnny Lee, you never did. At least I shall accompany you as far as the sidewalk and see you safely into the taxicab of Mr. Nutsy Feegan. After that may the spirits of our ancestors watch over you."

IV

"IN ANOTHER half hour, my friend Mark, we shall know if we are very brave men or very damned fools. At the present moment I do not know," said Smiley Lee.

"Neither do I," returned Farr.

His mouth felt hot and dry, his stomach tight. This was the way he used to feel riding the cockpit of a fighter plane going into action. The suspense was getting him down and he fought with all his will-power to stifle his nervousness. The taxicab, driven by Nutsy Feegan, had run down Mott

Street toward the East River, made a quick turn and was now on a poorly-lit street, banked by dilapidated rookeries. The cab rolled past a street light and for an instant illumination flooded the interior of the cab. Farr bent down quickly and picked up the white patch that lay on the floor. It was a woman's handkerchief, monogrammed. "H. R."—and it had tiny crimson flecks on it. He went cold all over. He knew his voice was harsh as he spoke.

"Helena's handkerchief. They stuffed her mouth with it and cut her lip. We may be taking hell's own chance, Smiley, but we know one thing. This Nutsy Feegan didn't lie. She was in this cab and we're on the right track. And now we—"

"Here y'are, gents." The cab braked to a halt by the curbing. A totally dark building some three stories high loomed over the pavement and the alley that separated it from its neighbor was at the cab door. "You're delivered and I got my payoff. Now I'm on my way. The side door is ten yards to your left."

Farr and Smiley Lee swung out and Nutsy Feegan meshed his gears behind them and was off. They went noiselessly along the alley, Farr's eyes from force of old habit reconnoitering the surroundings. The alley seemed to run into a rear courtyard and two stories above it, reaching from building to building was the same sort of iron bridge that had run into the office of the Cathay.

"Catwalk," he said.

"We are still in Chinatown, although this is the fringe of it," said Smiley Lee. "Now, the door." They stood before a heavy wooden door, set deep in the wall of the building. It had a circular peephole cut in it. "Our plan?"

"Knock and when the door opens the old teamwork," bit out Farr. "I'm knocking out the doortender and we slip into the joint. After that, if we can locate Helena we rush it and snatch her out as fast as they snatched her in. Maybe it's a gun job and maybe it isn't."

"If it is I shall have no compunctions," remarked Smiley in an icy voice. "These people are not of an estimable character. Shall we go?"

"You knock, I'll stand ready for the strongarm act."

Farr took a last look around. They were

utterly alone in the dank alley, a gut of eerie shadow. From the East River came the mournful hooting of a boat on its way out of the harbor. It was going where, they were going into what? He pulled himself together.

"Rap."

He stood close to the door's peephole, gun gripped in the concealment of his left hand pocket, right fist bunched and swinging easily. Smiley stepped forward and gave the taps, three short, two delayed. Silence seemed to deepen, it hung like a blanket. Then there was a tiny sound and the peephole opened to disclose a human eye.

"You heard us," said Farr hoarsely. "We're expected and we're late. Open up or catch hell from the boss."

It worked. From within a bolt creaked, the door stood ajar. Farr was in with a single leap, facing a slant-eyed individual.

"You—you—" The slant eyes opened full, the mouth opened also for a yell of alarm. Driven straight for the man's chin Farr's uppercut swung and it went right where he intended it to, full on the point. "Gurrrf!" The doorman's breath expelled softly from his lungs, his figure drooped, the knife he had snatched from his waistband clattered on the floor and he pitched forward. Smiley Lee caught him as he fell and lowered him noiselessly to the floor.

"A most excellent wallop. You have knocked all the sense out of him. But, unfortunately, also any information he might be persuaded to provide to us with a gun in his stomach. We tie him."

Smiley tore out the man's belt and shoelaces, thrust his handkerchief into his mouth and stood up, the job done. Farr was looking down a short corridor, lined with doors and deep with semi-darkness. For the moment he could not see clearly. Every door along the corridor was open onto a shadowy room with the exception of the one at the end, facing the entrance. It was closed tightly, but gleams of light came through its cracked panels. He touched Smiley on the arm and spoke in a low voice.

"So far, so good. Easier than I thought. Too easy perhaps. We had the luck."

"Press the luck," came back Smiley. "It is like the war. Get an unexpected break and follow it up. That lighted door next, yes?"

Silently they crept along the corridor. There was not a sound in the ancient house, they might have been utterly alone in it for all the signs of life it gave. Farr reached the door and studied it, grip tightening on his gun. The zigzag cracks were wide, they ran almost from top to bottom. He put his eye to one of them and stared through it into the room.

The face of Helena confronted him, swimming in a pool of half-light, half-shadow. It looked ghastly white, exhausted, drained of life. Then his vision adjusted itself to the narrow cracks and focussed clearly. He could see now that she was half-sitting, half-lying in a deep chair across the room, eyes closed as she had closed them resting on the Cathay settee, hands folded in her lap, slim ankles crossed. Her chest rose and fell to her labored breathing. Once she stirred and then sank back into her semilethargy. No sound came from inside the room.

Farr gripped the knob of the door and it turned. He put his shoulder against it and it came open. In front of him lay opportunity, Helena seemed completely unguarded. For a split second he hesitated, then made his decision. "Rush it, Smiley! In!"

He flung the door wide and jumped forward with his gun jutting in front of him and Smiley at his left side. No one faced him, except the girl. Her head came up at the sound of his charge, her eyes widened.

"Look out!" she gasped. "It's a . . ."

FARR'S arm was gripped violently from the side and yanked back. The shot he tried to swerve and throw went into the floor. Arms fastened on him like tentacles, there was the patter of feet behind him from the hall and a body launched itself onto his back. Out of the corner of his eye as he reeled forward, fighting with every ounce of muscle at his command, he saw Smiley Lee go down under what seemed an avalanche of figures that had sprung from nowhere.

The impact of a blow took him on the skull and he too pitched forward and lay face down on the floor, half-stunned. The room reeled around him in a sick haze and through it seeped the thought: Trapped! A knee was in his back, a savage grip pressed

around his throat. Then the pressure relaxed and he was hauled upright, empty-handed, striving for breath. Slowly the haze cleared and he saw himself ringed by six swarthy-faced men of distinctly Latin type with the Korean gunman, his right hand bandaged, glowering murderously from beside the chair in which Helena rested.

Fingers plunged through Farr's pockets and their contents were ripped out and tossed onto a wide table in the center of the room. The yellow packet of firecrackers lay there, by his cigarettes and gun. A click came and the poorly-lighted windowless room sprang into full illumination. Someone had entered from the hall and flicked on the switch. A short, broad-shouldered, thick-barreled man came around the table from the rear and seated himself, drawing Farr's gun close to him. He too was Oriental, thin-lipped, slant-eyed and inscrutable-looking but a brutal power stamped his face, his eyes were an opaque screen of secret thoughts, and his ears ran straight into his head without lobes. Intelligence marked his features which were those of a hard-bitten man in the forties, his bushy mop of jet-black hair still youthful, gleaming and perfectly groomed. Here was authority, the real brains, deep, crafty and cruel.

"I am pleased to receive you," he said with an ironical politeness. "I too was waiting for you in one of those darkened rooms in the hall where most of my men were hidden. Yess." The word had a tiny hiss, the English was stiff but excellent. "You were somewhat rough with my man at the door but we shall pass that over. All of you Latinos can go except Moreno and Fernandez. Four guns will be enough to take care of these two."

