

"Treasure Trove in Jezebel"—STUART EMERY
W. C. TUTTLE—BILL HEUMAN—BERTON E. COOK

ANC

Short Stories

April 25th

25c

Guns—one thing they never kill
is trouble

"AMATEURS PLAY ROUGH"

Richard Howells Watkins

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

It's
LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC
Quick-
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!*

This pleasant antiseptic reaches way back on throat surfaces to kill millions of threatening germs called the "secondary invaders."

Although many colds may be started by a virus, it is these "secondary invaders," say many authorities, that are responsible for much of the misery you know so well. Listerine Antiseptic, if used frequently during the 12 to 36-hour period of "incubation" when a cold may be developing, can often help forestall the mass invasion of these germs and so head off trouble.

Listerine Antiseptic's remarkable germ-killing action has been demonstrated time and again. Tests showed germ reductions on mouth and throat surfaces ranging up to 96.7% fifteen minutes after a Listerine Antiseptic gargle, and up to 80% an hour later.

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

period of 12 years showed that those who gargled with Listerine Antiseptic twice daily had fewer colds and usually had milder colds than those who did not gargle . . . and fewer sore throats.

So, whenever there's a cold in your family, prescribe Listerine Antiseptic for everyone. It's a wise thing to do. Lambert Pharmacal Co.

"SECONDARY INVADERS"

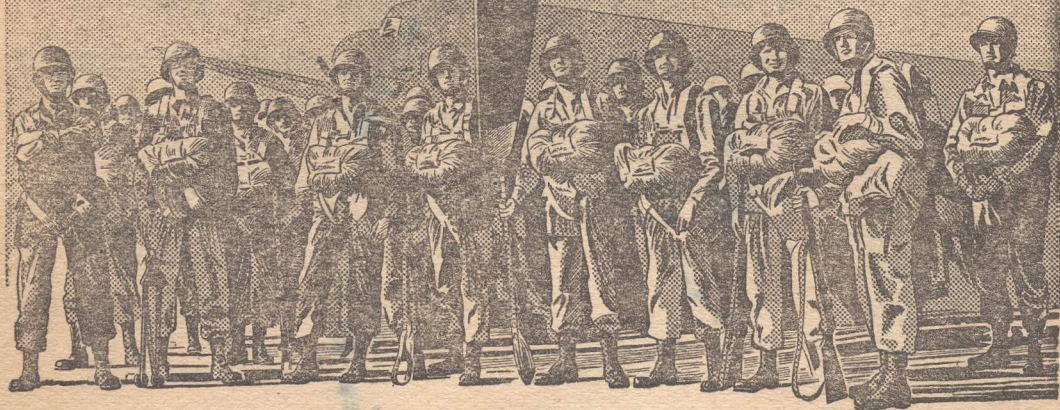
These are some types of the threatening germs that can cause so much of the misery of a cold when they invade the body through throat membranes.



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.

TESTS SHOWED LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC REDUCED GERMS UP TO 96.7%

The choice is yours!



YOUR weight is figured in ounces. Your flight in seconds. Your landing in yards. You're trained to hit fast and hard at any point on this broad earth. You're in the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, "America's Guard of Honor."

Wartime talk? Not at all! The famous 82nd has a spot for you **RIGHT NOW**—if you have the stuff for a heads-up, rough-and-ready job.

We won't beat around the bush. Not every man has the qualifications and the courage for such a job. Before the 82nd sailed for North Africa in 1943, its officers screened tens of thousands of young men for the toughest, quickest thinking, most daring.

It was hard work. Many earnest applicants had to be turned down. But when the 82nd made history over Sicily, with the first division-wide airborne landing, its careful selection of top-notch men paid off.

On through the war, the 82nd made headlines. Its husky fighters plunged out of the heavens by parachute, swooped into Italian pastures and airfields by glider. With the silence of a panther, they stalked the enemy in farmhouses and taverns. By striking from the rear in France and Holland, they bewildered the enemy. The same commander who led 82nd fighters in France and Holland and in a triumphant parade in New York *leads them still*.

If you can qualify, a job on this team pays well, with \$50 a month extra for glider and paratroop duty. Visit your nearest Recruiting Station.



CAREERS WITH A FUTURE

**U. S. Army and
U. S. Air Force**

Short Stories

TWICE A MONTH

THE

BEST

OF

AMERICA'S

ACTION

ADVENTURE

MYSTERY

THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE 4

AMATEURS PLAY ROUGH
(A Novelette) **Richard Howells Watkins** 6

Doug Ives Only Wanted a Craft for Island Trading. He Told the Girl the Cock-eyed Activities of the Human Race Interested Him—Up to a Point. The Point Would Expire in Just Half an Hour

COWARDS **W. C. Tuttle** 32

They Didn't Delay Justice in Silver City. Sally's Husband, the Sheriff's Son, Had Been Judged Guilty—Therefore They Were Already Erecting the Gallows

RETURN OF LEFTY **William Heuman** 38

Lefty Came Back on a Mighty Important Errand—and to Play a Mighty Important Ball Game

CURIODDITIES **Irwin J. Weill** 47

TREASURE TROVE IN JEZEBEL
(A Long Novelette) **Steuart M. Emery** 48

It Was All There—the Map with the Spot Marked X, the Old Prospector with the Sole Knowledge of the Hidden Horde. . . .

THE SHOOTER'S CORNER **Pete Kuhlhoff** 74

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

SHORT STORIES issued semi-monthly by SHORT STORIES, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City 20, N. Y., and entered as second-class matter, November 24, 1937, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION PRICE in the United States, American Possessions, Mexico and South America, \$5.00 per year; to Canada, \$6.50; and to all other countries, \$6.50. Price payable in advance. April 25, 1948. Vol. CCIV, No. 2, Whole Number 1015

EDITOR
D. McILWRAITH

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
LAMONT BUCHANAN

April 25th, 1948

CONTENTS

**THE VILLAINY OF
AHAB FOZZARD** **Berton E. Cook 77**

*Today the Master of the "Myrtle Caine" Would Have Been
Called a "Clipper" There Was No Expression So Apt
for His Greedy Kind at the Turn of the Century*

**THE DOUBLE FEATURE MURDERS
(A Novelette)** **A. V. Harding 90**

*Between the Setting and Rising of the Sun Violence Was
Done Again and Again, While Somewhere Near a Killer,
Whose Heart Was Blacker Than the Night, Stalked*

ROBBER'S GOLD **Cliff Maxwell 111**

*Those Were the Days; Hard, Uncompromising. No Place
for Weaklings. Each Man His Own Law, Each Trigger
Finger Its Arbitrator*

**YOUR BONES IN THE BRUSH
(Conclusion)** **Caddo Cameron 114**

*There Are Many Deadly Enemies in the Thicket, But the
Deadliest Is the Brush Itself. For the Brush Can
Cripple Or Kill As Easily As a Six-Gun—and
Considerably More Quietly*

THE BIG ROSE PEARL **Raymond S. Spears 138**

*Usually, Down Along the Mississippi, Such Rumors Would
Be Remembered Only Like a Red Moon, a Bad Wine,
Or a Mean Murder; This Time Talk of the Big
Pearl Continued on and on.*

COVER—Edgar F. Wittmack

EVERY
AUTHOR'S
FINEST
AND
LATEST
STORIES
NO
REPRINTS

Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

The entire contents of this magazine is protected by copyright and
must not be reprinted. Copyright, 1948, by SHORT STORIES, INC.

WILLIAM J. DELANEY, *President and Treasurer.*

M. DELANEY, *Secretary.*

The Story Tellers' Circle

Amateurs Play Rough

"AMATEURS PLAY ROUGH" admits its author Dick Watkins, "started when it occurred to me that it was about time I wrote something on Miami and what could go on there. Most winters I live on a beach within forty miles of the town—near enough, I say—but I'd never done anything about it in the typewriting line.

"It's an odd place, an American city—I almost said a typical American city but that's going too far. It has all the chain drug stores, innumerable places ministering to automobiles, traffic jams, political messes and bargain sales of the usual town but actually it's a frontier city. Only a few years ago the postman carried the mail for it many miles down the desolate Florida beach on his bare feet and when he got there he hadn't gotten anywhere much. Though it's a big roaring place now, particularly winters when you need fenders on your elbows, it's still on the edge of things, on a narrow coastal strip with the grassy, watery Everglades at its back and the hurrying purple Gulf Stream at its front door. And a bit south of it the strange mangrove-ringed Florida keys take off from the mainland and meander 145 miles seaward until they quit at Key West and Cuba's ninety-mile water jump beyond.

"Perhaps you can best describe Miami by calling it a jumping-off place. Things end there, especially bankrolls. You can jump off in a place at the big airport to almost anywhere in South or Central America or you can jump off by signing on some small surface craft heading into the Caribbean to pick up coconuts or bananas. Many people say they'd rather jump off than stay there but the place is growing too fast to make that stick.

"They have climate, horse and dog racing and real estate to make a living off. Particularly they have real estate, above water, too, except when a hurricane dumps inches and inches of rain in a few hours and the fish is undisputed king.

"If you want to see queer characters or perhaps some buddy from your home town a thousand miles away just pause a few moments on the corner of Flagler and Northeast Second Avenue. You'll be surprised.

"Yes, I'd call it quite a place to start a story. The ingredients are all there."

Richard Howells Watkins

Private Dick No Cluck

THERE are a lot of different opinions on that fictional foil, the private detective.

A regular cop will tell you that the private investigator is a damned nuisance; a dead-beat, over-weight deadhead who wasn't good enough to stay on the force. Whereas that good breed, the authors, make out same private eye as a glamor boy-genius showing up the doddering regulars as Sherlock Holmes did Lestrade.

Probably the truth lies somewhere in between, as A. V. Harding—whose special investigator, Charlie Redpath, operates in a thoroughly human way in these pages from time to time—tells us.

"After my first (or perhaps it was the second) Redpath detective tale in *SHORT STORIES*," Harding says, "I received a letter from a reader in California. It pleased me a great deal—authors being human and liking fan mail—particularly because the writer discerned and approved of my fictional point of view. Said he, and I quote from the letter still in my file, 'What I like mainly is that the little guy (Redpath) is kind of bumbling and human, no physical or mental giant . . . doesn't do Superman feats but might be just anybody working hard at being a detective.'

"That has been my feeling about Redpath because that is the real truth about private detectives. They do not work for fabulous fees. They are not 'fallen-in-love-with' by every attractive young female client, every client is not an attractive female, and as the *SHORT STORIES* reader put it so well, they are not Supermen in any way.

"The large cities like Los Angeles, Chicago and New York have hundreds of private investigators listed; they are never found in very small towns. As a rule, the so-called Private Eye is a former regular policeman or detective. One other great myth that has been built up about them—as untrue as the huge fees and beautiful girl client gimmicks—is the idea that these investigators are unscrupulous and usually thoroughly dishonest. It is a fact, and one can check this by pursuing any private detective bureau ad, that they stress 'confidential activity.' To them come many people in all walks of life who will not or cannot, for one reason or another, go to the regular police. They are called upon to do a great many types of work, including secret investigations of 'personal, domestic, business, and criminal troubles.'

"It is true that they are often used to 'get the goods' in marital cases, and some of this work is naturally unsavory, but by and large, the private investigator is honest and hard-working and he is certainly neither crook nor Superman. He puts in a tough day's work even as a lawyer or a business
(Continued on page 144)



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,
Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, California.

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.

Name.....

Address.....State.....

Amateurs Play ROUGH!



By
**RICHARD
HOWELLS
WATKINS**

I

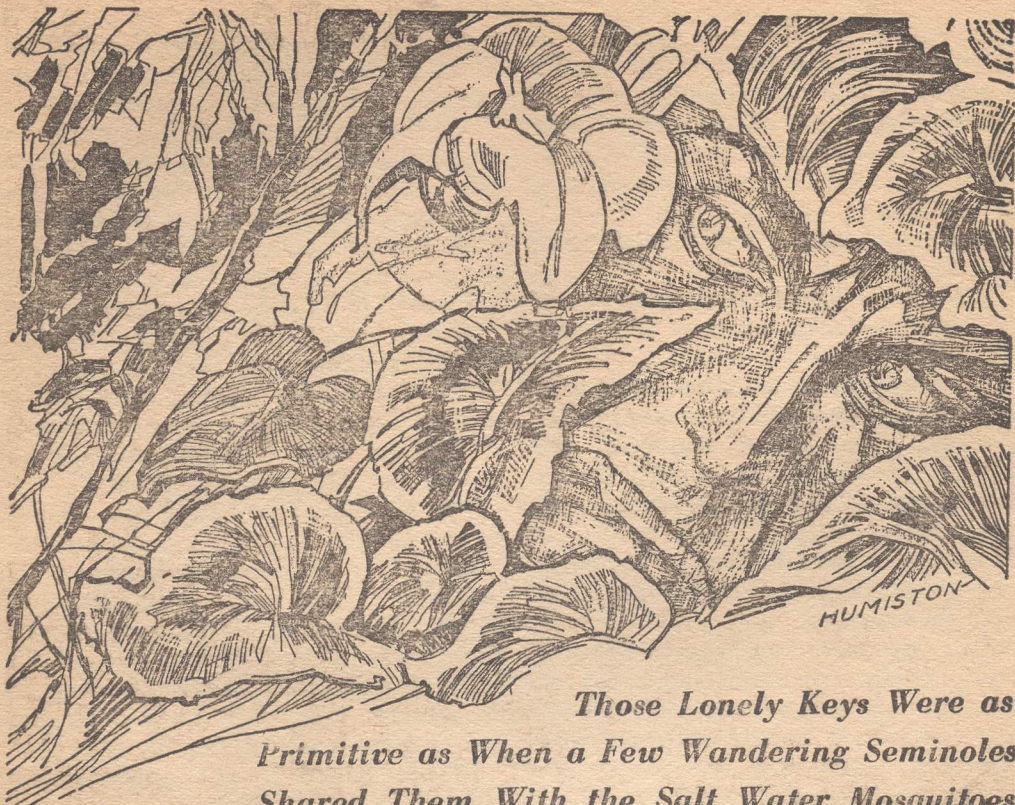
AN ARGUMENT was going on below decks in the dismantled schooner yacht *Osceola*. It was not noisy but as Doug Ives rowed in closer the strain and shake of fury in men's voices came streaming from the portholes of the main cabin.

On Biscayne Bay or in Miami you could often hear arguments, mostly alcohol pro-

pelled. The restraint of these men made their anger impressive. Not a word was audible; just the rush of hot emotions.

In a rattan chair on the small afterdeck a girl was leaning forward in a tense position. Kibitzing. It wouldn't do her any good. The angry men below were too cautious.

Doug Ives was tempted to board the schooner and give them all the fast heave-ho, either polite or physical, as matters



*Those Lonely Keys Were as
Primitive as When a Few Wandering Seminoles
Shared Them With the Salt Water Mosquitoes*

developed. This was his schooner except that he hadn't turned over to Mark Rankin the certified check in his pocket. He had paid a deposit; he had Rankin's signature, hereafter Doug Ives would do any arguing that went on in *Osceola*.

He scrutinized her topsides narrowly, hoping he hadn't been stuck. She was old but somebody had taken care of her. More fisherman than yacht. He regarded the stumps of her masts with sorrow. But, dismasted, she had come just within his limit. The sail across the bay in this dinghy for a final look at her lines hadn't disillusioned him. Though he was a seaman, not a surveyor, he felt sure she was sound.

"You will, Rankin! You will!" somebody below said hoarsely. "If you don't—"

The voice fell.

Doug Ives frowned at the porthole.

"Nobody better slug Mark Rankin before he comes through with that bill of sale," he muttered. "I'll never find any other craft as good."

Doug saw her as no toy of a Miami real estate man; he saw her rigged for trade wind

work, carrying a cargo to the West Indies. She'd pay her way and keep a man free and out under the sky.

Dourly he darted a glance at Miami's imposing skyscrapers, looming up behind Bayfront Park. The jail on the top floors of the high courthouse wasn't the only skyscraper jail in sight. All jails, those high-piled bricks, though they called them offices.

The argument below erupted onto *Osceola's* decks. It got even rougher. Cries. Curses.

Impulsively Doug laid his rented boat in alongside the schooner's bow. He secured the painter to a stay with quick fingers and swung himself aboard via the bowsprit.

The tall figure of sweating Mark Rankin dominated the quarterdeck. With a steel marlinespike in his hand he was driving two men toward the gangway. Well dressed, those two, not flambouyantly tropical. A thick squat fellow with a narrow face was talking rapidly in a low voice as he retreated. His deep-set eyes were fixed on Rankin's face. Bad eyes. Hard as cold black marbles.

The second man, young, almost as tall as Rankin and with muscles where Rankin showed fat, was in a flaming rage.

Doug walked aft. That young fellow with the bulging forehead was about set to start in on Rankin. His eyes were darting around wildly.

"Last call, Rankin," said the soft voice of the squat man.

"Get off and take this young fool with you, Miller!" Rankin cried. "You won't crack me!"

The young fool ran to the rail and caught at a boathook. The lashings snapped under his wrench. Past reason, that man. He raised the boathook two-handed, like a battle-ax, and swung at the panting real estate man.

Doug Ives stepped in briskly. His quick arm deflected the heavy weapon. The hook scarred the teak deck.