The malign-looking crew filed out. The pair, Moreno and Fernandez, who remained kept their weapons poised and in front of the opaque-eyed Oriental lay the automatics of Farr and Smiley Lee.

"I am Moy Hsun, a Chinese like yourself, Mr. John Lee."

Smiley Lee's face took on an expression of cold hatred. "You are a damned liar. You are a damned Japanese, who happens to look like a Chinese. Just like your Korean gunman, who no doubt poses as a Chinese here in Chinatown, and can fool the Americans but not us descendants of Old

China. You go to hell, son of Nippon, with my compliments."

The opaque eyes grew merciless. The thin lips tightened. "Yess, I am a Japanese and Nga Att, my able aide, is a Korean. You are a very smart man, John Lee. You may call me Kuru Hato for the remainder of our brief conversation. I shall not take up more time than necessary, you are due elsewhere."

"In the next world, I suppose, Hato?" inquired Smiley Lee.

The Japanese bowed. "Where else? With your ancient Chinese sense of realism you have read my thoughts and my necessity. You three know too much, you are dangerous. Will you sit down, will you be at ease during the somewhat short span remaining to you?"

Farr felt a chair thrust in behind him and seated himself. He wasn't saying anything at the moment, the situation was up to Smiley Lee who with his uncanny knowledge had driven straight through to the truth. The ball was Smiley's to run with. He sent a glance toward Helena and caught her answering look. He tried to express confidence in his and apparently she caught his meaning. She nodded and sat back quietly. She would wait until whatever happened should happen.

"Lobeless ears," said Smiley Lee suddenly with the lash of contempt in his voice, "Lobeless ears, Hato. You know what they are supposed to be? The stigmata of a born criminal. One of your high-class Japanese had them—Yoki Mara, commandant of a hell camp, where he tortured and killed hundreds of American prisoners in the Philippines. He was known and execrated as 'Colonel Cropear' and listed as War Criminal top brass on our Intelligence files. But he disappeared with his sergeant-executioner and is reported to have committed suicide in the hills to avoid the scaffold. He was a man of sixty, Hato, with lobeless ears like you and a graying bald skull that had a bullet crease on its top. When you are sixty some twenty years from now and your hair has grayed and fallen out, you will probably be exactly like Colonel Cropear and some scaffold will get you."

"You filthy Chinese!" The opaque eyes flared.

"American of Chinese descent. Mr. John Lee, business man of New York City, alum-

nus of Columbia University, vice commander of my American Legion post. You are not familiar with us American Chinese, Hato, you Nipponese dog. Plenty of loyal Nisei, the American-born of Japanese descent, fought for the United States. Did you even fight for Japan?"

"I was in Mexico during the war, posing as a Chinese," returned Hato quickly. He had mastered his sudden fury, he was all cold smoothness again. "As I remarked before, you are a most smart person, Mr. Lee. You are goading me to make me postpone our business."

There was a shuffling sound and a figure in windbreaker and dingy trousers appeared in the room. Nutsy Feegan, the taxidriver, looked more unprepossessing than ever with a malignant grin twisting his mouth.

"We're okay, chief," he said to Hato. "I kept lookin' back outa the cab and no one tailed us. These guys fell like a ton of bricks for the line." His grin widened as he looked at Smiley Lee. "Thanks fer the C, pal. It's a pleasure to drive a free-handed Chink like you."

FARR'S fists closed so tightly the nails bit into his palms. He realized that his emotion showed in his face. Hato was staring at him mockingly. "Yess, my friend, you were framed by an expert. You threatened to question the Korean Att in the rear office, did you not? I have been myself often in the Cathay. From the street I have seen the catwalk that runs into that rear office from the next building and it was a simple matter to send my Latin aides over it to snatch the girl the moment she was left alone. They were in fact crouched under that window, listening to you for some time. But the girl did not have the object we seek, she knows nothing at all. We have just examined her. She has not even knowledge of the task her brother, that damned Intelligence officer, was on. Through a mistake our product got too early into a Border camp."

Farr's mind cleared. "Marijuana," he said. "Put on the track of a gang running marijuana into troop encampments, Marijuana cigarettes scattered in innocent packages of firecrackers."

"You are right. That damned Intelligence officer is, or rather was, a topflight

operator. Somehow down there on the Border he got onto our messenger and traveled with him by bus all the way to New York and Chinatown. He knocked our messenger senseless three hours ago in an alley on his way to his hideout and made off with the yellow firecrackers he carried. But our man recovered in time for us to take up his trail and Att got him.

"You and the girl came on the scene so unexpectedly Att could not finish his search and had to jump into the gabled house. He tried for the girl with a flower pot, which would look like an accident, and missed. So he traveled the rooftops for a few buildings, descended to the street and kept on your trail, passing word to me by another of our men who was waiting nearby for service, if necessary. From the Cathay Att sped straight to me here after his escape. Feegan returned to his rank in time to get the reward offered."

"You do not have to go on, son of Nippon," said Smiley Lee. "We may be a pair of dumb clucks but there are some things we can figure out for ourselves—yes, Mark?"

Farr nodded. No, lengthy and boastful explanations were not necessary. Working with tremendous foresight and speed Hato had thrown his men into the job. Here was a brilliant, unprincipled master criminal who could plan like a general born. Helena's brother had known that death trailed him, that it might strike at any instant and he had tried to pass on to her his seized clue, leaving him free to press the Chinatown end of his quest.

"So now we come to the finish of our business." Hato leaned forward, picked up the package of yellow firecrackers and turned it over in his fingers. "You know what is in here, as my Latinos overheard on the catwalk, you have opened and resealed it. But only up to a certain point do you know the contents. You do not know the all-important message which it conveys, the information on when a certain cargo worth one million dollars will begin to arrive in the United States and at what point. Fernandez, bring me Solvent C."

One of the swarthy Latinos strolled over to the sink and took a flask of a colorless liquid from the shelf, pouring it into a shallow pan. He brought it to the table and

set it down. Hato thrust back his coat and bared a small sheath fastened to his waistband. He drew from it a beautifully-made, tiny dagger with a three-inch blade and with it lifted the flap of the packet. He undid the paper, took the firecrackers and onionskin map out and set them aside, and placed the yellow tissue in the chemical-filled pan.

"So the map is half," remarked Smiley Lee. "We had the whole thing under our noses but we did not know it."

"Only two people knew it," said Hato. "The chief operator in Mexico and myself. He produces, I distribute. He notifies me by this means when to expect the first consignment and I prepare to have it met and brought to Chinatown. No tapped phones, no letters, nothing to incriminate us. This section, as you know, was once notorious for its distribution of drugs. True, those days are over, but where better to cast suspicion in case of trouble than on the Chinese, whom I happen to hate, as well as the Americans. Hence the old tong killing sign of the peacock's feather."

HIS fingers were drawing the soaked paper up and down through the chemical fluid. His opaque eyes seemed to become unshuttered, they had a venomous triumph in them. "To debauch American Army troops through marijuana is not only a profitable endeavor but a personal pleasure. To reduce an American soldier to a writhing, drug-tortured wreck is most enjoyable to me. Ah!"

From where he sat across the table from Hato, Farr could see the paper, now being lifted from the tank. Markings and letters were coming out on it, the secret writing was being disclosed. Hato's eyes went shuttered again with intensity and he laid the soaked paper flat on the tabletop. He picked up the transparent onionskin map and laid it on top of the yellow sheet, fitting it into the center. A smile of triumph twisted his lips.

"The locale, the date of arrival of the plane. Tomorrow—that is cutting it very fine. But a single long distance call and the contact will be made. Four hundred thousand dollars in the first payload and no customs to pass through."