While the fellow's fingers were still stinging Doug wrested the shaft out of them. He gripped it by the middle in both hands and charged, ready to strike fast with either end.

"Over side!" he said. "Over!"

The squat Miller gave up at once but his marble eyes were venomous. His companion tried a grab at the long boathook. Deftly Doug cracked him on the hand.

"Come on, Case!" Miller said and jerked at his arm. His voice was hard as he spoke to Rankin:

"I'll take up our business later."

"Tomorrow, and at his office," Doug said, moving them along. "Today I have business with him."

Case lifted a solid fist. "I'll—"

"Tomorrow," said Doug. His boathook urged them.

MILLER tightened his grip on young Case's sleeve. He led him down the gangway to the parking space alongside the bulkhead line. They climbed into a cream-colored convertible. Behind a row of cocopalms the traffic of MacArthur Causeway fled between beach and mainland. The convertible joined unending streams of cars from forty-eight states.

Mark Rankin was still breathing fast. "A couple of rasc—"

"Deal me out." Doug looked at the scarred deck. "Let's close."

Rankin, a-drip with sweat, looked down at the marlinespike in his hand. He turned abruptly and walked aft. Doug followed.

On the small after deck Rankin stopped. Under the awnings close to the companionway a man was lying on his back. There was blood on his sports shirt and his hands were moving aimlessly. Beside him knelt the girl Doug had seen. She was staunching the wound in his chest with a handkerchief.

Rankin was still gripping the sharp pointed marlinespike. Doug looked at it. There was a rusty looking smear on the steel tool and Rankin's hand was bloody.

"Another rascal," Rankin said. "I had to stop him, Mr. Ives. Self defense."

The wounded man looked up. "Wait!" he said thickly.

Doug Ives put down the boathook. He had been a little hasty. It had happened before. The courthouse jail rose up more prominently among Miami's skyscrapers. Still, this man didn't look like business for the morgue. Doug bent for a closer view and caught a whiff of alcohol.

Rankin turned to the companionway. "Bond!" he called. "Bond!"

A wizened, white-jacketed steward showed his head. "Sir?"

"Take the car and get Dr. Scholtz."

The old steward sprinted toward the companionway. He leaped nimbly into a plain black sedan. It didn't look plush enough to be a real estate dealer's. Rented, perhaps, Doug thought.

Rankin patted his forehead with a handkerchief. "These three were trying to extort a share in my Rankinton Glades," he said. "Frank Bullock, here, and that squat man, Alden Miller, were until recently my business associates. Ray Case is a well-to-do young oaf who's joined them. I had to break with them. Unscrupulous."

Bullock snarled up at him.

Doug Ives glanced at the girl. Her downturned face was concealed by her fluffy brown hair.

"Did you see what happened, Miss—ah—?" Rankin paused.

The girl raised her head. Cool blue eyes, a grave, tanned face and a figure not too uninterestingly slim.

"I'm Alice Bell," she said. "I saw this man pick up that chair and turn to the companionway as you ran up, Mr. Rankin. He

would have struck if you hadn't jabbed him with that—thing."

Her voice was respectful, even submissive. Doug winced.

Mark Rankin drew a deep breath and smiled.

"Never keep a customer waiting," Doug said. "The check's—"

Rankin's attention was all on the wounded man. "There you are, Frank," he said. "I have an independent witness. Miss Bell just happened to be aboard to apply for a publicity job with me."

Alice opened her bag. "I have some recommendations—"

"The police will believe her, Frank, if it comes to police," Rankin said. "Help me get him onto the chaise, will you, Ives?"

Doug bent and they lifted Frank Bullock. His black eyebrows contracted in an apprehensive scowl as they lowered him.

Alice smiled at him reassuringly and held the stained handkerchief in place on his chest.

"Rest easy, Frank," Rankin said. His utterance became slightly, softly Southern. It sounded somewhat phony. "Yo' trouble is you're too credulous, boy. I don't put you in the same class with Alden Miller and that cub, Case."

"He needs a doctor, not advice," Doug Ives said. "I need a boat. How about closing this thing?"

Alice lifted her head. Her blue eyes disapproved of him.

"Now, now, Mr. Ives," said Mark Rankin. "I'm too disturbed. I want to sit heah beside Frank. Come back in a while—or look her over again. No secrets heah. Make yo'self at home."

No secrets?

II

RANKIN pulled a chair over beside the chaise. Frank Bullock turned a dark and calculating glance up at him.

Doug Ives shrugged uneasily. He picked the morning paper off the small table with rattan legs and walked forward with it. He sat down beside the stub of the foremast and hunted quickly through the paper. He stopped at a full page ad.

A new garden city, Rankinton Glades, was to rise in the reclaimed Everglades west

of Miami, this schooner-owning Mark Rankin announced. It sounded choice. Utilities would soon be in, streets would be boulevards, a country club, with enormous pool and golf course—

Doug turned back to page one. A small cut of Rankin beamed beside a news story. This Mark Rankin was a solid citizen and the ship's papers were in order. It was funny he was using a rented car. But Rankinton Glades wasn't hokum. South Florida editors were too wise about real estate to play up shoestring ventures. Real estate was the biggest business down here. Why be uneasy?

The importance of real estate was confirmed in the paper's feature story. It was about a Rankin of other days but he was still worth headlines. Real estate! Paul Underwood, an old-timer with enormous holdings around Miami, had got himself killed by a hit-run driver. Underwood, a Miami pioneer, had been killed at a grade crossing of the Seaboard and the motorist, Thomas Bell, was cooling off in the Dade County jail high in that tall building now obscuring the sinking sun. The story was an eulogy of Underwood, a recital of his bold part in Miami's beginnings. The real estate angle, with a casual mention of Rankin and other big operators of the present time.

Doug yawned and glanced aft. Mark Rankin was still sitting solicitously beside Frank Bullock's chaise. Rankin couldn't stand adverse publicity, right now.

Doug looked out at the hurrying cars on the causeway. Why hadn't a police car with screeching siren come along with a cream-colored convertible tailing it self-righteously?

The late afternoon sun inched down and no siren paralyzed traffic. Bullock's pals, squat Miller with the black marble eyes and muscled Ray Case, weren't calling in the cops.

Rankin's steward returned in the black car with a stringy little old man gripping a black bag. Almost furtive, that doctor looked as he hurried up the gangway.

Ten minutes later Doug stood up restively. He moved toward his dinghy. Before he could swing from the bowsprit down into it Mark Rankin came hurrying forward. His broad brow was smooth. A care-

free man now, but quick on his feet. He beamed at Doug Ives.

"The doctor says it's only a little dent in Bullock," he said. "I sho' am relieved."

More Southern than ever.

"Just catsup spilled on his shirt," Doug said dryly. "Ready to ship him ashore and hand over?"

Rankin was studying him. His eyes narrowed, rather as Alden Miller's had narrowed.

"Proposition to make you," he said. "You can handle her?"

Doug nodded. "Master's ticket during the war."

"But you don't really know this schooner—how she handles under moto'—that sort of thing."

Doug waited.

"How'd you like to try her out fo' a few days befo' we sign?"

Doug blinked. "I didn't see you stab him," he said.

Rankin smiled. "You come straight out. I like 'em that way, son. But you're wrong. I'm not trying to get you away."

Doug's nod was noncommittal.

"It's this way," Mark Rankin said. "Bullock is weak, but not a bad sort—not compared to those other two. He's suffering from shock. Needs a quiet place to rest fo' a few days. And—"

HE TURNED and looked aft. The girl Alice was standing beside the cabin house, looking down at her flat white pocketbook. Her brown hair was bobbing gently just above her shoulders in the puffs of the easterly breeze.

"And Alice, theah, is a little nervous," Rankin went on. "Seems a right nice girl. Miller and Case aren't gangsters but she's a bit scared."

"Maybe," said Doug. She hadn't been too scared to listen on deck.

"She knows those rascals could make big trouble fo' me—Bullock would probably fall in with 'em again—if it weren't that she'd seen my action was self defense. She's heard about what happens to witnesses sometimes."

"Well?" said Doug. That girl looked a little too demure.

Mark Rankin turned and beckoned. Most obediently Alice started forward at once.

"How 'bout my getting a nurse to look after Bullock and turning the boat over to you to take 'em along on a free-trial run, say down among the Keys?" Rankin said. "Just a few days, till Bullock is fit, Alice has got over her nerves and my steward, Bond, has a chance to feed 'em up. How about it, son?"

"Not with that menagerie on board!" Doug said. "A stabbed crook, a hush-hush nurse, a scared female witness—and what does your man Bond know?"

Alice Bell's blue eyes flashed at him. She had heard. Her tan took on a hint of rose. It was no blush. Temper.

Perhaps the wrong word—menagerie.

Rankin sighed. "You don't trust me, Mr. Ives."

"I've bought a schooner from you for fourteen thousand bucks, which is plenty," Doug said. Plenty? It left him only a thousand to get started. He'd have to run her without masts on the first trip. He reached in his pocket. "Here's your certified check."

"A trial run—"

"I don't want a trial run. I want possession, as we agreed."

Rankin shook his had. "I'm still upset. Befo' I hand over I must ask yo' a favor."

"What?"

"It's—It's this po' girl, heah," Rankin said. "She's afraid if I send her off in my car she'd be followed, intimidated."

Doug waited.

"If you could wait till dark and sail her 'cross the bay to Miami they'd have no way of tracking her," Rankin said.

Doug laughed, remembering the flash in Alice's blue eyes and that rush of color under the tan. He said:

"Miss Bell would rather be intimidated with a sledge hammer than sail with me."

Alice drew a breath. "Not at all," she said. Her voice was grateful. "I'd be so much obliged to you."

Doug fingered his chin. "I'm guaranteed to be poor company." He watched her intently.

She didn't sock him with her pocketbook.

"That's good," she said lightly.

It should be funny, that meekness, but it hit him as almost sinister. Why? What was going on here?

"I'd appreciate it," Mark Rankin said, as

if that mattered. "It will be dark inside an hour."

He didn't say so but Doug knew he could hold up the sale; maybe make him go to court to enforce their agreement.

Doug glanced toward the causeway. Some cars were loitering along, sightseeing or watching, in the slow lanes beyond the cocopalms. Pedestrians, too, and people fishing further along.

"Right!" he said to the girl. "I'll sail away now. I'll drop back for you as soon as it gets dark."

"Oh, thank you!" said the girl. She clasped her hands. Was he being kidded? She looked at Rankin. "And thank you, too, dear Mr. Rankin."

III

IT WAS dark enough when Doug Ives ran his dinghy, with sail lowered, up to *Osceola's* starboard side, which lay away from the causeway. The hitch was a moon, big as an orange on a plate, rising up out of the Gulf Stream just off shore. That big disc would lose its dull red fast and become a high powered reflector.

"It's doesn't matter anyhow," Doug reminded himself. "She's got the vapors. Nobody's chasing her. She's chasing Rankin. A kid like that!"

The sickening Alice was waiting. She had sense enough to step down into the middle of the dinghy and sit down quickly.

"Come back and we'll settle up, son," Mark Rankin muttered. "I'm sho' obliged. Good-bye, Alice!"

In silence Doug pulled away. Some distance from the causeway and the line of big yachts along it he raised his sail.

"Breeze is light," he said. "I may have to row."

Alice didn't answer. She sat still, with her back to the pin-pointed windows of the skyscrapers and the glow of street lights. Beyond dark Bayfront Park Miami was going full blast into a tourist season night. Saying it with electricity. Alice looked out toward the moon and the mangroves on the keys south of Government Cut.

Doug fiddled with the sheet, hauling the sail to catch the light breath of easterly air. He headed toward the mouth of the Miami river, where he had rented this boat.

"Where shall I put you ashore?" he asked.

She turned her head. "There's a street that runs out to the water at the southern edge of Bayfront Park, the street where that old casino is." Her voice was frosty.

"It's on my way," he said.

She went back to looking out across the bay. That was all right with him. Maybe she really was paralyzed with fright.

"Look," he said curtly. "Relax! This is just a real estate squabble. The toughest any of these lads, Rankin, Bullock, Miller or Case, will get is to sock each other with legal papers. You have nothing to be afraid of."

"Thank you," she said.

Mockery? Politeness? Derision? Gratitude? He couldn't figure this blasted girl. She was playing some game. Her line was inscrutability. He sailed the boat.

The moon was already throwing pale silver light on his sail. They wouldn't be outwitting any earnest watcher on the causeway.

Slowly they approached the black shadows of the leaning cocopalms of Bayfront. The park cut off the city's lights. A band among the trees was emitting brassy noises.

A standard lamp, almost smothered by lifting and sagging fronds, showed him the street she had described.

Darkened cars formed two solid, deserted ranks in the middle of the broad street. This was one of the few spots in Miami where movie-goers and band listeners could leave their jalopies without having to buy them completely back again.

A motor began to turn over fast. Some goof revved it up to the limit and let it snarl on at top speed.

The seawall loomed higher. He started to clamber forward to drop the sail. The girl turned, let go the halyard and gathered in the canvas. He picked up an oar and began sculling to the wall.

A shot split the band music. It dimmed the roar of the racing motor. A bullet whined briefly.

Under Doug the dinghy lurched. The girl had flung herself to one side, with a low cry.

Doug got back to his feet. He slung the oar at a shadow near the top of the seawall. The vague form was ducking back in the

deep gloom of a cocopalms. The oar went sailing past as the figure vanished.

Doug grabbed the other oar. He jabbed it in the water, wrenched the boat around and started sculling for open water.

"Go overboard to port if he shows again," he whispered. "He missed me—close."

HE KEPT his eyes on the cocopalms along the wall. No movement there. Fifty feet down the street the lights of a car blazed on, a car facing toward Biscayne Boulevard. The clamoring motor was throttled down with a backfire or two from the muffler. Almost as loud as the pistol shot. Clever.

The car started at a leisurely pace. Doug strained his eyes. A light colored car? A convertible? He stopped sculling.

"Close!" he muttered. "I knew I shouldn't have stuck my neck into this mess. Business men! When they go sour they play wild and rough, like rattled amateurs. Hell! They're dangerous!"

Alice looked up at him. Her left hand was cupping the base of her neck. Her voice was shaky and perhaps ironic:

"Whoever shot at you hit me."

Doug bent toward her. A thin dark stream was flowing down her shoulder. He pulled her hand away. A slug had slashed across the smooth side of her neck. She had been a scant inch from fast death.

He ripped a strip off his shirt, looked intently at the gash and then wadded the cloth against it.

"It's shallow," he said. "It hasn't done any real damage—not much more than a lifting. Better lie down in the bottom."

"I'm all right," she said. "Let me take care of it."

He eased her down in the bottom with his coat rolled under her head. Grimly he awaited hysterics. None came.

His eyes turned shoreward. He caught up his oar again and headed the boat toward the seawall.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, lifting her head.

"Call a cop and get my oar."

He scowled. The street was still deserted. The shot had not caused the slightest excitement. All the car owners were enjoying vicarious thrills at the first house or at the band concert.

"There isn't any sense in calling in the police," Alice said. "We haven't the slightest evidence. And if anybody ashore had seen the man with the gun they'd be screaming by now."

"We can give the cops a job anyhow."

"No!" Her voice was emphatic. Her eyes were fixed on him.

"It might not even be safe to land there," she said. "The other one might be waiting for me."

She paused. "I'll pay for your oar," she added politely.

"Look!" Doug said. "That shot was not aimed at you."

Her silence was disbelief.

"You're only a witness that will keep a man out of jail," he said. "That's not so dangerous."

Silence continued.

"Shooting in moonlight is fluky." He was emphatic. "I treated Miller and Case rough this afternoon. This risky stunt doesn't match Miller's reptile eyes. The big boy with the overhanging forehead, the young one, Case, was working off a pout on his own against me."

He nodded reassuringly. "You're safe—once you get clear of me."

"Cleverly phrased to permit your getaway," she said. "Please take me back to Mr. Rankin's boat. Dr. Sholtz may still be there and I'll feel safe. I'm afraid to go ashore now."

"Back to my—"

"Yes!"

"After I get my oar," he said. "The fellow I rented this from would probably hold me up."

He sculled alongside and scrambled up the seawall. No excitement. No clues, either. Alice didn't change her mind about coming ashore. Back in the boat he rowed hard. He made the little craft surge through the flat waters of the moonlit bay.

SUDDENLY he slackened speed. "Don't think you're fooling me," he said. "You aren't scared. You want an excuse to go back to Rankin."

She lifted her head. He said:

"It's not just to get a job. You're up to some coy game of your own. Better sign off and go home."

She looked toward Miami's towers. He

kept to slow tempo with his swing and pull on the oars.

"I suppose you're in the real estate business, too," he said. "Well, these boys don't seem to be scrambling for peanuts. Certainly not that bird Miller. Erratic amateur rough guys. And Rankin—"

"You were buying a boat, not messing in other people's business," she said. "Remember?"

Doug shut his mouth and rowed. Alice lay still, not even looking at him. The moonlight showed him her face. A troubled set little face, not asking for anything, not giving anything away.

As the dinghy drew alongside the schooner Mark Rankin came to the side and stared down at them.

"Landing repulsed," Doug said, slinging a line up on deck. "Bear a hand. We're coming aboard."

Rankin and old Bond helped the girl up to the deck. Alice refused to be taken below. She listened intently while Doug made a curt report.