He lifted the map and put it away in his

pocket, laying a handkerchief over the wet paper with the markings. "When it dries I shall burn it. Not a trace will be left of anything."

"Four hundred thousand dollars in a single payload is not hay," observed Smiley Lee. "Nor is it marijuana. It is something far, far bigger."

Into Farr's mind crept a fragment of recollection. That cryptic sentence of Helena's brother over the phone—Potter's Field . . . Popper's Field . . . Popper? Popper? Poppy—it really had been.

"You're not running marijuana to Army camps by air, Hato," he exclaimed. "You're running opium from poppy fields in Mexico."

Hato bowed ironically. "You think with acuteness. A pound of opium, valued at its legal rate is worth \$100. In the underworld, where diluted and adulterated and made into its derivatives morphine and heroin—M and H—as they are known in the illicit trade; it brings \$1,000 a pound. Four hundred pounds brought in in a converted fighter-bomber plane, bought at Army surplus sales aircraft, bring what? I leave the simple addition to you.

"Hundreds of acres of the opium poppy have been planted and are in flower not fifty miles south of the Mexican border today, one of the greatest potential drug-centers in the world. A ship can be searched by the customs, an automobile can be investigated by the Border Patrol, but who can stop a fast plane traveling at twenty thousand feet, so high up it can neither be seen nor heard? One that lands so far deep in the heart of America that there are no inspectors. Then met by an agent in an automobile, presumably picking up a friend who throws his plane luggage into the baggage compartment of the car and they loudly announce they are going to the leading hotel. Only at the hotel different luggage comes out of the compartment and the drug-filled luggage is driven on here for distribution or goes to Chicago, Hollywood—or wherever the market is highest.

"It is necessary always to think up something new to trick those smart narcotics men who caught \$4 millions worth of opium aboard ship in San Francisco just the other day. Now, by our means, millions of dollars worth of drugs will fly the air lanes, un-

suspected, unchecked. It is stream-lining and modernizing a very old game!"

It certainly was, reflected Farr. No border Patrol could stop a plane at twenty thousand feet, traveling at top speed for some unknown destination. At airports far inland private civilian planes were continually arriving without investigation, refueling and going on back where they came from or wherever else they pleased. The sky was free and now it was being poisoned by the traffic that wrecked the lives of countless men and women and brought fortunes to its operators.

"You have hit the jackpot," said Smiley Lee. "And it is a pot of gold. At stakes for which you play no human life would mean anything. It means nothing anyhow to a son of Nippon such as you." Hato's thin snarl came out again. "How soon do you intend to kill us and how?"

"In a few minutes you will be lined against the wall and Att will attend to you with a silencer fitted on an automatic. The able Att has taken a good many lives in the course of his own. Yess, Att?"

The Korean gunman grinned. "I shoot."

"As for your disposal—there is a tunnel running from the cellar below us, which has a trap door into this room, to the building next door which I have also rented. Its cellar has a cement floor badly in need of repairs. The repairs will be made with new concrete and you three will be in that concrete. This particular New York distribution center will continue to operate in tranquility. No one knows you came here, no one will ever know."

"Hato, you are the most sagacious man I have ever met," said Smiley Lee. "The courtesy of a final cigarette before the firing squad? It is with a heavy heart that I go to meet my ancestors because of the lost face of the Lee family. But in the end, something tells me, the honor of the Lee family will be avenged. They will get you, Hato—they will get you!"

"Yess?" said Hato with his viperish hiss.

Farr shuddered. Helena had gone ghastly pale. Her face twitched and then lighted strangely, her eyes shone. Her hand went to her hair and dropped, one finger pointing queerly. She was signaling in pantomime, she was trying to get something through to Farr. He followed her pointing

finger, and found himself looking at the dim corner of the room. The floor was rising, a square of it was coming up—he saw a pair of slender hands bracing the rise and beside them a cap he recognized.

The trap door from the cellar below was being elevated by someone with hands as small as a boy's and the cap was G. I. The man under the G. I. cap would have both his own hands free and Farr knew what would be in them. It was going to be desperately fast work. An instant's diversion of Hato's attention and that of his men meant the difference between life and death.

"A cigarette, please," he said and reached onto the table for the package that had been in his pocket. He slipped one out, hardly daring to look at the corner, shoved it into his mouth and took up the book of matches beside it. His fingers shook with nervousness as he struck one and it flared.

"Aha, the American trembles," mocked Hato. "I have seen Americans tremble before."

"Yes," got out Farr. "I—I— Ouch!"

He dropped the lighted match as though it had burned him and reached for another. It fell exactly where he meant it to—unnoticed—right at the fuse of the yellow firecrackers that lay on the desk. There was a spurt of powder smoke, a spitting of sparks and the first firecrackers went off. One after the other the whole string crackled and jumped and burst in a series of minor detonations. Hato flung himself back in his chair, dabbing at a cracker that had exploded in his lap. Other crackers blown onto the floor popped and banged.

"You clumsy fool!"

"Helena, Smiley—down! Corporal, open up!"

The trap door was up two feet now. The head and shoulders of Corporal Ling Lee of the Army were framed in it and an automatic jutted from each hand. His young face was hard. Farr's own hand flashed forward and grabbed the gun that lay in front of Hato as the first shots crashed in the room. Ling Lee was firing fast and perfectly. The two Latinos, Moreno and Fernandez, screamed as the lead took them and reeled where they stood, guns falling from their hands. Fernandez gripped a broken shoulder, Moreno a torn right forearm. Nutsy Feegan dove for the door and

a shot took him in the kneecap, crumpling him. Farr held his own gun on Hato.

"Sit where you are! Smiley Lee was right. The Lee family got you, Hato."

The trap fell all the way back and Corporal Ling Lee stepped out. With him stepped Sally Lee and in an instant half-a-dozen other young Chinese Americans scrambled out after them, all with guns.

"I am happy, Cousin John Lee, that the Lees were able to arrive in time to wish you many more years of good health," said Sally.

"I thank you, Sally Lee. Yet, how—"

"Did you think that Thirty-second Cousin Sally Lee was going to let you go out with a strange taxi-driver without knowing where you were off to?" inquired Sally Lee cheerfully. "I preferred to watch over you myself rather than leave it to the spirits of our ancestors. I am small, I would appear a boy in my slacks and sweater in a poor light. I hopped the back of the luggage rack of Nutsy Feegan's ancient taxicab like a hitch-hiker. Plenty of boys hitch rides on such and neither you nor Feegan could see me. You may call it a woman's curiosity if you like, Cousin John, you incapable man."

"It is the first time in my life I have ever been called upon to admire a woman's curiosity, or thank it for anything, Little Barnard Blossom," grinned Smiley.

"When Nutsy Feegan dropped you two here, he went on a bit, turned and came back down the alley into the court in the rear where he parked. Consequently, Little Barnard Blossom knew the layout was phony and got to the nearest phone not half a block away. Sixty-fourth Cousin Corporal Ling Lee at the Cathay promptly took off for here with six more Lees, veterans all. You saw the catwalk into this building over the alley? How many times have you and I played as children over those getaway routes and I know a catwalk above between two buildings in Chinatown usually means a tunnel between them below. We found the tunnel and its guard who will guard nothing again until he gets out of the hospital. So we came out into the cellar below this room and I held the trap up to permit Corporal Ling Lee the use of both his hands."