"After this you can't refuse to take this po' girl and Frank Bullock away fo' a few days," Rankin said.

"I do refuse," Doug said. "It's time to call in the cops."

Alice turned to him. "I can't identify the man who fired that shot and neither can you," she said. "What could the police do?"

Rankin tapped him on the chest. "I'll close the deal now if you'll run these two down to the keys fo' me," he said. "I'll charter her from you fo' five hundred. Otherwise you can sue me to get possession of her."

DOUIG IVES hesitated. He had stretched things too thin in paying fourteen thousand for this little ship.

"Make it a thousand," he said impulsively.

"Done!" said Mark Rankin.

Alice, hand cupped on her neck, lifted her head scornfully and looked away from Doug.

Why had he let himself in for this? Was it the money? He felt confused and resented his confusion hotly. Confusion wasn't one of his weaknesses. He looked indignantly into Alice's disdainful eyes. These people would confuse anyone.

IV

THE traffic on the causeway was sporadic now. Even pleasure seekers in Miami sleep sometimes. Doug Ives listened to the soft beat of *Osceola's* idling motor. Smooth. It was his motor now and his schooner. The papers were signed.

He touched with the toe of his sneaker the Reising submachine-gun Mark Rankin had just brought aboard. "How I hate those things!" His voice was fretful. "Both ends of 'em!"

Alice, in a rattan deck chair, stirred. Her neck and shoulder were swathed in Dr. Scholtz's bandages.

"Perhaps you're gunshy, Mr. Ives," she said. Plainly she hadn't forgiven that menagerie crack.

"No perhaps. Fellow shot me with one once—Japanese boy."

"Did you run?" She smiled charmingly at him.

He shook his head. "I can't run on water. That's the only trouble with it."

"The gun's just fo' protection," Rankin said. "It's a war souvenir a man gave me."

"If the game's to get me, somehow, to use that gun for you on Miller and Case you'd better call off this cruise," Doug said.

Rankin took his chewed cigar from his mouth to indicate shocked surprise. He clapped a hand on Doug's shoulder. "Son, you don't think I'd—"

"Rather you'd picked up more grub or charts ashore," Doug said. "If it has to go please stow it out of the way below."

Rankin lifted the gun. Doug planted a foot on the three loaded magazines and kept it there. Rankin carried the gun below.

Doug picked up the clips and glumly weighted down his trousers pockets with them. He raised a hand to Bond. "Let's go aft and stand by!" The wrinkled steward scuttled toward the stern line, agile as a monkey and no handsomer. Rankin hurried up the companion.

"Go ashore or come with us," Doug said. "I want to get through this job fast."

Rankin pawed at his shoulder. "You won't regret this, son."

"I hope," said Doug. He speeded up the motor. "Coming with us?"

In her chair Alice Bell was watching. She smiled when Rankin patted her hand.

Then the real estate man stepped on the rail and flung his thick body clumsily across two feet of water to the seawall. Gaily he waved his hat. Doug inspected his face. Hard.

With wheel and motor Doug kicked her stern out, gestured to Bond and backed into the channel. The moon was high, now, and he could see no craft under way in the cut. He opened up the motor and his little ship surged ahead. The pride of ownership was spoiled by his charter.

He studied the water alongside. "Six knots," he decided. "Sail is her meat."

Bond hovered at his elbow.

"Strike the awnings," Doug said. "Give the nurse Mr. Rankin brought aboard anything she needs for her patient. Then turn in."

The schooner glided on out the channel and left Miami Beach to port. Her bow rose to short low seas. Doug kept her headed seaward past the lighted entrance buoy and put her on the easterly course for Bimini, across the Florida Straits. He kept the motor running wide open.

Bond stuck his head up the fore hatch. He looked at the shore, back at Doug and then vanished. Doug stared gloomily at the sailing dinghy, hoisted on the schooner's port davits. "I'm paying for that thing by the hour," he said.

"You're tearing my heart apart," Alice said.

The sharp edge of the hurrying Gulf Stream showed ahead, plain as a tide rip. The schooner moved a bit in water somewhat rougher, velvet black water that would be deep blue in the daylight. There was more air here, a southeasterly, perceptibly warmer. The Stream made its own weather.

Doug stuck his knee against a spoke of the wheel and lifted binoculars to scrutinize the channel he had just left. The moon had set the sea ablaze with white light. He took his time, looking not for running lights but for dark blurs against the sand beach. He could see nothing following.

The black reptilian eyes of Alden Miller still bothered him. Miller wouldn't be quitting. Doug looked at the massed hotels of Miami Beach. Those shiny eyes, if high in one of those towers, could still watch *Osaola*. Doug kept her moving her best on the Bimini course, straight across the

Gulf Stream. Ten minutes later he left the wheel in a becket to douse his running lights and drape an awning to conceal light from the skylight.

Almost at once the head of Bullock's nurse lifted from below. She was like no nurse Doug had ever seen. Mrs. Gort looked as if she had devoted her life not to smoothing pillows but to turning in bus drivers for knocking down nickels. Hatchet-faced, ham-handed, with a wrinkled nose that plainly told her the whole world smelled, she pivoted her head slowly.

Her eyes fell upon the distant shore of Florida. Swift as a woodchuck, she dived below. Her voice sounded off.

FRANK BULLOCK came struggling up the companion treads. Mrs. Gort, below, exhorted him. Bullock looked, as bid. His eyes jumped from his distant shoreline to Doug Ives. His dark brows drew together.

"What's your game?" he said. "You're heading east, not south! What is this?"

Ma Gort thrust the submachine-gun up into her patient's hands. "Make him go back!" she said. "Shoot his ears off!"

Doug grinned. "Grab some sleep," he said.

Bullock was getting the jitters. He grasped the empty gun with both hands and looked at Alice for support.

"You told Rankin you'd land us at this fishing camp he's just bought on Red Crawfish Key!" Bullock said. "That's where I—"

"That's where you're going," Doug said. "Rankin just thinks nobody knows he owns the place. I'm swinging seaward to make sure nobody follows us or dopes our true course."

"But—" Bullock lifted the gun and began framing a sinister mug.

Doug slid a becket on the wheel and walked toward him. "An empty gun's dangerous—to the man holding it," he said.

Bullock thumped the tommy gun down hastily on the little round table.

"I'm not threatening you, Ives."

Doug went back to the wheel.

Bullock's scowl was still suspicious.

"What were you and Rankin talking about after Alice and I agreed to stay aboard?"

"Terms," said Doug. "It's costino Ran-

kin a thousand and I'm all through the minute I land you people on Red Crawfish."

Alice sat up. Her voice was edged.

"Wouldn't he make it a two thousand?"

"I did my best," Doug said. "The job is dirt cheap, I'd say."

Resentment supplanted suspicion in Bullock's voice. "And after you land us we can go to hell in a basket, hey?"

"With your secrets for ballast," Doug agreed. He turned to Alice. "I told Rankin I wouldn't make a good fall guy, whatever I'm in. I'm telling you the same."

Bullock eased himself down into a chair.

Ma Gort shook her head. "Nice talk!" she said virtuously. "Fall guys! Nice talk about a gentleman with enough lettuce to develop a town and name it after himself!"

"Is Rankin a buddy of yours?" Doug asked.

Ma Gort wrenched her neck around in an indignant circle.

"I'd be proud. You must be mixing Rankin and Alden Miller, with your talk of fall guys! There's a heel! Did time for getting money under false pretences, Miller did."

Doug nodded. He was thoughtful. He looked at Alice, intent on all this. "False pretences—not violence," he said. "That's a different street. And yet—" He cocked his head at Frank Bullock.

"Don't get the idea I'm a thug!" Bullock snapped. "I was a little tanked when I swung that chair. Rankin was—" He stopped dead and growled deep in his throat. "Trying to make me talk, hey?"

DOU**G** grinned. "I'm just a poor boy trying to get a line." His voice hardened. He spoke to Alice, the girl who could remain so silent and yet so watchful. "I'd be a lot smarter to steer straight for Crawfish, dump you and sail clear."

Alice lifted her head. "It would be cheaper, too," she said. "Or is Mark Rankin paying you a percentage on mileage?"

Doug chewed his lip. "The mutiny's over," he said. "Take your patient below, Nursie. Let him take his tommy gun to bed to stand off the nightmares."

Painfully Bullock pulled himself to his feet. Ma Gort, with the gun under one arm, helped him to the companion.

Unexpectedly Alice stood up.

"I'll sit with Frank till he goes to sleep

if you want some rest, Mrs. Gort," she said, all sympathy.

"Well, I'm human," said Ma Gort.

"Good hunting," Doug said to the girl. His voice was dry.

"I hope you don't hit a rock—till you've spent money fixing her," Alice said. Her voice was ashake with anger.

"The rock may hit you. Only one thousand! I was robbed."

Alone, Doug sat motionless behind the wheel. He looked rigidly at the compass, steering fine. Faintly to his ears from below came Alice's voice, occasionally a laugh, and the answering rumble of Bullock's voice. He lifted a fist from the wheel. A hard, bony fist, entirely useless in this ship.

"Bad tempered, mercenary, coy, unscrupulous!" he said. "Dump 'em and get clear!"

But it was another hour before he changed course to southward and began bucking the strong current of the Stream. By dawn his brain felt as hard, bony and useless as his fist.

He called Bond, went below and on the salon table worked out a course. He would keep her to seaward of the line of mighty reefs that protected the keys from the assaults of the sea. He gave Bond the course and made sure the man could handle her.

Below again, he listened a moment. No sound but Mrs. Gort's snoring came from Bullock's stern cabin and none from Alice's stateroom forward of the salon. He dropped onto the starboard settee.

Real estate men—and a woman—playing cowboys and Indians! What compulsion lay behind this violence? He flung his hands over his head and went to sleep.

V

DOU**G** **I**VE**S** walked silently forward in the gray of dawn. He grasped the handle of the winch and gave Bond's stringy muscles a lift in breaking out the anchor.

Behind *Osceola* lay a blazing day spent bucking the current of the Stream, a closing with the reefs as darkness covered her and then tense moonlit hours of following shallow Hawk Channel southwestward along the endless line of keys.

Well after midnight she had slipped under the Overseas Highway bridge at Bahia Honda and dropped her hook to let

them sleep a few scant hours. Now the coming light warned Doug to get away from that highway.

"Your job is forward here, Bond," Doug said. "Watch the bottom. Coral rocks, showing dark green, can look like grass patches."

BOND scowled and slapped at whining dive bombers.

"Bottom's blasted close to the top, sir." His eyes distrusted mangrove studded keys, clear shoal water and Captain Doug Ives.

"Let's go!" said Doug. The winch pawls clinked and the anchor came up off the bottom.

Doug lifted a hand high and waved forward.

Aft at the wheel Alice thrust the gears in and quickened the throb of the motor. At least the girl had a father—or somebody—who'd taught her to be useful on a boat.

The schooner slowly breasted the three-knot flow of the ebb. She put her stern to the high bridge. Walking aft Doug studied that thin concrete link to civilization with keen eyes. The headlights of no cars hurtling toward Miami or Key West stained the gray dawn.

Ahead were keys still as primitive as when a few wandering Seminoles shared them with the salt water mosquitoes.

"I'll take her," Doug said to the girl. "I want to get behind the mangroves before it's light."

The bandage about her neck had been replaced by a bit of surgical cotton held by tape. The tan of her body, protected by a big handkerchief and a pair of Bond's white drill trousers, had a deeper tone after that day at sea. She looked a bit sleepy.

"You have a high opinion of Miller's shadowing," she said. "Or is it Case's? How could they possibly know where we are?"

He could not forget how confidentially she kept talking to Bullock. "No extra charge for caution," he said brusquely.

"I'd rather pay." Her voice was prickly. "Bond's on lookout; I'll get breakfast." She went below.

At the wheel he put the schooner on north northwest and watched unendingly for a red day beacon that would keep her off the flats. Grudgingly the increasing light at last revealed it. He maneuvered close enough

to check the number and looked for the next.

Keys and flats closed in on *Osecola*. Doug took it dead slow.

"Give me a cast!" he called.

Bond swung the lead and plunked it into the water ahead of the bowsprit. "Eight feet!" he wailed. Doug eased her to starboard, groping for more water. She drew six. Any coral head would hang her up. He made out the next beacon.

The schooner crept on up Spanish Channel. Easy, so far. Doug ate and drank coffee at the wheel. The last gray vestiges of night fell away. The sun burst on the keys. *Osecola* no longer floated. She seemed suspended in the air. The water was too clear to exist. But the bottom was there, reaching for her keel.

FRANK BULLOCK stiffly ascended the companionway. Under bushy black brows he stared uneasily. Real escabe was either mud under the spile-v, arching roots of isolated clumps of swaying mangroves or sand a foot or two under water. Men and the marks of men did not exist. A simple world. He sat down. Alice brought him another cup of coffee.

"Godforsaken!" said Ma Gort. "We stay here?" It was a wail. Miami's skyline was obscured by a hundred miles of those mangroves.

Doug shifted strained eyes to Alice. "Excellent bonefishing," he said.

She looked back at him, with a tilt of her head. This watery waste did not intimidate her. She took Bullock's empty cup from his hands.

Studying his chart, Doug swung his wheel sharply and left Spanish Channel to port. Bond heaved his lead and called back soundings.

"Seven! Eight! Six and a half. Six and—Seven!"

Keys, like converging green walls, approached on either side. Mangroves arched above her. Their roots reached for her hull. Doug stopped her, eased her ahead.

The passage widened. The bottom edged away. More of this. Hours of this. An occasional stake or leaning fingerpost marked deeper water across the flats.

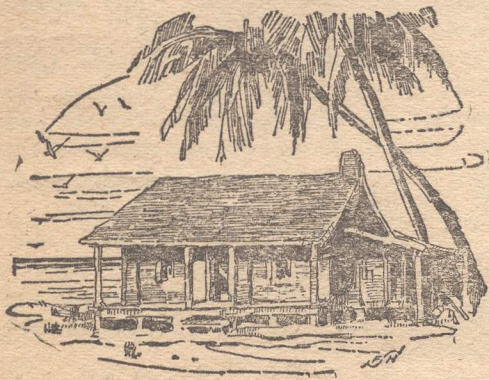
Doug spun the wheel to swing the schooner around the reaching end of a key.

Bare shoals opened away to port. And to starboard on the key a spindly pier suddenly came stretching and curving out from a clearing. Grass there, too unkempt to be called a lawn, on a veritable hill, three feet higher than neighboring keys.

And, thirty feet back from the end of the lengthy pier, cocopalms shaded a low gray house. A house in this wilderness! A wide screened porch ran along its entire front and side. Behind it, in solid ranks, the mangroves.

"Red Crawfish Key," Doug said. "A valuable property—for fishermen."

His fingers pressed a button on the wheel-box. The schooner's siren crowed. A crane in the shallows flung out his wings, scrambled awkwardly with dangling feet and flapped into the nearest tangle. A cormorant dropped from a dead tree almost to the water before his black wings picked him up and he sped away. From the house came no answering sound or movement.



Frank Bullock stood up. "What's this?" He was angry. "Rankin said there was a guide here to cook and look after us."

Doug's eyes had searched pier and cleared beach for a boat.

"He seems to have stepped out for a moment," he said dryly.

He threw the motor out of gear. The schooner idled ahead and lay dead in the water. They watched the silent house.

"Well, I'm the goat," Doug said. "Where do you want to go next? I'll give you a free passage."

Alice turned on him. "I think it's lovely!" Her admiration was vehement. "Sportsmen pay a fortune for quarters at a camp like this!" Now her voice caressed the key,

"The guide will be back. We're going to stay, aren't we, Frank?"

"Stay?" said Bullock. He stared at her. His lips moved slightly and then he grinned. "Why, sure!" he said. "It's just what we want!"

"Not me!" said Ma Gort. Bullock's black brows drew together. "I think you will," he said. "Rankin wouldn't like you quitting, would he?" Ma Gort's defiance collapsed.

Bullock pointed at the pier. "Put us alongside."

Doug Ives laid a tight hand on the gear lever.

"Dock lines, Bond!" he called. He faced the girl. "You have an hour to change your mind."

VI

THE hour had passed. Doug Ives paced his deck, forward and aft. Bond, wrinkled head projecting from the crew hatch, elbows hooked over the coaming, waited the word. These keys were no treat to him.

Doug took out his watch. Bond boosted himself up out of the hatch. Doug looked at his watch dial. His lips curled into a wry grin. He shoved the watch into his pocket.

"Stand by," he said to Bond. "I'll be right back."

He swung up onto the thin-legged pier and rapidly walked its shaky length. At the camp Ma Gort was in the kitchen washing up pans and dishes with rainwater from a cistern and talking to herself. When she saw Doug she talked to him.

"His breakfast dishes in the sink! These saucepans ain't been washed—not to call washed—for weeks. Left a cigarette burning on the drainboard. I'll guide *him* when he comes back."

"Where's Alice?"

Ma Gort shook a fist at the mangroves crowding close to the back of the bungalow. "Gone exploring. The mosquitoes will explore *her*. Bullock's gone to bed. Figures he's got a nurse so he wants to be nursed. I'll nurse *him*."

"Ever work for a detective agency?" Doug grinned at Ma's jerk.

"I'm a practical nurse—" Doug went out the back door.

Pines and a little scrub palmetto crept within thirty feet of the place. Mangroves

made a thick fringe around the key, standing on tangled stilts wherever roots could reach salt water.

Doug picked the clearest of three faint trails. It led northward. Mosquitoes tried to brave the dope on his face, revving up their wings till they whined shrilly.

The path curved for no reason. The ground grew damper. Doug glanced at his watch. As he looked through the scrub he caught sight of Alice's brown back, handkerchief striped. He heard her voice. Something moved beside the girl and was gone.

Doug rounded the curve at a quicker pace. Alice was coming toward him, strolling at a casual rate. She lifted her eyes to him with pleasure. Yeah?

"Who were you talking to?"

Alice widened her eyes in surprise.

"When you lie put your back into it," Doug said. "Lie with your mouth, too."

"I thought you were keeping out of all this—"

He pushed past her. She followed him. He pointed to a large footprint in the mud. A big man's print. Her own track covered it. He cocked his head. Oars rumbled softly in rowlocks ahead. He ran down the path to a narrow beach. A keel had scored the mud. The mangroves screened him in. The boat was safe hidden in the maze.

He turned to face the girl.

"The cock-eyed activities of the human race interest me—up to a point," he said. "The point expires in half an hour."

He showed her his watch. "If you and the others aren't aboard then you can stew in your own mangrove juice. I've business in deeper waters."

"Half an hour," she said. She was not mocking him; her cool blue eyes were full of thought.

"I'm asking you to come," he said. He headed for the pier. She was not following him.

On board the *Osceola* he caught up the binoculars but put them back in the deck locker without raising them to his eyes. X-ray, not mere magnification was needed to pierce that tangle ashore.

"Break out the outboard, Bond," he said. "Hustle!" He lowered the ship's white canvas covered tender overside.

Bond came lugging the motor. "Are we staying—"

"Half an hour," Doug said. "I'm swinging around the key. If—"

From the house on the key came a scream. It ripped the quiet murmur of the wind like a knife through silk. Ma Gort! And she wasn't the screaming kind.

Doug dived down the companionway, caught up the submachine-gun and hit the pier. He slammed in a twelve cartridge clip. Ma Gort dashed out onto the screened porch. Her heavy hand bulged the door's wire mesh and knocked it open. She shrieked words at Doug.

For luck Doug cut around the corner of the house and entered the back door. He started searching the rooms, gun muzzle raised.

Doug halted beside Frank Bullock's bed. There was blood on Bullock's shirt again, a lot more blood than when Doug had seen him stretched out on *Osceola's* deck. This time he was dead.

Ma Gort gabbled at him. Gradually her words became more intelligible. "It's a hemorrhage!" she wailed. "The wound opened up! He died in his sleep."

Doug looked at her. No—Ma Gort wasn't the screaming type. Certainly she wouldn't cut loose merely because she had lost a patient. Doug bent and examined the edges of the thrust through Bullock's chest. His probing eyes switched to the nurse.

"The wound opened up," he said. "Think another spike or a knife helped? That pillow could have stifled his outcry. Have these bandages been replaced? Know murder when you see it?"

"But—there's nobody here!" Ma Gort quavered. "Unless that girl—or Bond—I didn't! I tell you it's just a hemor—"

Doug strode out the back door. The blank scrub met him.

"Alice!" he shouted. "Alice!"

Intently he listened. His eyes silenced Ma Gort.

No answering voice—but somewhere close in this watery wasteland a motor was murmuring softly. A motor going away without making a fuss about it. Not an outboard.

Doug picked a tall pine tree. He dropped the gun at its base and swarmed up. Near the swaying top he slung a leg over a limb and cupped his ears. His face was set.

Nothing but shoal water and the slender,

shiny green tops of mangroves in clumps of varying size showed to the northwest. The unseen boat was winding away through narrow channels. Suddenly the faint sound of the exhaust quit. He wrinkled his face in a fierce attempt to pick it up again. No sound. Stopped!

Doug climbed down. He ran to the edge of the clearing. Bond was hesitating at the foot of the pier. Doug beckoned.

"Search the northeast side for the girl," Doug commanded. "Sing out the minute you strike anything queer."

Old Bond's wistful eyes hung on the gun. Doug shoved it at him and ran down the path where he had surprised Alice and her friend.

There were two keel marks on the mud now. Two! The big man's prints were visible where he had stepped in soft mud to shove the boat off. No other prints. Maybe he had carried her. Doug's lips thinned. That second keel mark in the mud was deeper than the other. Much deeper.

"She didn't go willingly!" he said aloud. "That's certain."

Was it?

VII

DOUG searched. He went winding and twisting rapidly through the fringing belt of mangrove swamp, climbing along on top of the slanting, rib-like roots. Then he bulled through the palmetto and pine belt. He gave the key a fast combing. No girl.

He called Bond to the house. The old man was done up from fighting the scrub with one hand tied down by a gun.

Doug had another look at Frank Bullock's body. Just what had happened was a job for a doctor—a good doctor. He came out with Ma Gort tagging along and locked the front door.

"Bond, can you find your way in the tender to Spanish Channel?" he asked. "If you miss the deep-water route we followed just bear southwest till you hit the markers."

"I can find it, sir. There's a boat compass on board."

"At the highway, flag a car and get to a telephone. Call the sheriff's office at Key West. Tell 'em it looks like murder on Red Crawfish."

"And kidnaping, too!" Ma Gort cried. "Where's Alice—unless she's been murdered?"

"I'm handling it," Doug said.

DOUG IVES finished his sandwich, got his sailing dinghy overside and stepped the mast. He flattened out his detail chart in the bottom and pinned it down with the Reising gun.

The *Osceola* and Red Crawfish Key were silent, deserted. Ma Gort had refused with rising voice to stay with Bullock's body, so Bond had had a passenger in the outboard for the Overseas Highway and civilization.

"Don't make the mistake of running, even if you killed him, Ma," Doug Ives had advised the nurse before he retired to the cabin to study the chart with grim intensity.

The inboard motor he had heard from the top of the pine tree had definitely stopped. The game here in the keys wasn't over.

Doug shoved off from the schooner and hoisted his sail. The east wind, though fluky among the keys, let him steer northwest. He headed deeper into the labyrinth, further from the thin concrete line of civilization toward which Bond and Ma Gort were chugging. Red Crawfish, guarded by a dead man, dropped astern.

At first glance the chart proclaimed his search of this maze of keys and shallows completely hopeless. But small numbers on the chart, indicating depths, narrowed the search to channels where a motorboat drawing about three feet could venture. It was a job of navigation.

He sailed northwestward, rounded a key, lowered mast and sail and raised the centerboard. The southeasterly set of the ebbing tide carried him silently through a waterway, deep enough, but with mangrove roots on either side reaching out to catch his craft. He sat still, steering and thrusting his eyes through unending tangles.

The two keys drew apart. He located himself, made sail again and worked again to the northwestward side of the area he had marked out on the chart. He drove the dinghy hard. He skipped no possible channel.

His eyes sickened of everlasting greenness, shiny green mangrove leaves, light

green shoals. He kept on. The afternoon was going.

He was drifting through a hundred-foot passage. A large key stretched along one side. Two smaller keys, so close together as to look one, made up the other side. Between these two was a narrow slot of water. He stared into the arching greenery. He saw a fleck of white. It hit him like an electric shock.

He stiffened to attention. His boat drifted past. He saw no more of that whiteness.

Quickly he paddled toward the little key, caught hold of the mangrove roots and pulled the boat in under the overhanging branches.

Leaves whispered above him. He looked at the gun, took out the clips and left it on the bottom. Soundlessly he started working his way through the belt of swamp. He needed both hands and feet to make way.

A flash of blue ahead stopped him. He wormed himself down among the roots and waited.

A blue-shirted man with broad shoulders was coming toward him from the direction of the slot.

It was Ray Case. Doug got his feet under him, balanced.

Case had not seen him. He sheered away, moving toward the highest spot on the key. There a couple of spindly pines strained skyward in search of sun.

Case wrapped arms and legs around the thicker trunk and began climbing. Doug let him climb.

Case pulled himself above the canopy of leaves. Doug got going. He kept to the thick mangroves. Circling the island he approached the narrow channel.

Not till he was twenty feet away did he see the motorboat. She was a small, hard used cabin cruiser, the sort of craft men might rent from a commercial fisherman in the keys. The dingy paint on her counter was white only in contrast to the greenness in which she was hidden. There was no small boat secured astern. No rowboat anywhere.

Doug wormed on five feet closer. Somebody was moving briskly about below in the cabin. Doug inched ahead.

Alice Bell came up the companionway. She had a dustpan and brush in her hands. She leaned overside, dumped the litter in

the dustpan and then swept out the receptacle thoroughly.

She heard the scrape of Ray Case's shoes on the rough bark of the pine and lifted her head.

"Any sign of Miller?" she called. Her voice was just loud enough to reach the invisible man in the tree.

"No sign of anybody, Alice," Case answered. "Beyond that clearing I can see the schooner's still at the pier."

Alice went below again.

Doug turned his grim face toward Case's pine tree. He reached it as Case let go his grip and dropped the last few feet.

Doug swung the heavy machine gun clip. It cracked on the point of Case's jaw. Surprise faded from the bony face. Case collapsed.

Rapidly Doug tied his hands behind his back with strips torn from his blue shirt. Then he gagged him. He ran the man's belt around his ankles twice, doubled his legs back and secured them to his bound wrists with doubled shoelaces.

Case was still out when Doug finished the job. Doug propped him against the pine. He swung across roots and jumped into the cockpit of the motorboat.

BELOW, Alice was inspecting a row of canned goods on a shelf behind the alcohol stove.

"Not a decent vegetable in the lot," she said. She glanced up. Her mouth opened in round astonishment.

"I thought you'd been kidnaped," Doug said. He laughed. "My thinking is old-fashioned."

Alice closed her mouth and tilted her reddening face.

"I can look out for myself," she said in a moment. She looked shoreward.

"Tied your new friend up so we can have a quiet talk," Doug said. "Has he fired any more shots at you since you changed sides?"

"Aren't you afraid this solicitude for me will cost you money?"

"Listen, Alice," Doug said tautly. "I want to run my schooner out of here without being pinched by some sucker cops who might accuse me of deserting a sweet, innocent little girl in the wilds."

That made her flush again, anyhow. She

came up the ladder and sat opposite him in the cockpit. Her veiled blue eyes indicated a brain churning erratically in her head.

"Yes; a judge might fine you some money." Her taunt lacked spirit. She touched her neck. "Case fired just to scare us."

Doug lit a cigarette. He studied her in silence. She was silent, too. They stared at each other, neither willing to drop eyes.

"Did Ray Case come back to you on that path on Crawfish just as soon as I left?" he asked.

The girl nodded slowly.

"Were you with him continuously till you both left the key?"

"He rowed in again when I called. He took me out to this cruiser, anchored off the thickest of the mangrove swamp."

"What happened then?"

"Miller went back to Red Crawfish to reconnoiter." Again her head came up in challenge. "Why all these questions?"

"You're in a spot. Reconnoiter isn't the word for Miller's activity. I suspect Bullock's been murdered. Not nicely."

VIII

ALICE sat frozen. Her eyes searched his face frantically. He sat still, cigarette smouldering between his fingers. Let her look. She made a small movement of her hand, a mere twist that somehow conveyed pity for the dead man and repulsion for the crime.

"Miller wouldn't kill him," she asserted. "You don't understand. Miller and Case wanted to win back Bullock to their side, to threaten Rankin with prosecution, to—"

"To shake Rankin down," Doug supplied. "Because Rankin can't stand any adverse publicity just as he launches Rankinton. And you joined them in the squeeze. Just a big business girl."

She did not flush. "Is this an inquiry into my morals?" she asked. "Why not keep to the point? Rankin is here in the keys. That's how Miller and Case found us—by following his car down the Overseas. They lost him near here when they ran out of gas. They learned at the gas station that Rankin had bought Red Crawfish recently so they hired this motorboat.

Rankin could have been hiding on Crawfish as well as Miller! Rankin could have—"

She stopped at the emphatic shake of Doug's head.

"Rankin didn't need to kill Bullock," he said. "Rankin had talked him over—or bought him off. Use your head!"

He waved a hand toward invisible Red Crawfish. "Bullock was killed in such a manner the sheriff may believe his previous wound opened up. Crime laboratories don't grow on mangrove trees. And that would leave Rankin as his killer."

"Self defense, whether Bullock died or not," Alice said. "I saw—"

"Self defense—only on your sayso, though. You're Rankin's witness. And where are you? You've walked into the hands of Rankin's enemies. If they don't think it's safe to buy you they can lose you overside with some chunks of ballast tied to your neck and ankles. Then where is Rankin? Guilty of homicide. Right where they want him. And you?"

Alice's face was white. "Do you suppose I couldn't see that danger? I can look after mys—"

"Don't say it!" Doug was contemptuous. "You're the dizziest little twister I ever ran into. A girl as dumb as you are ought to stay honest for plain self protection."

Her face was flaming now. But suddenly she smiled at him, a forced smile as unnatural as blue mangrove leaves.

"There's a lot of money involved in this," she said. "Miller and Case are very sure they can declare themselves in on Rankinton Glades. It's a whole city. There are fortunes in it for us—and for you, too, if you want."

Doug studied her. His eyes were baffled.

She leaned toward him earnestly. "Miller and Case have something on Rankin. It's big enough, damaging enough to give them the whip hand over him even if he squirms out of this Bullock thing. They've convinced me of that. Why don't you—"

HE laughed. He bent and kissed her be-guiling face. She drew back as if stung.

"You're too bad to be true," he said. "Somehow—"

"I don't care what you think of me!" she blazed. Her voice became softly coaxing

again. "Join us! Stay here on board with me!"

He stared at her. "You do try," he said.

"Let Miller talk to you," she whispered.

"I'll make them both talk and you, too," he said. "Go below. I'm tying you up. Then I'll scoop in Miller and we'll all go see the sheriff."

"You're going to tie me—" She was frightened.

"I can do it the easy way or the hard way," he said. He gripped her arm. "Just as you want it. Behave and I'll let you loose before we get to the sheriff. You don't seem bright enough to make a dangerous criminal."

Desperately she protested:

"You're wasting a chance to make a pile of—"

"There you go again," Doug said. "You've got me typed as a tightwad." He shook his head at her.

"What else are you?" she blazed. "You'd do anything for money!"

"Look!" he said patiently. "D'you think that money I bought *Osceola* with is my own?"

"You act as if it was the only money you ever hoped to have!"

"Except for about four thousand, it's stuff lent me by three fellows who've been shipmates of mine. They're still standing cold tough bridge watches on North Atlantic runs so they can back me and my West Indies trading notion to the limit of their necks. We figure one day we'll buy in other little schooners and they'll take over commands in our company. But meanwhile they'll keep more cash rolling into the gamble. And I'm not spending a nickel without sweating blood. Other men's money! I'm—"

HE STOPPED dead and turned his head. Somebody had dropped an oar or something like it somewhere near the key.

His fingers tightened on her arm. "Yell now and I'll sock you!" he said through his teeth. "I'm collecting Miller."

He leaped from the gunwale to the mangrove roots and swung along to solid ground. At the pines he stopped dead.

Ray Case's bound body was gone. Lashings and all. Gone! He heard the patter of the girl's feet behind him. He ran on,

swerving to the left. The ground stayed dry that way; it looked the easiest way for a bound man to writhe along. No arching roots; just scrub. Brush bent down recently made a plain trail. Doug followed it on the jump, crouching, jamming his way through.

He came out on a limestone outcropping slanting into the water. He grunted suddenly.

Alice, scrambling close behind him, bumped into him but he paid no attention. He splashed into the water.

Under the surface at a depth of two feet lay the bound figure of Ray Case. A myriad of inquisitive little fish darted away. The body had been there some minutes. The little fish had already started work. Barracuda had not yet arrived. Doug dragged the soggy figure up onto the limestone and heard a shuddering gasp from Alice.

The man was dead—drowned. Doug pushed his pocketknife into Alice's hands. For a moment he tested the tension of the bonds.

"Cut him loose!" he commanded.

He waded out into the water. The bottom turned soft. He ploughed out, eyes raking the mangroves, the nearby keys, the shallows. A primeval landscape unblemished by sight of man. He listened intently. Nothing but the whisper of the mangrove leaves.

He slogged back to shore. Alice's eyes were big as they lifted to him. She had rolled Case's body onto his chest and started artificial respiration. Doug took his useless turn. The man had been too long under water to have a chance. Dead.

Doug stopped. He examined the ties Alice had cut. He spent time on the knots.

The girl, too was silent but her eyes were accusing.

"He didn't loosen these lashings himself," Doug said. "Somebody dragged him here and drowned him; then slacked off the bonds to make it look as if he was trying to escape."

Alice shivered. "How can you be sure?"

"I know lines and knots." Doug's voice was curt. "I didn't give him any scope. Murder! As nasty a murder as Bullock's."

"Miller didn't do this," Alice said. "Miller isn't a lone wolf. He has the brains, but he depended on Ray Case to back him up. He needed Case."

She looked at him gravely.

"How do I know you didn't drop him in the water after you tied him up?" she asked.

Doug returned her look. "You know," he said.

A crab crept out of a hole in the mud beyond the outcropping of limestone. Its eyes on their unpleasant stalks veered toward the prostrate form.

"The sheriff may not believe you," Alice said.

"He won't," said Doug. "Not unless I wrap up this whole thing."