"He used them," said Smiley. "Corporal,

your Operation Family Lee was most superbly executed. You have landed and the situation is well in hand." He scooped a gun from the floor and darted to the door, flinging it wide and listening. "There are plenty more of this gang in the house. No, they are well on their way out. Footsteps on the stairs leading to the upper catwalk and the roof. The minor members of the band are dispersing as fast as their feet will carry them. After all, they do not matter, we have the brains and the main brawn as well. Hato, Att and the pair of Latinos, Moreno and Fernandez, no doubt from south of the Border. Also the disreputable Nutsy Feegan who has no regard for the truth."

"Yah!" snarled Feegan, his close-set eyes warring.

"Go sit on the floor in the corner, all of you, and ponder your sins. Ride herd on them, Corporal Lee."

Farr turned to Hato who had pulled his chair up against the table and leaned forward in it, his eyes utterly expressionless. He sat in a queer, crouching attitude, hands concealed, by the table edge.

"Up with those hands, Hato," ordered Farr. "No monkey business."

"This is no monkey business," answered Hato. "It is very serious business."

His right arm moved sharply, strongly, as though the hand below it was making a decisive motion, his eyes bulged and his jaw set tight. The motion continued, then ceased as rapidly as it had started and something tinkled on the floor. For an instant Hato sat bolt upright, then he collapsed face down on the desk. His body twitched a few seconds and became quiet.

"The smart operator to the end," flashed Smiley Lee and darted around the desk. He lifted Hato's body back.

"Don't look, Helena," warned Farr abruptly.

"Right in front of us with two guns on him he got away, Mark," said Smiley Lee. "Hara-kiri. With the little dagger he used to open the firecrackers."

"He beat the chair," said Farr dully.

"It was not the chair Hato was beating, Mark, my friend. Neither he nor Att would ever be forced to take the stand, a high-priced criminal defense lawyer might make hash of our charges of murder for lack of

witnesses to the actual crime. No, Hato might have beaten the chair and taken only the drug rap and what is that? A few years in prison. But Hato could never face even a week-end detention. There are physical examinations for men detained while awaiting trial. And what would the first one disclose?" Smiley's hand went to Hato's sleek black head and wrenched. It came away with the entire raven crop and the bald, gray-fringed skull with the red crease was disclosed.

"Colonel Cropear, as I suspected all along. Sought these two years as one of Japan's most blood-stained war criminals and prison camp commanders. Got away from the Philippines to Shanghai, no doubt, and thence with easily-forged Chinese papers into Mexico and so on to New York. His suicide report a decoy to stop search. And Nga Att would be that executioner aide of his, not a Japanese sergeant but a Korean serving in the Japanese army. No, Hato was doomed, as Att is doomed. There will be no Chinatown murder or drug charge against this Korean, neither will ever be reached. The Army will claim him first with hundreds of witnesses to his camp killings."

THE face of the Korean was transformed into that of a wild beast. Sitting on the floor with the other injured men the truth was there in those evil features.

"I have the Army now," came Helena's voice. She was at the telephone in the far corner speaking in a low voice into the instrument. She hung up. "They are coming at once from New York headquarters. The Intelligence squad and MPs. Also some Federal men on the drug angle."

"Which ought to be attended to," said Farr. He took the onion skin map and the now dried firecracker wrapping in his hands. He fitted the map into the exact center and stared. There they were, the two halves of the combination map-message fitted together. Through the transparent onion skin map he saw the straight marked line from south to north that had come out on the yellow paper underneath. Also wording. Smiley Lee, back beside him stared also.

"A line from just south of the Border to the dot in mid-central United States which

would be Kansas City, Mark my friend. Of course no custom's inspection for planes there. The words '7 . . . 28 . . . cy gry Lo Li ftr.'"

"Easy, Smiley. Not even a code, just abbreviations. Landing 7 a.m., after night flight from Mexico. The 28th of the month which is tomorrow. The rest like an ad for a used plane sale 'converted gray Lockheed Lightning fighter.' So at 7 a.m. tomorrow the 28th a detail of Federal agents scoop in Lockheed, pilot and load at Kansas City. The new opium fortune route is broken for good, the Army will take care of the fire-cracker marijuana cigarettes along the Border. Everything looks all wound up."

"Not everything." It was Sally Lee speaking. She looked completely innocent and guileless. "Poor Little Bloken Blossom of Barnard just remembah. Thirty-second Cousin Johnny Lee, man incapable to take care of himself—"

"Sally," grinned Smiley, "stop that pidgin salestalk, it is corny as hell. Be a modern American."

"Cannot forget old China custom,

Johnny. Anyone save person's life in old China, likee you know, must support same for rest of life. Little Bloken Blossom save Johnny Lee's life, must take care of poor Johnny Lee and support him for rest of his idle useless career. Thus make famous prolific Lee family biggeh and betteh. Sally savee Johnny, poor Sallee now condemned to mallee Johnny. Hey, Johnny?"

"Sally Lee, my delightful thirty-second cousin, I fear so. Also I hope so. My heart and hand, Sally."

Sally Lee's eyes glowed. So did those of Helena in sympathy from across the room. Her glance strayed and met Farr's and he knew that she fathomed the thought that was in his mind. There was still grim business ahead tonight, still racking details to be gone into when the Army arrived and the proper care to be arranged for the body of an American officer who had died in the line of duty and who had fulfilled his mission. But after that the road would lie clear ahead of them, for Helena and himself; and her smile told him that like Smiley and Sally Lee they were going to take it together.

Buckaroo's Brew

By S. Omar Barker



NOW here is the recipe, time-tried an' true,
 For chuckwagon coffee, the buckaroo's brew:
 Use Arbuckle's Roasted, in case you can get it;
 Pour in enough water to just sorter wet it;
 Boil hard for two hours, then into it toss
 The well-rusted shoe off a club-footed hoss;
 Gaze into the pot for a few minutes steady—
 If the hoss shoe ain't floatin', your coffee ain't ready!

*The Moose Thereabouts Were the Real Alaskans,
Than Which They Come No Bigger*



MONGSWA OF YUKON

By THOMAS FRANCIS NORRIS

THEY had just halted their jeep on the hillside trail five hundred feet above the muskeg swamp when Yancy Cravat heard the familiar call, "Moo-waugh-yuh," of a moose-cow float up through the frosty stillness. For a moment he stared expectantly toward the heavily wooded amphitheater of pine beyond the swampy lowlands from which the call had originated. He knew that it was the mating season and realized that the seductive bellow was an open petition to any bull within the radius of her voice to respond immediately to an urgent need. He also knew that within a few minutes that he was going to see a bull-

moose speeding toward the pine-forest in answer to the invitation. Turning quickly to his companion, Pierre, the Algonquin Indian guide who always accompanied him on hunting expeditions, he exulted, "That bellow means that we're in a moose area and that I'm going to have a pair of antlers in this jeep before we go back to camp!"

Pierre knew more about the habits of the moose than any other guide in the province. He was elated over the fact that he had persuaded Yancy to explore the area. The dark eyes of the Indian glinted happily, "Pretty queek, Mongswa, the bull will answer. Maybe you get a beeg moose thees time, no?" he emphasized excitedly.

"Hope you're right!" Yancy gave the Indian an assuring grin. However, his skepticism still plagued him from the fact that he had covered the whole region between Aklavak which is in the northern part of the province, down as far as Whitehorse without the slightest trace of these elusive game-animals.

While awaiting the response to the moose-cow's call, Yancy's attention was directed to the dark stretch of pine beyond the muskeg swamp. He estimated the distance at one mile. From past experiences on other hunting expeditions, he believed that this wooded area was a refuge for numberless cows with their young of the previous year. His presence in this section of the province was due to the persistency of Pierre who had assured him that the moose in that part of the Dominion were the real Alaskans and according to his exaggerated sense of proportions were as large as a house.