He bent and slung the body over his shoulder. He fought his way back to the motorboat. He lowered the dead man onto a bunk, ascended the ladder and tossed a piece of green netting over the companionway. He opened the motor hatch and removed the rotor from the distributor.

"What are you going to do?" Alice asked. Her hands were clenched. Her face was woeful; full of weary perplexity.

He stopped dead. "Changing sides again?"

Her head lifted. She was trembling with anger.

"I'm on my side—nobody else's! You're Rankin's man!"

HE IGNORED the taunt. "Stay here or come with me," he said. "Interfere in what I do and I'll still tie you up."

He grabbed at a mangrove sapling and swung off the afterdeck. When he reached solid ground on the key she was close behind him.

"You need watching!" she said defiantly. "I'll do it—free!"

In silence they crossed the key and worked through the tangle to his dinghy. In continuing silence he stepped the mast and they launched the boat. She sat forward, as far away from him as she could get. She looked exhausted but still ready to fight.

He sailed toward Red Crawfish Key. The ebb tide now was running slower. The wind was dropping with the sun.

Abruptly Doug cocked his head. The girl's eyes jumped to his. He nodded, frowning.

"That was a shot—Red Crawfish way. Want to go back?"

Disdainfully she tilted her nose. The dinghy ruffled on.

IX

A SHOT. Not the bellow of a shotgun as some hunter tried to knock over a bird. Hunters and fishermen had not existed that day in this remote section. Doug studied his chart and altered course to northward. He clung to a neighboring key and swept suddenly out into sight of the untamed northerly end of Red Crawfish. His eyes raked the everlasting mangroves. Nothing; not even a stray crane or heron.

He sailed on, well away from Crawfish's green fringe. Alice was peering into the shadowy depths, too. As the swamp curved to the west his eyes jumped to shallows, a sort of middle ground between the next bits of land.

An edge of board, perhaps a bit of flotsam, was hung up on the sand. Queerly it was standing on edge. Doug headed for it. The side of a submerged rowboat.

He brought the dinghy into the wind. In the boat's bottom were piled chunks of coral. Not quite enough to prevent the current from dragging it.

"That's Miller's boat," Alice said. Her eyes were frightened. "He wouldn't get rid of himself. Rankin did that!"

Doug nodded. He stood up for a better look. He saw nothing else. He sailed back to Red Crawfish and around to the cleared southern shore.

Osceola lay as he had left her alongside the spidery pier. The lawn in front of the fishing camp was empty. The house where Frank Bullock's body sprawled on the bed stood solitary among the cocopalms. As Doug beat up toward the schooner he saw a tiny craft alongside her. The little boat was deserted. On the wide counter was fastened an outboard motor. Doug had a long look at that outboard.

"One of the new type—noiseless," he said to the girl.

"Could it—be the sheriff's?" Alice suggested dubiously.

"No." That wasn't how sheriffs investigating murder traveled.

He kept the dinghy going and passed outside the schooner.

"Anybody aboard?" he called softly.

Nobody came from below to answer that hail. Nobody appeared in the clearing or came out along the curving pier. No birds

rose. The house maintained its silence. Red Crawfish seemed to sleep.

Doug eyed the silent woods behind the clearing with deep distrust. He put the dinghy on the starboard tack.

"Aren't you going to land?" Alice's voice was hushed.

"No."

"Are you afraid?" Definitely disdainful. "Yes."

He sailed around the southern shore, beat up past another key to eastward, rounded that key and spoke to Alice.

"Let go the halyard."

The sail came down. He unstepped the mast. With an oar he ran the boat among the roots. The little key was between them and the shore of Red Crawfish.

"Miller may be dead," Alice whispered suddenly. "Or he may have waded to another key after Rankin found his boat."

"One man on a key need not be silent," Doug said.

"That shot!" said Alice.

"It's an easy wade to the north shore of Red Crawfish," Doug said. "I may have to retreat here. You'll be safe this far away whichever side you're on now."

With the toe of his sneaker he tapped the tommy gun suggestively. "It's on semi-automatic. If you want to fire a burst put that jigger on FA—full automatic."

"Aren't you taking it?"

He shook his head. "Dead men can't talk. I'm not killing."

He eased himself overside. In water too shoal for swimming he went crawling toward the swamp north shore of Red Crawfish. These mangroves seemed full of peer-ing faces.

He crept in among the roots. He stopped to listen and to breath. He glanced back at the little key he had just left.

He saw his dinghy. Alice was letting the current take it down toward this shore. Her eyes were searching for him.

He cursed softly. Alice spotted him. She paddled into a shallow curve near him and lowered the anchor over, without a splash. The dinghy brought up. Alice lifted the gun to her lap and clasped her hands over her knee in an attitude of waiting.

Through the arching roots Doug eyed the girl. Scared but she had followed.

"Maybe she's out for a chance to plug

me in the back," he muttered. But he didn't believe it. A spunky, cross-grained, enigmatic little devil, for all her good looks. "Crooked as a mangrove root," he added uncertainly. "She must be."

He crept into the green gloom of the interior. Five feet in he could no longer see the boat. She was probably safe enough. He slipped on through the failing light, stopping often to listen. The key was waiting for something. For murder?

He estimated the situation. With the air still the crucial sense would be hearing. The man who listened most should come through. He squirmed along like a snake, with ears straining.

From behind him came a cry. Alice's voice! On top of it, almost simultaneous, a splash.

Doug sprang to his feet and whirled. He went crashing through the mangroves toward the boat.

Alice was in the water, floundering about with turns of the sheet around her legs. The sail was half over her.

Miller, clothes muddy and tattered, was dragging his squat body into the dinghy. He grabbed frantically at the anchor line to cast off.

Doug hit the shallow water in a flat dive. He put all he had into it. His body planed toward the boat.

Near it, Doug lifted head and reaching arms.

The boat was drifting. Miller caught up the tommy gun. His snaky black eyes gleamed.

Doug's hands closed on the gunwale. Miller struck out at Doug's head. Doug jerked sideways. The short barrel thudded on his shoulder. Miller lifted it for another blow.

Doug flung his weight on the gunwale. The round-bottomed craft rocked violently. The gunwale went under. Miller dropped the gun. It clattered into the bottom as he grabbed at the thwart to save himself.

Doug's arm reached in. His finger closed on Miller's throat. Miller let go of the thwart. His right arm dug in under his torn shirt and dragged at a shoulder-holster.

Again Doug brought his weight down on the gunwale. Miller, toppling out of the boat, flung his body at Doug.

Driven under, Doug remained sub-

merged in the shallow water and dragged Miller with him. They writhed and fought. Miller had a squat man's strength.

Doug wrenched his head up and gulped some air before Miller could pull him under. He shifted grips and flattened out on top of Miller. Before his wind went he pinned Miller's gun arm down on bottom with his knee.

Miller weakened. No air. Doug jerked a revolver from Miller's fingers and tore himself from Miller's other hand.

Doug's eyes darted toward shore. Miller was kicking and clawing spasmodically to get his head up. Doug jammed him under. The last of the man's strength was going.

Alice had freed herself from the line and the sail. She was shame-faced and dripping.

"He dumped me in," she panted. "He must have been h-hiding down there under the mangroves and came up outside—"

Doug nodded toward the drifting boat. "Get it."

He lifted Miller's head and let him breathe. He smelled the muzzle of the .38 revolver. It was wet. He could make out no lingering odor of gunpowder. He broke the gun. Six cartridges, unfired. He put them into a pocket already weighted down by one of the Reising gun clips.

"A hell of a businessman you are," he said severely to his gasping prisoner. "Revolver! Shoulder-holster!"

"Rankin—responsible—for all this violence!" Only extreme effort enabled Miller to get the words out between gulps.

Doug grunted and rubbed his aching shoulder.

"Including Bullock's murder?" he asked.

"Yes, of course!" Miller said. Then—"Is he dead?"

"A little late," Doug said critically. "Is he dead?" should have come first."

Miller's eyes blinked. He said no more. He had said too much.

X

ALICE waded up current towing the boat. "Get aboard, bail her and tuck that blasted tommy gun away forward," Doug told her. "It blows brains out, not in."

Alice obeyed in silence.

Doug embarked his prisoner, shoving him

into the stern. He tossed Miller's empty revolver forward, under Alice's feet.

"Guns!" he growled and took the oars. "They never kill trouble."

Miller's eyes turned fearfully toward Red Crawfish. He slipped off the seat and huddled in the bottom.

"Afraid of Seminoles?" Doug asked.

"Rankin," Miller whispered. His hands and his lips were working. "He tried to shoot me. He stole or destroyed my boat. He was stalking me in that swamp. That's why I wanted your boat. To get away."

"He dumped me out," Alice said.

"I'm sorry," Miller said. "I had no time for explanations. My life was at stake."

Doug headed up current and rounded the easterly shore.

"I got over-excited," Miller said. "That's why I threatened you with my revolver."

"What were you doing on Rankin's key?" Doug asked.

"I wanted to get Bullock out of Rankin's grasp," Miller said. His eyes peered at the mangroves. "Poor Frank wasn't safe with that man. He's dead, you say?"

"Don't bear down," Doug said. "A slip's a slip."

Miller waved a hand at Alice. "As Miss Bell will tell you, Ray Case and I followed Rankin down to rescue Frank Bullock."

"Not to make sure Bullock died of his wound? Not to get hold of Alice so you could slap a charge of murder against Rankin if he wouldn't split Rankinton Glades?"

"Certainly not," Miller said. "We didn't even complain about Rankin to the Miami police for his assault on Bullock."

"Can't have a man pinched and black-mail him, too," Doug said.

Unexpectedly Alice spoke. Her voice was cajoling.

"Why not be frank, Mr. Miller? What did you know about Rankin in the first place that gave you a hold on him?"

Doug glanced over his shoulder. Alice had bent to one side to look past him into Miller's face. Her eyes were wide, her lips parted as she waited.

MILLER stirred uneasily in the bottom of the boat.

"That's a private matter—a business matter. As I told you when you joined us I can't go into it."

Alice's shoulders drooped.

Doug wrinkled his forehead. He rowed on.

"Where are you taking me?" Miller asked.

"The sheriff ought to be here soon," Doug said.

Miller nodded. "He can't get here too soon. Aside from my panicky struggle in trying to escape from the key I can be charged with nothing."

"You may be right," Doug said impartially. "That Bullock killing was pretty slick."

Miller ignored this. "I believe Rankin knew we were trailing him down the keys. Yes! He lured Ray Case and me here to murder us rather than settle our—our claim."

"Quite a claim," Doug said.

Abruptly Miller was silent.

Doug pulled around the long curve of the key. The *Osceola* came into sight at the spidery pier. The small outboard still lay beside her.

The law had not arrived from Key West. Red Crawfish still slept under the slanting light of the evening sun.

Doug put the dinghy alongside the schooner's quarter. He took the dinghy's line and swung himself aboard the ship.



Alice and Miller sat still in opposite ends of the boat. Alice looked crumpled, Miller confident.

Doug secured the painter. "Hand me the hardware," he said to Alice. He dumped

the two guns on the schooner's deck. He reached down a long arm and lifted the weary girl aboard.

"Climb!" he said to Miller.

The squat man scrambled up over the rail. His face was bland. "The sooner that sheriff—" His voice cut off. His black eyes fixed on *Osceola's* companionway.

Big Mark Rankin stood there.

"You caught him!" Rankin said to Doug. "Good work, son! I spotted him skulking in the mangroves and fired at him but he got away from me."

He showed them a key and inclined his head soberly toward the camp. "I had seen what he did in theah. It didn't fool me. Murder! Brutal! Horrible! Only a jailbird could do a thing like that. I knew it was Miller's work right off."

Rankin's voice had gone Southern. He walked across the deck and scooped up the submachine-gun. "I don't feel safe against a snake like that without a gun in my hands. I sho' don't."

"Miller killed Bullock," Doug said. He leaned back against the rail. "Making a jury believe he did it will be something else."

Rankin shook his head, cradling the gun against his forearm.

"He killed his wounded pa'tner in cold blood. A desperate attempt to involve me with the authorities."

"Bullock was doomed by both sides," Doug said sternly. "A wounded man—an easy target for amateurs frantic enough to kill for a fortune in one deal."

"Don't connect me with it!" Rankin said. "I'm shocked at you, son!"

"Wait till the sheriff comes!" Miller cried. "You wanted to shut up, Bullock! Why wasn't there anybody here before the schooner arrived? I'll bet you took your guide off in that outboard so you'd have one less witness around when you went for Bullock and then for me and Case. Well, I'm still alive!"

He pointed at Alice, watching them with weary eyes, and spoke to Doug Ives, resting his thighs against the ship's rail.

"With this girl on his side Rankin knew it was safer to kill Bullock than let him live to accuse him of a previous crime!"

Alice's blue eyes came to life. She waited breathlessly.

"There's a bit in what you say, Miller,"

said Doug. His voice was impartial, almost uninterested. "While you were waiting for Rankin to show up on Red Crawfish, Ray Case got himself killed on that little key northwest of here."

Miller's black eyes swung to Doug. "Ray Case—killed?"

Doug Ives nodded. "Murdered. That's two of you gone."

His gaze rested incuriously upon Mark Rankin, who was fidgeting with the sub-machine-gun. "Two out of three. Or one to go, if you prefer."

Rankin's face twitched. "You're sure he was killed?" he asked.

Doug's mouth was hard. "Dead sure."

Miller's squat body was shaking. His teeth closed on his pendulous upper lip. Abruptly he got hold of himself. He faced Rankin.

"I'm not afraid of your gun, Rankin," he said hoarsely. "Not now. You're too bright to kill me in front of witnesses—or to massacre them with me. You do your murders in private, don't you?"

He took a step toward Doug Ives. "Rankin's beaten me, in a way," he said. "With Case dead I know he's not bluffing. He won't split on Rankinton Glades. There's a couple of millions in that place and he isn't dividing. I know that now. He's hipped on the thing. The profit's got to be all his."

HE LOOKED over his shoulder at Mark Rankin. "I'm going to talk," he said. "Why don't you shoot, Mark? Is it because they won't let you take your Rankinton Glades cleanup with you to hell? I'm going to talk, Mark."

Alice was beside Doug at the rail. Involuntarily her fingers touched his arm, a mute appeal to him not to move, not to speak.

Mark Rankin sighed. He looked down at his feet. The gun sagged on his arm. His fingers shook.

"I'm tired," he muttered. The drawl was gone. "Tired and nervous. Jittery, maybe. I'm not used to violence. I'm a peaceable business man—not—"

"Here's how peaceable he is!" Alden Miller cried. "He sunk his money in Rankinton Glades—all of it—plenty! He knew what a tough spot Miami people were in for places to live—thousands of them. And

he was going to give them houses. He slapped his own name on the thing to make it seem decent. They had to have places to live—and they'd be working, sweating for him years after they bought at his prices."

"Why doesn't the sheriff come?" said Rankin. He slumped down on the wheelbox. "Why don't you stop this man, Ives? Can't you see he's lying, taunting me, trying to stir me up into assaulting him?"

"I'll stir you up like poor old Paul Underwood did!" Miller cried. His eyes came back to Doug. "Underwood, one of Miami's pioneer developers, heard about Rankin's prices. He was a realtor with a heart—there are some. He went to Rankin, made clear through, and told him to tone down his prices or he'd spring a decent development on better, dryer land right alongside Rankinton Glades.

Miller pointed a finger at the motionless man on the wheelbox. "He thought Underwood was bluffing. But Paul Underwood meant it. He had enough money to sink Rankin in any price war. He got busy. He was set to launch his own development, to start building houses within a week of the time Rankin cut loose with publicity on Rankinton Glades."

The squat man's black eyes gleamed at Rankin. They shifted mockingly to the gun he clutched. "I'm talking, Mark. I'm enjoying myself at last. Well, Rankin suddenly realized Underwood would break him into little pieces. When Underwood paid him a final visit that evening out there on his empty stretch of Glades country—"

Rankin leapt up. His voice was shrill, almost hysterical.

"I can't stand here and listen to this crook revile me! You guard him, Ives! Take this gun, boy, before I blow his lying head off! Take it!"

He thrust the gun toward Doug, held away from him with both arms horizontally across his body. His right hand was twitching beside the trigger guard. Both hands were shaking. The barrel, pointing toward Miller, dipped.

XI

DOUG shoved off from the rail with both hands. He leaped across the deck. His fingers were inches from the gun when

it roared. On full automatic, it began gushing out the whole contents of the clip. The gun jumped wildly in Rankin's grip.

Steel-jacketed slugs tore past Doug's head. He knocked the muzzle skyward and wrenched the gun from Rankin's unresisting grasp.

Slowly Alden Miller put both hands on his stomach. His knees bent; he sagged and collapsed on the deck.

"It suddenly fired—kept on firing—" Rankin screamed.

Doug straight-armed him back to the wheelbox and droppd to his knees beside Miller.

The man was smiling. His black eyes shone brilliantly. His hands clutched tighter at his middle. Sweat beads grew on his forehead.

"Clever!" he murmured. "Always clever—Mark Rankin. Listen you—and the girl—listen! Mark Rankin killed Underwood with his car. We didn't see it—but—we guessed—and then we got the evidence. Rankin ran him down out there."

The eyes glittered. "Murder," he muttered and was still a moment. After that rush of words his lips failed him.

Rankin, standing by the wheelbox, stirred. Doug glanced up, gripping the gun like a club. Rankin stood still.

"Rankin put the old man's body in his car," Miller gasped on. "After dark—drove to the Tamiami canal—jammed the body down on the front of a fisherman's parked car. The fisherman came back—drove away. The body bumped off when he hit the railroad track—fell under the wheels. Man thought it was the rails—drove on—people saw—caught as a hit-run driver. Rankin safe."

"All this—" Rankin began.

Doug looked. Rankin stopped talking.

"I know he got me," Miller muttered. "I'm dying. I'm telling truth—all of it. So you'll know it's truth—I confess I killed Frank Bullock. A marlinespike—same size—threw it in the swamp."

He coughed. "A chance—for too much money. It knocked me—and Case—off balance."

He struggled painfully to breathe. "Proof!" he whispered. "We grabbed Rankin's car—while he was driving Underwood's—away from Rankinton." The words

were coming slower. "Bloodstains in it—marks on the front—bit of Underwood's coat caught in the grille—all there. Proof. We had him—but—"

He was trying hard now. "We—hid—the car—in—Glades—three—miles—"

His mouth dribbled into stillness. The black eyes closed.

"Fainted," Doug said to Alice. He moved Miller's hands slightly from his stomach. "He's taken two slugs. Get the first-aid kit from the toilet room and blankets. Quick!"

Alice darted below.

"Let me help—" Rankin began.

"Stay right there on deck," Doug said. "I want you in sight. Chatter and I'll put you out."

Alice came back. Doug cut away the tattered shirt. Together they slipped the cotton pads into place over the wounds above and below Miller's body. The flow of blood was checked.

"Guns!" Doug said to the girl. "I hate 'em! I let Rankin take this one because it might speed up the talk. I was sure there was no cartridge in the chamber."

"I cocked it after you'd left me in the dinghy," Alice said. "I thought you knew."

"Guns!" said Doug. "When amateurs get rough!" With great distaste he picked up Miller's .38, pulled the cartridges from his pocket and reloaded the gun. He looked at Rankin; then tucked the revolver in his pocket.

"We've got to get Miller to a doctor," he said to Alice. He switched on the ignition and started the motor.

"Miller must tell just where that bloody car is hidden to hang Underwood's killing on Rankin," Doug told Alice under cover of the motor's rumbling. "Rankin will have fancy lawyers. Proving he drowned Ray Case—or even deliberately shot Miller—"

He shook his head and then bent anxiously beside the blanket-covered body. Miller's face was gray.

"He has lost a lot of blood," Alice said.

DOUg looked overside at the bottom. The tide had dropped.

"Cast off the bow line," he said, flipping a line off a bollard on the pier. "Can't swing her till I get into deeper water."

He rammed the motor into reverse and speeded up when Alice let go forward. He put over the wheel slowly.

The schooner hung against the piling. He opened the throttle wider. The propeller was sucking cloudy water off the bottom in under her stern. The schooner did not move.

Doug caught up the boathook. He planted it against a pile and shoved mightily. Forward Alice pushed her hardest.

THE schooner inched astern. Doug strained to keep her coming. He jerked his head around.

Mark Rankin had glided like a phantom from the rail. He was beside Miller's body, bending over it. His arm was slipping in under the blankets, moving toward the first-aid pads that dammed the of Miller's life blood.

Mark Rankin's face was not a very pleasant sight.

Doug whirled, boathook in hands. He swung with all his might at Rankin's head as the man jerked eyes at him. He swung as hard as Ray Case had swung that day in Biscayne Bay.

The thick shaft cracked against Rankin's skull above his ear. He went staggering aft. His heavy body was ahead of his wavering legs.

His foot hooked against the low taffrail and he went sprawling overside.

The propeller churned on, hard astern. The timbers of the schooner shuddered and shuddered again as if those heavy blades had slashed into a solid hunk of driftwood.

Up forward Alice dropped down upon the deck, hands screening her eyes. Between the piles and the ship's side the muddy water sliding past had taken on a brownish tinge.

Doug cut the motor. He leaned over the stern. He caught a glimpse of Rankin's body, jammed between the keel and the bottom.

"Look after Miller," he called to the girl. When she stood up, conquering her faintness, he jumped overside.

The muddy water was clearing. What he saw told him there was no need to hurry to save Mark Rankin from drowning. The propeller blades had seen to that.

XII

DOUG IVES steered *Osceola* through narrow channels. The sun had dropped under to westward, drawing the color out of the shallows. The trick was to get her into deeper water before dusk became dark.

Out of sight far ahead the sheriff of Monroe County, in a fast motorboat, was speeding Alden Miller to a doctor.

First things came first with the sheriff. Lengthy examinations were out. Quick medical aid would revive the squat man and perhaps save his life. Miller would supply precious answers.

The sheriff had three dead men, Frank Bullock, Ray Case and Mark Rankin, stretched companionably under an awning on the foredeck and in Key West those three bodies would need much explaining. He was driving her.

Up forward on *Osceola* was one of the sheriff's deputies, conning her past shoals with a keen eye and a keener memory. Down below, drinking a cola, was another. Mild-mannered men, both of them. The one below was talking soothingly to Bond and Ma Gort about turtle steak. Yes, Ma was an agency girl, just obeying Rankin. She hadn't been in on anything.

Doug stood at the wheel and Alice sat silent in a deck chair. They did no talking as the schooner left the shallows behind and entered Hawk Channel in the darkness of the night.

Bond came up with sandwiches and coffee. They ate in silence, with little appetite. The deputies changed places and the moon came up. Doug looked hard at the moon.

"You and I have to get squared away, Alice," he said abruptly. "There's no sense in complicating this mess at Key West with what I thought of you or you thought of me."

Alice inclined her head. "It's tangled enough."

"I'll admit it made me sore," Doug said, "seeing a nice—seeing you trying to get a job with Rankin by—impressing him."

"By throwing myself at him," Alice said. Doug did not object. "The way you pretended to be afraid, anxious to hide on *Osceola*—that was hard to take, too."

"Yes."

"Making up to Bullock on our run to Red Crawfish! And when we got there, deliberately going off with Case and Miller." He fired it at her fast. "Changing sides! Throwing in with them to hold up Rankin! Trying to talk me into joining the game after I jumped Case! I had a right to be suspicious of you."

"You still have," Alice said calmly.

"No."

The schooner thrust on through the smooth sea. The lights of Key West were showing.

"No?" Alice was startled.

"Give me enough time and I get almost bright," Doug said. He sounded savage; he meant to be savage. "Even when I'm not trusted to have ordinary decency."

"Ordinary decency!" Alice was indignant. "Why should I have trusted you? You acted as if you'd do a couple of murders to buy this ship cheaply. How was I to know it wasn't your money? Trust you? Pretending to be afraid of guns!"

"Pretending nothing!" said Doug fervently. "I hate the things—both ends of 'em. I—"

"You seem to get along all right."

"Well, I have the schooner," Doug said. "I haven't lost the bill of sale. Once the sheriff gets through asking questions—"

He flung a hand to the far southeast, where the West Indies lay under this same moon. "I know where I can pick up a couple of sticks for her. There's nothing wrong with the sails in that locker forward. "I'll be starting my job."

Alice said nothing at all.

"You've come through, too," Doug said. "I'm certain."

From forward the deputy cried out:

"Motorboat a-coming! Might be the sheriff backtrackin'."

"I see him!" Doug answered.

"How do you know—or care—whether I've come through?" Alice asked wearily. "You'll go sailing off—"

"No!" Doug said. "I can stand by, too."

The fast moving red, green and white lights ahead swerved, turned sharply and a motorboat ranged alongside. The lean face of the sheriff showed on the bridge deck.

Doug moved toward the side, gripping one spoke of the wheel with a long arm.

"How about it, Sheriff?" he called. "Have

you got Thomas Bell out of that skyscraper jail?"

Alice Bell gave a little cry. She sprang from her chair to lean over the rail toward the man from Key West.

"Sho' did," bellowed the sheriff. "Bell's out in custody o' his lawyer till we get this house cleaned. Called the Miami chief on this boat's radio-phone like you wanted me to an' started him peckin' over that hit-run charge."

He was grinning. His teeth gleamed in the moonlight.

"Miller come to in the hospital an hour ago. They let me in. He talked—told us wheah Rankin's car's at. Won't be no mo' trouble fo' Bell. You foller me—I got a berth ready fo' you."

The motorboat sheered away and ran ahead.

Alice waved at the sheriff. Uncertainly she turned toward Doug.

"Your eyes shine just like the sheriff's teeth," Doug said.

"You knew!" she said.

"Finally," he said. "There had to be some reason for your stringing that bunch, now one, now another. After I got under your adventuress pose I knew it had to be an honest reason—a big one. Not money. Nothing fancy like revenge. A reason that fitted you."

He laughed softly. "I nearly burned out my hand, trying to figure what would make you stand those mugs. I went back over everything again and again. At last I dredged up the name of the poor fellow in jail for hitting old Underwood and running away. I'd read his name—Thomas Bell. Bell! And your name was Alice Bell! Stupidity is my specialty. I suppose you couldn't change your name because it was Alice Bell on references you'd brought to show Mark Rankin. On top of all the other risks you had to gamble that he wouldn't connect you with—"

"Rankin wouldn't be interested in who his chance victim was," Alice said. "I had to risk—"

"Long chances," Doug said.

"Dad's not well," she said. "That's why he's down here in Florida, resting, fishing, taking it easy. And I knew that horrible jail—I'd read about it—would kill him. They made the bail terribly high because

poor old Paul Underwood was so loved in Miami."

She clenched her hands. "They were all against Dad. I had to get him out—I had to! I had a right to use any device, take any risk."

"I don't understand how you got onto Rankin."

"If it wasn't just an accident somebody had murdered Underwood. A cowardly hit-run driver would have run, not risk putting the body on the front of another man's car. No, it was somebody who had had to kill Underwood in such a way nobody would suspect murder."

DOUG nodded. "So you hunted for someone under strong compulsion to kill Underwood?"

"I had done newspaper work. I knew some newspaper people. I soon picked up whispers about Underwood's action against Rankinton Glades prices. I looked for Rankin out at his development. I found him on his yacht—with three associates quarreling with him, trying to blackmail him about something."

Alice drew a quick breath. "I was sure then I was on the right track. I had to watch these men somehow. It didn't matter what they thought of me; it didn't matter which side I was on—both sides were dirty. I tried Bullock first. He suspected me. Then I joined Case and Miller."

"Just when Rankin went to work to wipe them out," Doug added. "Rankinton Glades had to be all his. Having killed Underwood and been caught he was tough enough to know he had to wipe out the three who

knew or at least Miller and Case. If he started paying they'd strip him. So he lured Miller and Case down to where murder was safer."

He put a knee against the wheel, laid his hands on the girl's shoulders and turned her face around to the moonlight. "It wouldn't have helped your father get out of jail if those amateur thugs had discovered who you were and why—"

Alice tilted her head. "I can take care of my—"

"Don't say it!" Doug said. "Here, steer her, will you?"

He pushed her behind the wheel. She gave a spoke and the *Osceola* eased back directly behind the piloting motorboat. Somebody—probably that fisherman father—had certainly taught her about boats.

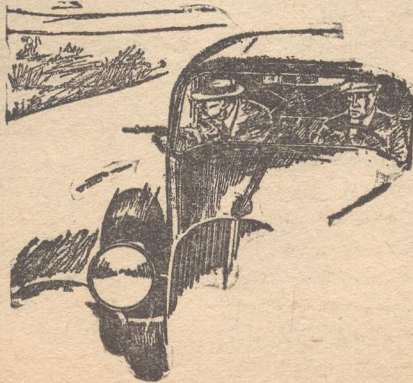
Doug sighed loudly. "It will cost me good money to hire somebody who can handle her like that," he said. "I bet you can cook in a tough, jumping seaway, too."

"There's a limit to what a man should do to save money for his pals," Alice said. Her voice was small and somewhat shaky. "Go hire a crew."

His hands covered her hands on the spokes.

"Even if I had to teach you to steer—even if I had to do the rough-weather cooking—even if I couldn't trust you to stand by like a rock in trouble—I'd still love you, Alice," Doug said.

The schooner *Osceola* went edging far off course in the moonlight. Only when the sheriff hailed did they come to. It took them both at the wheel, arms interlocked, to bring her back into the channel.



Cowards



How Much Nerve Do You Have to Have to Be a Coward?

SALLY LAMAR sat on the warped steps of a sand-blasted shack in Silver City, hunched over, her hands locked around her calico-clad legs, eyes staring into space. Sally was only twenty-two, but a lot of life had passed in those twenty-two years. The hollow sound of hammering beat upon her ears. Over there, scarcely two blocks away, they were building a scaffold—to hang her husband. To Sally it was unjust, unthinkable, damnably horrible—but it was the law.

She could still see those twelve, grim-faced men, filing into the jury box at the court house. They didn't look at her. In fact, they didn't look at anybody. And there was Judge Evans, shaky, old as time, fumbling for his glasses, as the foreman intoned their verdict—murder in the first degree.

By W. C. TUTTLE

They didn't delay things in Silver City. Dimly she heard the husky, cracked voice of the old judge—. . . hanged by the neck, until you are dead, and may the Lord have mercy—"

That was two weeks ago, and yet, now, she tried to cry out against such a verdict. It was morning now. Tomorrow morning—he would be gone. At daylight. One more day—less than twenty-four hours. Her hands gripped tightly. There were no tears. That was something of the past. People, walking on the narrow, wooden sidewalk, averted their heads as they went past. It seemed to Sally that they had always done that. But she didn't mind. She could see the top of the twelve-foot, tight-board fence they had erected around the scaffold at the rear of the jail. Behind that fence they were hammering, hammering—

Sally got to her feet and leaned against a porch post. She was pretty, even in the cheap dress, her face devoid of make-up, her hair unkempt. Sally was no weak-kneed, clinging-vine. She knew life. What would a girl be doing as a honkatonk singer, unless she knew all the angles?

But Sally had never been a bad girl, unless singing in a honkatonk show made a girl bad. True, she had bad associations—but that was all. She could hold her head up. Orphaned at an early age, she was blessed with beauty and a good voice. It was not easy to make an honest living in the cities in that era. Sally joined a traveling musical show and sang on kerosene-lighted stages all over the West, until the show stranded in Frisco. It was every girl for herself after that. Hash-slinging in mining camps, a few jobs in burlesque, but the cheap honkatonk shows got the bulk of them.

Against the wishes of Hank Lamar, the hardest sheriff they ever had in Silver City, Jack Lamar, young, handsome, devil-may-care, married Sally McLean. Some said it broke Hank Lamar's heart, but others pointed out that it would be impossible to break something that Hank Lamar never had.

And now Jack Lamar was to die for the murder of Grant Ellers, a gambler—and Hank Lamar, his father, would have to do the job. It was the duty of the sheriff—and Hank Lamar never shirked his official

duty. Hank was as hard as the tempered points on the drills that drove holes in the rocky depths of the Silver City mines.

It seemed that Grant Ellers had made a slurring remark about Sally, prompted, no doubt, by the fact that Grant Ellers was also in love with Sally. Jack Lamar, hot-headed, came to blows with the gambler, who was much larger than Jack, and gave Jack a whipping. An hour later, in his room at the Ajax Hotel, Grant Ellers was shot to death. The lethal weapon, a Colt .45, was found in the hallway, and the gun bore Jack Lamar's initials. Jack had no defense, no alibi. He merely said that after the fight, he got on his horse and rode away. The jury didn't believe that. In fact, in all that country, Sally was the only one, except for Jack, to believe it.

AND now there was only twenty-four hours left. As Sally stood there against the post, staring at nothing, a man came along the wooden sidewalk, walking very slowly. Her eyes gradually focused on him, as he halted at the sagging gate. It was Hank Lamar, the sheriff. Hank was a huge man, strong as a horse, his iron-gray hair was worn long, curling in past his ears. The upper half of his hard, deeply-lined face was shaded by his sombrero. He wore two guns, sagging low along his heavy thighs.

He had never been in their home, never been near it, until this time. Now he turned slowly and came toward her. Sally wanted to run away from him, but she clung to the post, ignoring him, looking over his head, until he loomed up close to her. They started hammering over there again, and he slowly turned his head to look toward the fence. Then he turned and stared at her again.

"Why did you come here?" she asked, not looking at him. Her voice was tensed, husky.

"Why?" He slowly passed his huge, gnarled fingers across his mouth. She could hear the grit of hand palm across his stubble.

"I've got yuh a ticket—on the night stage—to Dry Lake," he said slowly. "You can go on from there. Yuh see—" he hesitated for several moments, "there's nothin' here for you."

He placed the ticket and a few bills on the porch-rail. Sally said, "You think I'm a coward, too, eh?"

"Too?" he asked quietly. Sally nodded, her lips compressed for a moment. Then she said:

"With all the other bad things you've thought of me."

"Oh!" said the sheriff softly. "Well, yuh better go."

"There's nothing left for me—here," she said in a monotone. "That's what you think, Hank Lamar. I love Jack—and where there's life, there's hope."

He studied her silently for several moments, before he said:

"There's no hope. Don't yuh see—" Suddenly his tone changed. "Listen to me, you little fool! Yo're goin' out on that stage! Do you think I want you standin' here at sunrise?"