Yancy and his Indian guide turned suddenly. From the pine-covered hillside, about three hundred yards above the point where they had halted the jeep, a cold wind flecked with icy sleet, carried the awaited response of a bull-moose. It was a long, drawn-out bellow, "Oh—ah! Oh—ah!" which was followed by a heaving grunt that was plainly audible. Both men looked over the area from which the answer came.

Instantly, there came the sound of crashing tree-limbs as a huge Alaskan bull-moose charged into the open. Silhouetted against the skyline, he loomed colossal. Obviously, he compared to Pierre's description, "large as a house." On most occasions, a moose travels with a shambling trot. But Mongswa galloped down the pine-covered slope like an avalanche bent on destruction, his broad palmated antlers were glistening brightly against the chastened white of the landscape.

YANCY'S eyes widened in surprise, "Gosh a' mighty! What a whopper? A real Alaskan, if there ever was one," he thrilled excitedly. Through a field-glass he got a good view of the big bull. The body markings were distinct, blackish gray on head and shoulders, terminating into a more grizzled coloring on rump and sides. Under portions were much lighter. Feet and ears were distinctively black. The legs were un-

usually long, the bristling hair on neck and hump gave him a most formidable appearance. He estimated his weight at fifteen hundred pounds with a shoulder height of six feet.

"Mongswa!" cried Pierre, using the nomenclature by which moose are known among the Algonquins. "Look queek! See that long white scar on ees shoulder. By jimminy, I saw that beeg feller near Kluane Lake the last summer when I scout for a surveying outfit!" he explained expressively.

Pierre knew the Canadian Northwest as few others did. He knew its rugged terrain, its nameless mountains and its ice-locked valleys. He had traveled across the area between Dawson Creek into the heart of Alaska on numerous occasions when the thermometer registered fifty below throughout the entire journeys. He was a short stocky man with dark expressive eyes and had a physical stamina that was a marvel to Yancy.

Yancy, too, had noted the peculiar white streak, a protruding welt of hair that was particularly noticeable, "I can see it plainly. Beyond a doubt the big fellow got it in a battle with another of his kind," he remarked passing the field-glass over to his companion.

Pierre reconfirmed his previous statement, "I know for sure, ees the same feller!" he vowed with conviction.

Deliberately, Mongswa swerved out of his way to sweep through a thicket of birch, slashing down intervening limbs as though he wanted to impress some imaginary rival with his might as he galloped headlong toward the dark forest from which the moose-cow had called.

Yancy tensed suddenly, "Just take a look at those antlers on that big bully. Aren't they beauties?" he exulted, climbing back into the jeep for a better view of the galloping bull.

"They're longer'n your arm!" hazarded Pierre.

"I know that they're more than four feet!" Yancy corrected. "It's too bad that we weren't a little closer to him for I could have annexed that pair of antlers that he's sporting. He'll shed them anyway before the winter is over!" Instantly, Yancy's nerves became taut. What he saw sent a tingling sensation down along his spine.

A pack of gray timber-wolves were skulking behind a stretch of fence-like shrubbery that bordered the muskeg swamp. Obviously, they had been stalking the bull and were anticipating that he was going to pass over the water-logged swamp. Perhaps too, they had sensed the fact that he would become an easy victim to their treachery as his excessive weight would be a handicap in any attempt to defend himself in the soggy mire while their wide-spreading toes would be an advantage in passing over the surface of the muskeg.

A battle was imminent!

It would be a battle to the finish. Yancy knew that a bull-moose is bad tempered in any season, but throughout the late autumn and winter, they are a dangerous adversary from the fact that they are doubly armed. A sudden slash from their serrated antlers, or a well-directed thrust from a sharp fore-foot is a lethal blow for an unprepared enemy.

PIERRE cried excitedly, "There's seven o' them gray devils in the pack!" However, he corrected immediately, "No there's one among them that's all white. The other seex are gray!"

"You've good eyes, Pierre," complimented Yancy, thinking that the lighter-colored wolf was an off-strain or one that had strayed down from the frozen tundras farther north where clear white animals were more common.

Mongswa galloped along with increasing speed toward the muskeg. Yancy was unable to tell whether he was intending to cross over the soggy mire or follow along the stretch of shrubbery that skirted the swamp. What happened came quicker than thought.

Instantly, a gray ball shot up into the air from behind the shrubbery. A heaving grunt of surprise echoed up the hillside as the big bull steeled himself for battle. Proceeding down wind, the moose had been unaware of the lurking enemy until the vise-like fangs had sunk into his throat. Within two more seconds, another skulking wolf sprang upward for a similar hold but was caught in mid-air with a crashing thrust of a fore-foot. Suddenly, the encounter became a free-for-all melee. The hunger-maddened wolves were attacking from every

quarter. Enraged snorts, yelps, snapping fangs, sounded in the frosty air.

Yancy thrilled with excitement, "Look at that blond-colored devil; he's doing most of the snarling and yelping but seems to be wary about getting into the fight. He reminds me of a cheer-leader who makes all the noise but stays far enough away to keep from getting hurt."

Throughout the opening skirmish, Mongswa was gradually sinking into the water-logged muskeg. With one mighty effort, he leaped forward on stiffened legs to break the throttling hold on his throat. The wolf thudded against the surface, crushed lifeless by a blow from a well-directed forefoot. Wheeling quickly, another gray fiend took the count with a death-dealing wallop from a sharp hoof. Fiercely, the enraged bull swung around and caught another one of his treacherous adversaries with a terrific thrust that sent it rolling out from the fight.

Yancy didn't see how it happened. The battle had lasted less than five minutes. However, when Mongswa trotted away from the scene of battle, he was carrying the limp carcass of a gray timber-wolf on the points of his antlers. Fifty yards out in the muskeg-swamp, he tossed it high into the air, playfully dodging away from the spot where it struck ground. Then hesitating briefly, he raised his muzzle and trumpeted triumphantly, "Oh—ah! Oh—ah!" The sound of his bugling echoed and re-echoed from the heavily wooded area beyond the muskeg swamp.

"Look-ee!" Pierre cried, pointing down toward the thicket of shrub bordering the swamp, "There goes that white rascal with one of the others that Mongswa failed to keel!"

Yancy grinned, "Obviously, they were both clever enough to keep out of his way; otherwise he would have crushed them both!"

Half-way across the muskeg, the valiant bull sampled the wind once more which no doubt was a precautionary measure to detect a possible presence of another lurking enemy. Yancy knew that moose are marvelously endowed with a highly developed sense of smell together with the inimitable faculty of hearing which are the possessions that have insured their survival. For several

minutes he watched him with a feeling of admiration until he disappeared into the forest, aware of the fact that he had fought a great battle and had all but annihilated a band of his avowed enemies.

PIERRE looked up gloomily, "Too bad you hadn't a gun with a longer shooting range then you would have had the antlers!"

"I regret now that I didn't take my high-powered rifle with me," Yancy admitted slowly. "However, I'm not going to feel too bad over this because we'll be going up into the Klondike country where perhaps I'll get another chance to bag one of these big fellows. According to reports there are plenty of them up there this winter!" he remarked with assurance.

Pierre shook his head, "No like. Too cold. When monsoon come, you freeze!" he shrugged in a shiver.

"Ye-ah, I know it. But I'm no pantywaist. I can take it," Yancy grinned at his companion thinking about the verse in Robert W. Service's poem:

"The snows that are older than history,
The woods where the weird shadows
slant!
The stillness, the moonlight, the mystery,
I've bade 'em good-bye—but I can't!"