"Who is the coward?" she asked quietly. She saw his big hands knot into fists, his knuckles whiten under the strain.

He turned away and went slowly back to the sidewalk, where he went on toward the main street, not even looking back. Sally's eyes shifted to the few bills and the ticket to Dry Lake. One of the bills had fallen into an old bush, and she had to dig it out. She looked at the money and at the ticket.

Suddenly she lifted her head and laughed, but without mirth. They were hammering over there again. Slowly she went into the house, searched and found paper and ink.

HANK LAMAR went down to his little office. The main street was foggy with dust from ore wagons, freighters, riders. Silver City was not just a boom camp, it was established. At the office he met Dunc Harrison, his deputy. Dunc was lanky, lean, turkey-necked.

"Ol' Man Ferris was down from the bank a while ago, Hank," he said. "Says we ain't doin' nothin' about that bank robbery last week. He's hankerin' for action. Says if we don't do somethin', he'll take it up with the commissioners. He's gettin' runty about it."

Hank looked bleakly at Dunc and shook his head.

"Maybe they don't realize—" He drew a deep breath, "You tell Ferris I'll be doin' somethin' about it . . . after tomorrow."

"Yeah, I'll tell him—if I'm here, Hank."

The sheriff looked quickly at Dunc. "If yo're here?" he asked.

"Yeah," whispered the deputy, "that's right. I'm driftin', Hank."

"Yo're what?"

"Driftin'—like I jist said, Hank. Come sunrise, I won't be in Silver City. Now, wait a minute! I ain't never helped hang anybody, and I ain't startin' now. Come sundown, I'm driftin'."

"Coward, eh?"

Dunc's face flushed for a moment. "If yuh like the word, Hank," he said coldly. "I ain't never done no killin' with a rope—and I ain't never killed a man whose hands was tied. I don't like it."

"But it's the law, Dunc."

"Yeah, I know. They can go ahead—but I ain't helpin'."

Dunc walked to the doorway and stared out at the dusty street.

"I've been past Jack's place most every day, Hank," he said slowly, "and every time I go past—that girl's out there, listenin' to hammerin' over here. She'll be there in the mornin', too—and I'll know it. I've taken all my pers'nal things from the office Hank—and I'll be goin' now. So long."

Hank Lamar sank down in his office chair, staring at the blank walls of the office. Dunc Harrison had turned yellow, quit his job. And what a time to quit.

Hank's eyes strayed to the old clock above his desk. It was ticking faster than ordinary clocks.

"Hurry, hurry, hurry!" he said half-aloud. "Everything hurry!"

A man came into the office and Hank looked up. He was Jim Arden, general manager of one of the big mines.

"Sheriff," he said quickly, "we're sendin' out a bunch of gold on the stage tonight. Oh, I know it's unsafe, after all the holdups we've had, but it's also unsafe to hold it at the mine. Can you send Dunc Harrison along as shotgun messenger for us?"

Hank was silent for several moments. He knew that Dunc was not available now, and it would be difficult to find a suitable man to handle the job. But he said, "Yeah, I'll take care of it for yuh, Jim."

"Good! I'll appreciate it a lot. Any line on the two men who robbed the bank yet?"

"I may have—after tomorrow, Jim," he replied.

Hank was standing in the doorway when Judge Evans came along, leaning heavily on a gnarled cane. He stopped and their eyes met for a moment.

"I don't know what to say, Hank," said the old judge quietly.

"Let's not say anythin'," suggested Hank coldly. The judge nodded, shifted his cane nervously, nodded again and went on up the street. A queer smile twisted the sheriff's lips, as he turned back to his desk. After a few moments he selected a piece of paper and a pen, and carefully wrote a half-page letter. His hand shook as he blotted it and placed it carefully into an envelope.

Back in the doorway again he watched the activity on the street, until a youngster came along, bare-footed, *sans* covering for his blond head. He looked narrowly at the big sheriff, who said, "C'mere, Jimmy, I want to talk with you."

Trembling a little, the youngster went back. Quickly the big sheriff told him what he wanted done, handed the boy the envelope and a whole silver dollar.

"Better make it about eight o'clock, Jimmy," he said, and the delighted youngster nodded quickly. "I shore will," he promised.

THE stage to Dry Lake left Silver City at eight o'clock, where it connected with the railroad. Old Ed Byers, the grizzled driver, grumbled to himself at lack of light, as he lashed on his load. The stage depot was unlighted, except for a window light. Across the narrow street a honkatonk orchestra blared from the open door of a saloon.

No one saw Sally come in close to the stage, wearing a black shawl over a black dress. Silently she opened the stage door and climbed inside, where she huddled in a corner. The stage jerked and creaked, as Ed Byers climbed up on top, reaching down to take a heavy, metal box from the depot agent. She heard Byers complaining bitterly, and the agent retort:

"All I know is that it's goin' out tonight, guard or no guard. I ain't keepin' it on my hands, I'll tell yuh that, Ed."

Ed Byers swore, as he lashed it behind the seat. He got down again and went into

the office, but came out quickly and climbed to his seat. Before he could kick off the brake, the door opened and a man got in, closing the latch carefully and sinking into a seat opposite Sally, heaving a deep sigh of relief.

The four horses sprang into life and the old stage-coach went out of Silver City, swaying and lurching into the night, while dust sifted inside through the loose doors.

A big, desert moon broke over the hills, slanting through the dusty window of the stage, and illuminating the male passenger, as though a spot-light had picked him out. He was Hank Lamar, the sheriff of Silver City, and beside him on the seat was his battered valise. He could see that someone else was in the stage, and he leaned forward in the swaying vehicle, trying to identify her.

As he leaned forward they made a sharp left-hand turn, which streamed the moonlight across her face. Hank leaned back and said huskily:

"Where there's life there's hope, eh? All you needed was a ticket and a dollar. All women are like that."

"But you wasn't sure I'd be on this stage, were you?"

Hank Lamar muttered something, but not quite audible.

"Or maybe you came along to be sure I left the country," Sally said.

"I'm not interested in what you do—or don't do," he replied.

For a long time there was no conversation. The sifting dust made breathing difficult. Sally drew her shawl across her mouth and nose, but the sheriff made no move to do anything about the discomfort.

THE road left the valley and climbed some sharp grades, with sharp cliffs on one side, the open canyon on the other. Sally could see the tops of the piñons etched against the sky. The stage lurched around a corner, and started down a grade, when suddenly the brakes screamed, and the girl was thrown almost into the sheriff, so suddenly did the stage stop.

They heard a voice bark an order. Hank Lamar, off balance, swore feelingly, groping for his guns in the dark. Then he flung open the door and lurched out, almost crashing into the rocky wall. A voice yelled,

"Hold it, you fool! and Sally heard a bullet whine off the rocks. Hank Lamar, backed against the rocky wall, guns blazing in both hands as he blasted at the masked man, full in the moonlight. Ed Byers was yelling, "What the hell's goin' on here?"

The sheriff surged away from the rocks, walking slowly forward, guns tensed at his hips. The masked man was on his face beside the lead-team, which was edging away toward the edge of the grade, until Ed Byers yanked them. He yelled, "Whoa!" jumped down and went with the sheriff.

"I didn't know you was around, Hank," he said.

Hank didn't answer. He turned the bandit over, ripped off his mask and looked at him in the moonlight. Ed said, "My God! Him!" Sally was leaning out, trying to find out what had happened, when Hank and Ed came back, carrying the man. They didn't say anything to her—just shoved him into the stage, half-on-half off the seat. Hank said, "We've got to git him to a doctor, Ed. Can yuh turn around?"

"We're about a hundred yards from that turn, Hank, and I think it's wide enough there. Shut that door and we'll roll."

It was a ride that Sally Lamar never forgot. Four horses, traveling at top speed, deep ruts and high bumps. The wounded man sprawled across the bottom of the stage, forcing Sally to pull up her feet on the seat.

They reached Silver City and headed straight down the main street to the sheriff's locked office. Men, seeing the stage return, realized that something had gone wrong, and came running. They saw Sally Lamar climb out, and they watched the sheriff and Ed Byers, taking out the body of the wounded bandit. Some of them came in to help. Sally saw Judge Evans, leaning on his cane, watching the action.

They sent for a doctor, but placed the man on an old cot in the office. A man said, "Great gosh, that's Dunc Harrison! Hank, what happened to him?"

Ed Byers said, "He stuck up the stage, but the sheriff was on the watch for him. Man, he mighta got that shipment of gold!"

A man said, "Here's a letter for yuh, sheriff. We was walkin' on it, must have fell off yore desk."

The sheriff took the letter, glanced at the

envelope, put it in his pocket. Byers said, "He's awake, Hank! Maybe he—"

THE sheriff shoved over to the side of the cot. Dunc was staring around, his eyes puzzled. Then he saw Hank Lamar, and he seemed to remember. He whispered, "You got me, Hank. I—I didn't think there was anybody to send as a guard. I reckon I'll go out this time—for keeps. I didn't think you'd—"

"Dunc, I didn't think you'd do this," said the sheriff. "My own deputy. Why did yuh. Dunc? You've been straight."

Dunc laughed huskily and his lips were painted, when he closed them again.

"I couldn't stay here—for sunrise, Hank," he whispered anxiously. "I—I killed Grant Ellers. I—I found Jack's gun—he lost it in that fight. And I shot Grant, because he wouldn't split fair with me. We robbed the bank, and he—he lied about what we got—tried to hold out on me. I couldn't stay to see—sunrise. Where's—the—light—gone?"

Hank Lamar straightened up and looked around. At his elbow was Judge Evans, and all the men were staring at him. Judge said gently, "Hank, it's all right, boy—turn Jack loose. This closes the case."

"Yea-a-ah!" whispered the sheriff. "That's right, Judge—he's innocent." The doctor said, "Sheriff, this man is dead. Have some of the men carry the body down to my place."

Thirty minutes later Hank Lamar sat alone in his office. He had taken that fallen envelope from his pocket and torn it open. There was no stamp on it. The letter read:

Sheriff: When you read this I will be out of the country. Find me if you can. I hated Grant Ellers, and after he beat Jack the way he did, I went to his room and shot him with Jack's gun. I am not sorry, but I'm too much of a coward to face trial.

Sally Lamar.

For a long time he stared at the letter, his lips moving. Then he closed his eyes for a space, the letter gripped in his right hand. Then he slowly tore it into very fine pieces and sifted them into an old wastebasket. His shoulders lifted and he drew a deep breath. A sound at the doorway caused

him to jerk around. It was Judge Evans' cane, bumping on the floor inside the doorway, as the old jurist eased himself through into the office.

He looked all around and slowly limped over to the desk. The sheriff wasn't looking at him, as the judge said, "No one else around, is there, Hank?"

Hank Lamar shook his head, staring at the wall. "Nobody, Judge," he said quietly.

The judge fumbled in his pocket and finally drew out an envelope, which had been opened. He placed it on the desk, and Hank looked at it sharply.

"I—I thought you'd like to destroy this yourself, Hank."

Hank Lamar didn't look at the judge, as he replied huskily:

"I'd appreciate it, Judge."

There was silence for a few moments, and then the judge said:

"Hank, you had that confession down pat, except for one thing."

"One thing?" queried the sheriff.

"One thing. If your memory was good, you would remember that the shots which killed Grant Ellers were heard and investigated at once—and at that time, Hank," the judge chuckled quietly, "you were at my house, playing seven-up with me. Remember? See you later, my boy."

A few minutes later Sally and Jack Lamar, safe at last and in their own little shack, each trying to out-talk the other, were startled by a heavy knock on the door. Sally ran to the door and flung it open. Hank Lamar loomed huge in the doorway. No one spoke, nor did the sheriff come on in. He looked hard and uncompromising, but his eyes were in the shadow of his big hat. Finally he said quietly:

"Jack, I need a deputy I can trust—and a married man needs a job. And I've got that big house—me all alone. Sally, why don't you come over and keep house for me and Jack?"

Sally stared at him, not believing her own ears.

"You—you mean? Dad, you mean—why?" she gasped.

"I need somebody to boss me, I reckon," he said lamely. "I'm gettin' so I can't remember so good. Maybe I'm gettin' kinda old—and sorta cowardly. Why, I even tore up a letter tonight—before I knew what was in it."

Sally looked at him, her eyes shining brightly.

"I guess we're all a little cowardly," she said slowly.

"If we've got nerve enough," he said dryly.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Part I



THE JUNGLE SHAWL

A Johnny Fletcher action

mystery novel by

FRANK GRUBER

*A Really Great Ballplayer Is Always Great in Other
Ways Besides Ballplaying*



RETURN OF LEFTY

By WILLIAM HEUMAN

HE HAD on his lucky green suit, and the town band was playing the "Wearing of the Green" when Lefty stepped off the train. He was bigger than I had remembered him, but then I didn't remember too much about him because I had been a kid when Lefty went away seven years ago. I was twelve now.

I had to shout to Smitty's ear because the band was playing so loud you could hardly hear yourself think. They were lined up in a semi-circle before the station, and fat

George Hyman, the trumpet player, looked like he was blowing his brains out, and trying to see Lefty at the same time. I said to Smitty,

"That's the lucky suit. See it?"

You couldn't help seeing it, but I wanted Smitty to know that I knew about it, that he didn't know everything. I had read about the suit in the paper the night before. Lefty had worn that green suit the first game he ever played in the big leagues; he'd worn it to the club room, and he'd gotten four hits that afternoon, one of them a homer. He'd

kept wearing the suit ever since, and this year he'd led the league in batting; he'd just won the World Series with a double with the bases loaded. That was Lefty.

The suit wasn't bright green, but it was a green suit, no stripe, just green. Lefty carried his camel's hair topcoat on his arm, and he didn't wear a hat. His hair was black, parted in the middle, shining in the bright fall sunshine.

Lefty had a smile. That was the best thing about Lefty. It was a big smile which included everybody. It showed his even white teeth against the dark tan of his face.

He was waving a big hand as he pushed through the crowd with all the town officials and the three town cops with him. I noticed that he was taller even than Frank Dilton, the cop, and I'd always thought Frank a big man.

"I guess everybody's here," Smitty said. "All the stores are closed up. The bank is closed up even, and they close on holidays."

The school had closed for the afternoon, also. Miss King had told us in the morning that we'd be let out at two o'clock instead of three. She'd read the notice from a little slip of paper she'd received from the school board, and I thought I saw her hands tremble a little as she read it and she said Lefty's name.

Everybody in our town knew that Marjorie King was waiting for Lefty to come back, and everybody said it was a shame. Marjorie had gone around with Lefty when they'd been in high school together, but Lefty hadn't finished high school because I guess already he was thinking about becoming the greatest batter in the world, and that was more important.

Lefty had started to play with the Evans-town Tigers fifteen miles up the river, and he was getting paid to play ball. I heard my father say once that the Tigers had been giving Lefty ten dollars a game, and he'd been only seventeen years old then.

SOME people in town didn't think too much of Lefty then. They said he should have settled down like the other young fellows in town, like Fred Hopkins, who was now head teller in the bank. But Lefty wasn't like that. He wanted to keep going; he wanted to hit a home run in every town in the United States I guess, and they

say he pretty near did. He played in half a dozen different leagues and with a lot of teams before they brought him up to the big league. He was twenty-seven then, and that was not too young for a ball player.

Pop said that Lefty was the kind of player who took a long time to find his place. He'd tried to pitch and he'd tried to play first base, and now he was an outfielder, the best hitting outfielder in the big leagues.

People were kind of proud of Lefty his first year in the big league. He hit .345 and that was some batting for a first year man. This year it was up to .376, and he was right on top. He even had more homers than anybody else, and he'd won the World Series.

Smitty was saying, "You think Miss Marjorie is here?"

I guess Smitty had heard the talk in his house, too. I guess everybody in town had been talking about it when the news first leaked out that Lefty was coming home for a visit.

There was talk that Lefty was engaged to a show girl in New York. He'd been back off and on while he was playing minor league baseball. At first he used to come home for the winter and hang around his brother George's pool parlor. He used to go out with Marjorie King when he was home, but after awhile he stopped coming home.

People said Fred Hopkins wanted to marry her, and that it would be a good match. Marjorie had gone to teachers' training college and she'd come back as teacher in our school. She didn't seem to go out much with fellows, and I guess that's how everybody got to talking that she was waiting for Lefty.

Whenever I looked through the open bank door I could see Fred Hopkins through the bars of his window. Fred was thin, brown-haired. He wore glasses and he had a kind of pimply face. I didn't blame Miss King much for waiting for Lefty. Lefty had a smiling face and a singing bat.

The crowd was moving past the station now, milling around the line of cars waiting to ride Lefty down Main Street and up to Town Hall. Smitty and I started to push through the crowd to get up close to Lefty's car.

I saw Benny Saltenberg, who was in our

class, duck around Frank Dilton when Frank's back was turned. Benny got right up to the door of the car, pushing in between a lot of grown men, and Lefty as he was stepping up rubbed his brown hand over Benny's sand-colored hair.

Benny was grinning proudly as Frank Dilton chased him back. I knew he'd be talking about that for weeks in school, maybe all through the winter.

All the kids chased after the car as it started through the street. I lost Smitty somewhere, but I knew Smitty could take care of himself. There was a motorcycle bringing up the rear, and we kids had to stay behind the motorcycle cop, but we could see Lefty in the green suit, waving that left hand, sitting next to Mayor Gilman, and the Mayor looking like it was his birthday or something.