After spending a few days longer in the area, Yancy and Pierre broke camp and moved up farther north on the upper slopes of the Stewart River. Upon their arrival the stinging blasts of sub-zero winds from the Arctic regions were sweeping across the bleak hills. Hemmed in by ice-crusting mountains they were in the grip of the Yukon winter. That night when they were safely tucked within their sleeping-bags, the vast stillness was broken frequently by the eerie-like yodels of timber-wolves which Yancy knew were true indications of the presence of moose and caribou in the region.

Early on the following morning, Pierre returned from a scouting reconnaissance farther up on the river. He had seen two separate bands of caribou with a more exciting report about a herd of moose that had "yarded-in" at the terminus of a wooded ravine which was only three miles above camp.

Yancy knew the habits of these wild creatures. When the snow becomes too deep for them to obtain food in the open, they select an area where there is an abundance of saplings, twigs and foliage to sustain themselves until spring. On most occasions, the place where they "yard-in" covers a plot with many winding pathways that converge into one another, forming a network under overhanging boughs which offer protection against sub-zero temperatures and also have an arena into which no enemy can safely enter. However, should food become limited or when disturbed by human contacts they will leave immediately for another feeding ground. All such flights are carried out in single file, the more vigorous animals in the lead with the younger ones in the rear.

It was early in the forenoon. Snow had been falling since the previous night. Temperatures were dropping steadily. The brightness of the whitened landscape was blinding. Pierre was pounding his cold-numbed hands against his hips to revive circulation while he looked hopefully at a clearing sky, "Too much cold, no?" he questioned anxiously.

Yancy grinned amiably, "It's warming up a little, I think. The sun-dogs have finally disappeared from the northeastern sky. A good omen. It also means that we might have a clear day tomorrow," he explained prophetically.

Both men turned quickly. A pack of timber-wolves swung into view and sped up a slope within two hundred yards of the camp. They had flashed by so suddenly that they resembled a dark streak floating over the ice-crusting snow. Pierre sniffed in surprise.

"A beeg bunch! Mos' twenty. Sure 'nuf, M'sieur!"

"There were at least that many," agreed Yancy. "When they gang up like that they're usually up to some deviltry. They get pretty desperate during protracted periods of sub-zero weather. A lone caribou or a moose don't have much chance when a band like that gangs up on them!" he explained while he watched the wolf-pack until they became a thin, dark streak against the whitened landscape. After they had completely disappeared from view, Yancy began mulling over in his mind Pierre's

report about the moose-yard farther up on the river.

Before mid-day, the weather had cleared perceptibly. However, a lowering fog had obliterated vision beyond a quarter-mile. "Let's strike out for the moose-yard. There'll be nothing to it. With good snowshoes, we can make it up there within a few hours unless the fog gets too soupy!" proposed Yancy.

Pierre was elated over the proposal, "We'll get up there pretty queek. M'sieur!" he agreed amiably.

IT WAS one o'clock when Yancy and Pierre started out on the three-mile trek towards the moose-yard above on the river. The thermometer began dropping steadily. They knew that it was far below zero. The bitter cold clawed vengefully at the exposed parts of their faces. It was like the sting of a whip-lash. With lowered head Pierre set the pace in his accustomed trot—a gait that he was capable of following for hours.

Yancy knew that all types of predatory life in the northern latitudes becomes more daring during cold weather and on occasion exceedingly vicious when the thermometer dips below zero. The fog was becoming more dense which reduced visibility perceptibly. Each step over the frozen snow resounded with a "crunching hiss" that rasped noisily in the frosty air.

Long accustomed in traveling over the trailless regions of the Yukon country, Pierre remained in the lead, coursing along at a measured pace, head forward, apparently unmindful of his surroundings. He seemed untiring under the effort. Yancy had had some difficulty in keeping up with him.

Fortunately, they were traveling up wind. There was little possibility that their quarry would detect their presence until they came within gun-shot of the moose-yard. However, Yancy knew that moose have the highest developed sense of hearing of all the other deer species. Caution was essential if their efforts were to be rewarded with success.

Since departing from camp, they had followed the red strips that Pierre had fastened to tree-limbs on his previous reconnoitering trip along the river. For the most part,

Yancy paid little or no attention to the red markers as he had followed the Indian scout with a dogged persistence while he skirted around hillsides, down through snow-filled gulches, and sweeping through almost impenetrable thickets while his eyes tried to pierce through the almost impenetrable fog.

After covering more than half the distance, they were coursing up a steep grade, Yancy emitted a whistle to halt his companion. He had just heard three long, smooth yodels of a marauding timber-wolf. He knew the ways of their kind throughout the barren tundra of the Far North—their wild, eerie-like howls that float across the icy wastes. Their weird cantatas seemed like demoniacal laughter from the nether-world.

Pierre turned around quickly to await Yancy's arrival as he began stamping the snow about him with the toe of his rubber packs which appeared to be several sizes too large for his small feet.

"Did you hear that lobo a while ago?" Yancy asked in spasmodical gasps as he tried to regain normal breathing.

Pierre nodded, "Me hear that devil, yes!"

"Well, in wolf language, it means just one thing. It's the closing-in call of a gray rascal who has run into a situation where he needs help," Yancy explained hastily. Ten seconds later a series of wild, intermittent barks followed by a chorus of weird howls from a dozen or more throats broke through the bleak stillness. For just a moment, he regarded Pierre anxiously, "How much farther to the place where they've yarded in?"

"Pretty close, now, M'sieur!" hazarded Pierre.

"It's my guess that one of these hunger-crazed demons has discovered the exact location of this moose-yard and that he's gang-ing up for a strike!" Yancy ventured prophetically.

"Better we go!" urged the Indian as he swung ahead into his erstwhile stride.

Yancy nodded quickly, "You're right! For, if I'm not badly mistaken, those last yodels indicate that they're about ready to strike at some poor critter!"

Upon reaching the crest of the grade, they encountered a strong head-wind that reduced their speed considerably. How-

ever, visibility was becoming better which in a sense compensated for the icy blasts that stung their faces. Clomp! Clomp! Clomp! Pierre's rhythmic footsteps descended a precipitous grade with untiring strides. Then down through a cavernous ravine. He halted abruptly at the edge of a deep crevice that apparently opened up from a bottomless cavern from which a thin vapor was issuing. Backing away quickly, he called back over his shoulder, "Sink! Me scared like hell!" Within ten more seconds, he was clambering up the farther wall of the ravine.

Yancy made no reply. However, he stared at the retreating Indian with a feeling of awed admiration. A true scout in every sense of the word, he thought. He seemed to have a presentiment of danger that to Yancy was definitely uncanny. Had he advanced another foot nearer the crevice he would have vanished unnoticed into the steaming fissure below.

Immediately, Yancy redoubled his efforts, clambering up the steep ascent on the farther side of the ravine, then swung on ahead of Pierre.

"It can't be much farther!" he called out anxiously.

"Be there pretty queek, M'sieur!" returned the Indian.

"Better check your rifle then! There may be some gun-play before long!" admonished Yancy.

Pierre adjusted his Winchester that he had been carrying on his back—a method that he used when traveling long distances. Regarding the weapon critically, he hazarded, "Thees keel dam' wolf, three hundred yards, yes!" Suddenly, he led the way down a long rock-covered slope. After carefully appraising the location, he raced around a hill then waited for Yancy.

"We turn now, for sure!" he announced deliberately.

Yancy marveled over Pierre's sense of direction. Insofar as he could see there was nothing to differentiate the spot where he was standing with many others over which they had traveled. Then, without further comment, the Indian started down across a cedar-covered valley where visibility became clearer. After proceeding another one hundred yards, he halted abruptly, "Look-ee" he directed with a mittened hand, "we

gonna be there pretty queek. That's the place!" he explained.

Yancy estimated the distance at a quarter-mile. They were almost at their destination. It had taken them over two hours to cover the distance. The moose-yard was located in a heavily wooded area with dense growths of underbrush and overhanging boughs of pine which resembled a dark shadow against the deep banks of snow. The fog hung like a white blanket over the cove. The snow-banks about the place appeared to be ten feet in depth.

Instantly, he tensed to attention. The wooded slope above the cove was shattered by the frenzied staccatos of weird barks and yelps. Obviously, a wolf-pack were closing in.

Pierre turned, wrinkling up his nose, "Phew! Dam' moose stink!" he grimaced in disgust.

Yancy had noted the wind-borne odor from the moose-yard, a condition that prevails at the spot where these wild creatures establish themselves over long periods. For several seconds, he stared toward the cove and then noted an undue commotion in the yard. At first, he reasoned that in some manner the moose had detected their approach to the yard. However, the thought was dispelled by a loud, heaving grunt which was a true omen of a bull-moose going into action.

"Look-ee! Something ees—!" Pierre didn't finish the exclamation.



Instantly, a dark object shot up into the air from the cove, forming a perfect arc in its descent into a snow-bank. In another second, a band of timber-wolves came out into full view from behind a tamarack thicket. Both men dropped to the ground, edging their way slowly toward a fallen tree-trunk. Yancy had reasoned that the wolves had tunneled down through the sur-

rounding snow-banks into the moose-yard, perhaps with the intention of frightening the herd into a stampede from their quarters during which time they would have an opportunity for a kill. However, it became apparent that one of the wolves had become a victim of his own treachery as his lifeless carcass was pitched out bodily from the scene of his daring adventure.

Suddenly, the wooded-cove shook with a deep bellow as a huge bull-moose jumped from the yard into the open, breasting the ice-coated drifts, like a snow-plow on a railroad locomotive, his wide-spreading antlers were plainly visible above the snow.

"It's Mongswa! Sure as two and two are four! Why you old son-of-a-gun!" cried Yancy excitedly.

In the next moment, the stampede was on! There was a wild chorus of yapping wolves. The hunger-crazed brutes were darting from one side of the bull to the other for a favorable opening as Mongswa ploughed through the snow. Perhaps they had sensed the possibility that he would be an easy victim for their evil designs.

Yancy recalled a similar situation the previous winter while he was on another hunting expedition near Great Bear Lake. He knew that among big game hunters it is a well established fact that a moose-herd seldom leave a place where they have yarded in without a well-founded cause. However, they never vary from long accustomed habits in their flight—the more mature and vigorous animals take the lead. On all such flights, they have an inbred fear and hatred of marauding wolves.

Yancy estimated that there were about fifteen wolves in this pack. It was difficult to make an exact count due to the fact that the frenzied animals were grouped in twos and threes and were moving about so rapidly that there wasn't an opportunity to make an actual check. He also marveled over the knowledge that the wolves were unaware of Pierre's and his own presence as they have a morbid fear of a human. But he was certain that Mongswa had detected them behind the fallen tree-trunk. However, he was too engrossed in the defense of his charges to face another danger.

Suddenly, Pierre's eyes widened in surprise as a white wolf appeared as if by magic from some unknown quarter. Pausing

briefly, he raised his muzzle and emitted three long, weird yodels into the frost-filled air, "By jimminy, M'sieur! Isn't that the same white lobo we saw that day at the muskeg swamp?" he asked incredulously.

Yancy leveled his rifle across the fallen tree-trunk, "If it isn't the same one, it's one of his blood brothers. Anyway it's dead certain it's the last muster call that he'll ever make. Because he's getting out of the picture for good," he exulted, pressing a mittened finger against the trigger. Obviously, the sound of the rifle-shot passed unnoticed as the commotion in the moose-yard was at its height.

Mongswa, now at the head of the long line of cows and calves, had broken a trail two hundred yards beyond the cove when the frantic wail of a calf rose above the din of snarling wolves. Mongswa, the valiant, Mongswa, the fearless, accepted the gauge of battle immediately. Shaking his antlered head in defiance of his foe, he swung back through the huge drifts of snow to defend his charge. Yancy couldn't see what was happening, however, two more gray fiends met the same fate that their accomplice had received when he was tossed from the moose-yard at the beginning. Then for the next minute, Mongswa, the old warrior, became engaged in a stiff-legged dancing demonstration while the younger animals rushed up to the head of the line.

Pierre gurgled in elation, "Mongswa, he make sausage out of 'em two devils, no?"

Yancy grinned, "It's a safe bet that he messed them up plenty in the dance that he just put on." The two men watched Mongswa trot back to the head of the line where he renewed his trail-blazing skill with deliberate strides. After breasting a trail up on a hillside where the snow leveled off to a yard in depth, he swung around once more for another battle. A moose-cow had jumped from the trail in defense of her seven-months old calf that had fallen victim to a trio of attacking wolves at the rear of the line.

The two men jumped up into full view from behind the fallen tree-trunk. Apparently, there were only five wolves surviving from the original pack. Plodding quickly over the snow, Yancy came within one hundred yards of Mongswa as he returned to rescue the cow and her calf. For ten seconds,

wisps of snow flew in every direction. Bel-lowing grunts, savage howls, rent the air. When the skirmish was over, two more gray fiends had been pitched back into the drifts of snow, each wolf had been pierced through with a sharp-pronged antler. However, the undaunted bull had arrived too late to defend the calf. Its throat had been completely torn away by the wolves.

Suddenly, Yancy became aware of the fact that something had happened to Mongswa. For several minutes after the last battle, he seemed completely dazed when he threw the last victim into the air. The men couldn't tell whether the last effort had tested his endurance or whether he had been hurt. However, his former vigor was noticeably absent when he returned back to the head of the line to lead his charges down through a deep gorge. There had been only one casualty in the flight from the moose-yard.

Pierre's impatience became apparent, "Better get that Mongswa pretty quæk, M'sieur!" he urged, starting up along the broken trail over the snow.

Yancy followed reluctantly, "I don't have the heart to do it, Pierre. It wouldn't be sportsmanship to take a life, especially one who has risked his own life in the defense of another," he remarked slowly as he thought about the Biblical expression, "Greater love hath no man than he who lays down his life for a friend." Then looking out over the white landscape, he ventured wistfully, "I must be just a little soft-hearted!"

At the head of the long line of moose, Mongswa, the Master of the Yukon Wilderness, was leading his flock up the farther side of the deep gorge. Higher up on the crest, he swung around, lifting up his magnificent head, he emitted a triumphant bellow that spoke the defiance that was in his brain for his erstwhile foes.

Yancy, now trailing slowly after the persistent Indian guide, saw a dark object near the side of the broken trail, stooping down, his eyes bulged out, "Hi there!" he called out excitedly, "You moose-killing Indian, look what I've found!" Then raising a shiny pair of antlers high up above his head, he explained, "Don't you remember when I told you that a bull-moose always sheds his fighting equipment in the dead of winter!"

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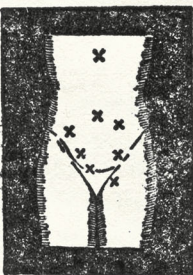
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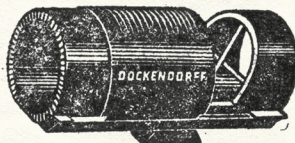
The Shooter's Corner

(Continued from page 4)

ing (running deer target etc.) under various lighting conditions.

For me, the sight (in conjunction with the aperture rear sight) has worked perfectly and I find that I like it better than most any other iron sight combination that I have used.

My friend now has such a combination on his little .30-30 and has been having good success on snowbound crows.



This spring I intend to mount Mr. Dockendorff's creation on a .22 Hornet rifle and use it on woodchucks that are getting too numerous around our farm. I am very anxious to give it a try at this chore as it seems to me that it will be ideal, not only because of its ability to meet all light conditions, but the cross-wire will be perfect for holding over on longer shots.

Nicely machined of hardened steel and beautifully blued, the Dockendorff gold cross-wire sight adds, in appearance as well as usefulness, to most any hunting rifle. It is 1½ inches long and the globe has a ⅜-inch outside diameter. It fits any standard ⅜-inch dovetail. Its aperture rim is notched and the inner surface is ridged to produce a mat effect that effectively eliminates all tendency of light reflection. (see cut).

If you are interested in this sight and your local dealer does not as yet have it in stock, you may obtain literature, or the sight (\$5.75) from Dockendorff & Co. Inc., Oronoque, Conn.

New Nichols' Boot

I HAVE just received the new spring and summer catalogue, published by the R. C. Nichols Corp., Yarmouth, Maine. A line of hunting, fishing and camping equipment is shown.

The only Nichols item that I have used is a sheepskin rifle case that I bought some years before the war. I have carried it across the United States several times, and have used it almost constantly for lugging a target rifle to and from the range. It is still in good condition, shows some wear, but not too much. I think this is a good recommendation.

This spring and summer catalogue is mostly for the fisherman, as would be expected—so, what took my eye was the announcement (on the last page of the booklet) of a new hunting boot to be available in time for the fall of 1948 hunting season.

Right now around my ankles there are red circles put there by a pair of rubber bottom pacs. You know how most boots will eventually wrinkle down around the ankles, and you no doubt also know how uncomfortable or downright painful this may be. It drives me nuts!

Well, this new Nichols boot will do away with all this uncomfortable business. That's what it says right there on page 55. Here's more from that page—"Now for the first time a perfect fitting leather top rubber bottom pac—the most versatile all-purpose boot made for general all-around hunting conditions—no more crippled feet with blisters and inflamed tendons of Achilles—no more ride and bite at the heel—no more ruined hunting trips you've waited so long to enjoy because of improperly fitting footwear.

"Nichols' Patented Footform Hunt Boot of an entirely new and improved design has exclusive scientific comfort features not offered by any other hunting boot. It is the only boot which combines the new patented Footform snug fit at the heel to prevent rubbing with ample room for the forward half of the foot to provide for expansion caused by the stress of walking. This improved design also permits pumping or 'breathing' action as you walk, which expels moist air from the boot and replaces it with dry air."

I understand that a number of these boots have been produced and are being worn for testing purposes by woodsmen, guides, and game wardens in various parts of the United States.

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If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is difficult because of the struggle to breathe, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Company for a FREE trial of the FRONTIER ASTHMA MEDICINE, a preparation for temporary symptomatic relief of paroxysms of Bronchial Asthma. No matter where you live or whether you have faith in any medicine under the sun, send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Caution! Use only as directed. Address

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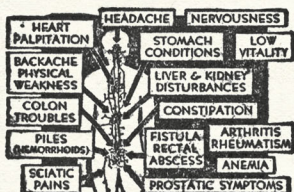
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Hood Products Corporation, Hood Building,
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I, for one, will wait with great anticipation for this boot to appear on the market.

For the Reloader

SEVERAL months ago I started using the new Ideal No. 55 Universal Powder Measure and the Ideal No. 45 Bullet Lubricator and Sizer. These new items are nicely made and the parts evidently are held to closer tolerances than in the older models. A number of improvements in design have also been incorporated.

The new powder measure is easily adjusted for any powder charge that may be needed by the reloader and the amount of powder in the reservoir may be checked visually due to this chamber being made of a transparent plastic. The operation of this machine is exactly the same as the old No. 5 measure.

The new bullet lubricator and sizer employs the same type of sizing dies used in the old No. 1 tool. This means that owners of the older sets of dies may use them in this new creation.

Due to the improvements in design this little greaser and sizer is much more convenient to use than the old model.

Both of these tools are a big help to the casual reloader and an absolute "must" for the shooter who does reloading in any considerable quantity!

The Lyman Gun Sight Corp., Middlefield, Conn., are the makers.

New Shooters' Bible

EACH year Stoger Arms Corp, 507 Fifth Ave., N. Y. C., N. Y., publish a new Shooters' Bible. Number 39 for 1948 is at hand.

Practically all standard guns and some custom jobs are shown and described. Also, most every accessory that a shooter may need is illustrated somewhere in this 544-page book.

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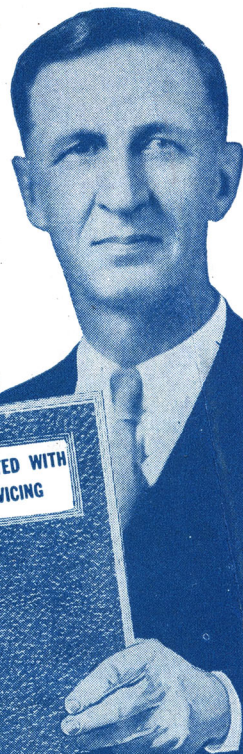
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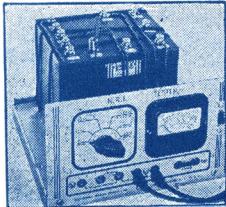
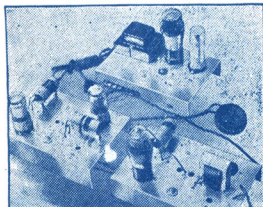
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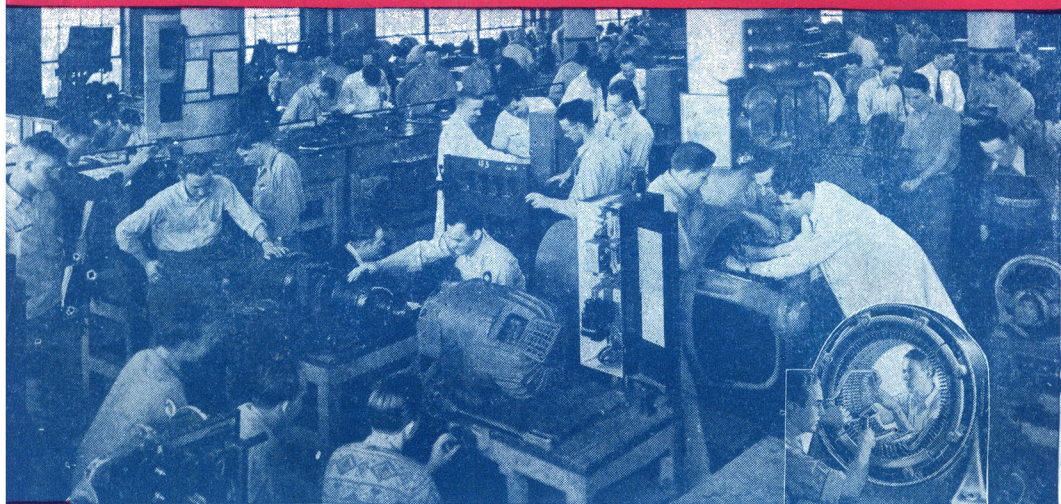
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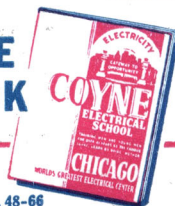
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