The cars were just turning in to Main Street when I got the idea. Now I guess it wasn't a great idea; it was a kind of crazy one, but this was a crazy day, what with Lefty coming home and the school let out early and all.

The cars were going very slow in the line, and they were going to stop in front of the bandstand on Main Street. The band was supposed to play a few special tunes, specially for Lefty, and Congressman Broderick would give a little talk before they went on to Town Hall where Lefty was to have a luncheon with the Mayor and the town board.

My idea was to skip over to Town Hall before Lefty got there and scrawl on the redstone steps in white chalk,

"Hurray for Lefty!"

I could see Lefty going up the steps and stopping when he got to my chalk scrawl. Lefty would grin. He'd kind of ask who did it, and somebody would point out me. Lefty would shake hands with me. He'd want to know if I played any baseball. He'd teach me how to hit the home runs the way he hit them and before you knew it we'd be—I told you it was a crazy idea.

I had to get a piece of chalk though, and I thought right away of the school. It was empty, and I could easily slip in while Old Man Kennedy, the janitor, was in another part of the building. The school was on the way across to Town Hall, too.

I ducked up a side street and made it on

the run. It was two short blocks off Main Street where Lefty was still riding like the king of Paducah. I could hear the band as I ran, and I must have made those two blocks in ten seconds flat.

The school house was two stories high, and it had about six rooms in it. I found the side door from the playground open, and I slipped in, going up the stairs at a run. My classroom was on the second floor. There was a carpet along the corridor, and when I got to the top of the stairs I went easy because Old Man Kennedy was liable to be in one of the rooms, and he was a mean one when he found anybody snooping around.

I thought I'd look in the room before stepping in to pick up the piece of chalk from the blackboard. That was when I saw her—otherwise I'd have walked right in with her crying and all.

She was sitting at the desk and her head was down. She had nice brown hair. It wasn't reddish brown; it was just brown, and she had it done up in an old-fashioned way. It looked nice. She dressed like that, too, not old-fashioned, but quiet.

I knew right away that she was crying, or had been crying, even though I couldn't see the tears. It was the way she held her head, the way her shoulders were pushed forward.

You could hear the band over on Main Street. It sounded like George Hyman was trying to outdo everybody else with the trumpet. It was high and wild like George's heart was going up with the music.

Marjorie King lifted her head and looked toward the window. I saw the tears in her eyes then. She had gray eyes. Sometimes she wore glasses, and I don't like glasses on girls, but oh, Miss King they looked nice.

I guess I kind of forgot about the chalk. She didn't see me because I stepped back when I saw her lifting her head. It seemed kind of funny to see her sitting there all alone while this fuss was being made over Lefty on Main Street. It didn't seem right, not that Lefty didn't deserve the fuss.

I began to realize about then that the idea of chalking, "Hurray for Lefty" on Town Hall steps wasn't too good. That's the way ideas go. For a while you think you have something good, and then after a while it doesn't look so good any more.

I WENT back, going down the stairs carefully and out through the side door again. I stood in the crowd around the bandstand and I listened to Congressman Broderick making his speech. I listened to the band and I looked at Lefty standing there in the sunshine, smiling, his green suit, his broad smile, his height making him look different from anybody else. You could tell right off he was the one everything was about.

It wasn't the same now though. When Lefty got off the train at the station it was like everything was all right, like the summer vacation about to start, or Christmas coming along. Now it was different. I kept thinking about Miss King back in the school house, all alone, and she was supposed to be Lefty's girl.

Smitty came over and he said, "Want to see if you can climb up the back of the bandstand?"

I didn't think much of the idea, and I guess Smitty got disgusted because I didn't see him any more. I listened to Lefty talk after Mr. Broderick got through. Lefty spoke the way he hit a baseball—easy as pie, not long like Mr. Broderick. He told a story or two and everybody laughed. He said he was glad to be back in the greatest little town on earth; he said he'd been pretty lucky this past season and he hoped his luck held out. He said it was the luck of the Irish, and Mr. Broderick, sitting just behind him, grinned from ear to ear.

They all got in the cars again and moved on to Town Hall for the big dinner in the reception hall.

I followed them and I watched as Lefty went up the steps.

Everybody started to go home then, but a lot of the men were still standing around on the street corners, talking baseball, talking about Lefty. I guess the women were talking, too, but it wasn't baseball. I passed two of them outside Snodgrass's grocery store and I heard one of them say,

"You think he'll go around and see her? It's a shame, all these years."

I figured they were talking about Lefty and Miss King, and I started to wonder myself if Lefty would go out with her again. I had to go home past the school house, and I looked across the yard as I went past the fence. I saw her coming out the side door.

She wore her glasses and she carried a brown brief case.

She was smiling as she came through the gate and she said to me,

"How was the parade, Raymond?"

"It was all right, Miss King," I told her. She wasn't crying any more. You couldn't even tell now that she was crying. She wore a little checked jacket and a black skirt. She didn't have a hat, and from a distance you could mistake her for one of the high school girls up the block.

She walked up with me to the corner, and she said, "I suppose you like parades, Raymond."

I thought it would make her feel good and I said, "When Lefty's in them."

I don't know whether she felt good or not. She looked straight ahead. She was smiling a little, not much. At the corner she said,

"Good afternoon, Raymond."

She lived with her mother up on Pine Street about two blocks from the school. I had to go the other way. I went home and I said to Mom in the kitchen,

"You think he'll ever marry her, Mom?"

I asked Mom that because I guess Mom knew more about that than Pop did, although Pop knew more baseball.

"Who?" Mom asked. She stood in front of the stove, watching the pork chops sizzle, standing back so the grease wouldn't spatter on her.

I said, "Lefty—Miss King."

Mom looked at me, a fork poised in the air. She said, "For heavens sake." Then she said, "I'm sure I don't know, Raymond."

When Pop came in later I heard her say to him out in the kitchen, "Why, even the children are talking about it. It's a shame."

At the supper table Pop sprang the surprise. He was grinning, buttering a piece of bread. He said,

"Raymond, how would you like to see Lefty play—a real ball game?"

I said, "The season's over, Pop." Besides I knew Pop couldn't get off from the factory to go way up to New York where Lefty played.

"Keep this under your hat," Pop told me. "Lefty's playing one game with the Evans-town Tigers next Sunday afternoon. Jack Chelsey got him to do it. I suppose you'd like to go up, Raymond?"

I didn't eat much after that. Mom said, "Look at all those potatoes, Raymond. I thought you liked potatoes."

I wanted to get over to Smitty's house. I wanted to tell him about this because it was the greatest thing ever came to our town. Nobody ever expected to see Lefty play. It was enough that he was coming home for a visit.

Pop said, "Don't you want your dessert, Raymond?"

"I'll eat it when I come back," I said. "I'll have it before I go to bed."

Mom said stiffly, "Raymond."

"Let him go," Pop grinned. "How often does this happen?"

As I was racing out the door I heard Mom say, "Next time keep your surprises until after he's eaten."

Smitty knew about it. He was sitting on his porch, looking through a comic book when I came through the hedge at the back of the house. He said quickly before I could get it out,

"Lefty's playing the outfield for the Tigers next Sunday."

I guess everybody knew about it then, but even so I didn't feel too bad about it.

Smitty said, "I'll bet he hits four homers. I'll bet he hits one over the trestle."

DURING the next two days we almost got used to having Lefty around, that is if you could ever get used to having a big leaguer walking around your town, and not only a big leaguer, but one of the best.

We saw Lefty on the street after school. We went down to his brother's pool parlor and we stood around outside, looking through the door, watching Lefty shoot pool, watching him talk with the groups of men who came in.

Sometimes Lefty came outside and he'd talk with us kids. When you got us close to him you could really see how big he was—not that he was heavy, just tall, and solid in the shoulders. We used to look at his wrists and his hands. You could see how he could hit a ball so far. His hands were long, strong fingers, and the wrists solid.

He would swing a pool stick around and show us how to stand at the plate; how to step into a ball. We felt pretty proud.

It was a Thursday afternoon after school, I think, when Lefty saw her for the first

time. He was out in front of the pool parlor, and there were a half dozen kids around as usual. There was a cellar door in front of the store, and I was sitting on the cellar door, looking across the street, listening to Lefty talk. Maybe that was how I saw her.

I knew that some afternoons, instead of going right home, she came down to do some shopping. She was walking up toward the butcher shop on the corner. She didn't look over, but she must have seen Lefty. You couldn't miss Lefty in the green suit, and so tall.

I saw Lefty look that way, and then look again, but Miss King just kept on walking. Lefty was scratching his jaw thoughtfully. He went back inside the pool parlor and I saw him talking for a while with his brother.

It was the next afternoon that we saw Lefty in the school yard. He was standing just outside the side door, and Benny Saltenberg saw him first. He wasn't wearing his lucky green suit. He had on a blue one with a stripe, and light tan shoes. It was still warm for early fall and he didn't have a topcoat, and no hat. He looked good, black hair slicked back, clean-shaven. He had a wisp of white silk handkerchief in his coat pocket.

The girls in the school didn't bother too much with him. They just looked, kind of curious, but all the boys started to hang around until Lefty said,

"Now, gang, suppose you all move along. This is a private matter."

It was the way he said it, smiling and all, talking to us as if we were grown up. All the older fellows like myself started to chase the kids away. Lefty made everybody feel important; it was the way he had with him.

I hung around near the yard gate for a while, playing catch with Smitty. Smitty said curiously,

"You think he came down to see her?"

"He didn't come down to see Old Man Kennedy," I said disdainfully. "Didn't you know Miss King was Lefty's girl?"

"I heard my mother say," Smitty said, "that they broke up years ago, that Miss King's heart was broken."

"He's going in," I said. I could see him through the trees along the curb. We acted as though we weren't watching him, but we could see clearly. We sat down on the curb and Smitty said,

"I'll bet they're going to make up."

Smitty was always like that—always betting, but not money, things like marbles, or beer bottle caps, or match box covers.

They came out after four o'clock, and they were talking as they walked. I noticed that Miss King was smiling. She didn't have the glasses on, and she looked really pretty. They walked up toward the corner, and Lefty kept going with her when she turned up toward Pine Street.

When I got home that afternoon Mom said, "You have to stay after school?"

"No," I said. "They went home together."

"Who?" Mom asked. "Don't speak in riddles, Raymond."

"Lefty," I said, "Miss King."

Mom looked at me for a few moments over the tops of her glasses. She said finally, "Raymond, I don't want you spying around on people. There are enough eyes on those two the way it is without the school children joining in."

"I wasn't spying," I protested. "We were sitting down by the school."

"Sit in your own yard next time," Mom said, and she meant it.

THAT'S why it was so funny that I should be in Grant Park the next night at about nine o'clock when Lefty and Miss King were there. I wasn't trying to spy on them. After what Mom said I knew I'd better stay away or I'd get it from Pop.

We were playing football in the afternoon, a Saturday afternoon, but we weren't thinking so much about football yet because tomorrow afternoon Lefty was supposed to play with the Evanstown Tigers, and the whole town was talking about that, but it was the football season and we always liked to be in season.

It must have been about quarter to nine that night, and I'd just left Smitty, and was going home when I remembered that I hadn't brought my football helmet home from the Park that afternoon. I didn't like to lose that because Pop had bought it for me for my birthday and I had only started to use it.

It was too late to get Smitty and go back and have a look so I went by myself, running a little because Mom said I'd better be home by nine o'clock if I wanted to go to the game tomorrow.

Grant Park is at the edge of town. It has some nice shaded walks, a lot of trees, benches, a little duck pond, and then the big field at the other end where we played baseball and football.

There is a brook which runs into the little pond, and the brook twists in and out across the meadow, forming a kind of island in one place, an island with trees on it. It's only a little island, and you reach it by crossing a tiny rustic wooden bridge. There's a fireplace on the island and a couple of benches for picnics.

I WAS lucky and I found the helmet on the grass where I'd left it in the afternoon. I was feeling pretty good, and I was running down one of the lanes when I heard them out on the island. I pulled up pretty quick behind a tree right near the little bridge. I thought I recognized Lefty's voice, and then I saw him.

It was pretty dark here in the park, but there was a moon and it shown down through the trees. It was one of those big orange harvest moons, looking like you could reach right up through the trees and touch it.

A cool breeze was running through the trees, rustling the dry leaves, parting the branches every once in a while so that the moonlight got through. It kind of speckled everything, and the shadows kept moving around, making it kind of spooky like.

You couldn't miss Lefty though. He was standing near the fireplace, standing very close to a girl, and then I saw who the girl was—Miss King.

I could hear what they were saying, I was that close to them, and then I remembered what Mom had told me, and I figured I'd better get out of there as quickly as possible.

I heard Miss King say, "Frank—it's been such a long time."

I guess that was the first time I ever heard anybody call Lefty by his first name, and it sounded a little funny.

Lefty said, kind of laughing, "You know I never forgot you, Marge. How could I—." He was kissing her then, and I guess she didn't mind because she didn't try to get away like they do in the movies some times.

It's funny about kissing. I suppose people like it when they're older, but when you

stand there and watch it, it looks kind of silly and you want to get away.

I was beginning to back away from the tree when Lefty lifted his head again. He was laughing and he said softly,

"How'd you like it, baby?"

What happened next I didn't quite understand after what she had just done. Miss King shook Lefty's arms loose. She stepped back, and just then the moonlight came through the trees at that spot and I could see her face. She looked very white, maybe it was the moonlight, and she wasn't smiling.

When she spoke her voice sounded different, like it was strained, and she was somebody else talking. It didn't sound like Miss King at all, and I'd been listening to her talk for a long time in school. She said,

"That wasn't very kind, Frank."

She turned and left him then—left him standing by the fireplace, and she walked quickly across the bridge, passing so close to me that I could almost reach out and touch her black skirt as it swished by.

She kept going down the lane which led to town. I just huddled there looking at Lefty, standing where she'd left him. I could see Lefty's face, and it looked funny, like he didn't understand something. His mouth was open a little. It looked like he didn't know whether to laugh or to get mad.

He called, "Marge—Marge!"

He ran across the bridge after her, then and down the lane. I don't know whether he caught up with her or not, but you'd think a ballplayer like Lefty would because he was supposed to be a fast runner. But he wasn't running so fast when he went after her.

I went the other way, and I got home maybe a few minutes after nine. Mom gave me a hard look when I came in, but she didn't say anything, and of course I didn't tell her about seeing Lefty and Miss King in Grant Park.

LEFTY looked different that first time he came up to the plate. He had his long black bat and he stood there, straight and tall, waving his bat toward the rightfield fence, watching the pitcher out on the mound. I guess he looked different because he wasn't smiling; he didn't look like the Lefty who had stepped off the train and

ridden down Main Street; he didn't look like the Lefty we'd seen standing in front of his brother's pool parlor.

Everybody was going crazy. The Evans-town Tigers had two men on base with two out in the first inning when Lefty came up, and everybody was saying,

"Here it goes. Watch him ride it."

Lefty didn't swing at the first ball, but he almost did, and everybody yelled, "Ah!"

Lefty knocked some dirt from his spikes with his bat and came back into the batting box. He still wasn't smiling.

The outfielders on the other team were playing way back near the fences, and the man in centerfield was so far away you could hardly see him. There was a spot of worn grass out there in centerfield where the outfielder usually stood, but with Lefty he was about thirty feet beyond that spot, and Pop pointed at it and laughed when he mentioned it to the man sitting next to him.

Lefty swung at the next ball. I was leaning forward, almost holding my breath, praying that he'd hit it. He did hit it, but it rolled out to the pitcher's box and he was thrown out at first. I could have hit it as far as that myself.

Everybody leaned back in their seats and Pop lighted a cigar. I heard him say,

"A man can't do it every time even in this kind of baseball. It's only human."

I felt kind of sick when I saw the pitcher throw Lefty out at first base. I watched him pick up his glove and continue on to the outfield. He had his head down as he walked and he didn't seem too interested in what was going on.

We were sitting in the bleachers along the rightfield foul line and we could see his face pretty clearly as he went by. All the kids were down by the screen yelling,

"Better luck next time, Lefty. He was lucky, Lefty."

Lefty didn't seem to hear them. He looked up at the sun and he slapped his glove a few times. He was chewing gum, and chewing it very hard, not as if he were enjoying it. He had his cap pulled down low over his eyes.

It was a pretty quiet game until the third inning when Lefty came up again, and then the noise started. I could see that the pitcher was trying very hard to strike Lefty out. He

was kind of smiling when he stood out there, looking as if he knew he couldn't get Lefty out for the second time, but when he threw the ball he didn't smile.

Lefty hit a pop fly to the first baseman. I was standing down by the screen myself. I was holding the chicken wire, looking through it, and I was saying over and over again, every second that he was up at the plate,

"Hit a homer, Lefty. Hit a homer."

When Lefty threw his bat away and trotted down the line toward rightfield again I came back up and sat down next to Pop. I remember Pop saying glibly,

"He'll get two more shots at this guy. You watch him the last two times at bat. Lefty's a clutch hitter, and he wants to please his home town crowd. You watch him."

I watched him. I prayed for him. I tried to bring him good luck every way I knew. I said, "Lefty—Lefty—Lefty," under my breath a hundred times, and then I said, "Homer—homer—homer," fifty times before he was due to get up again in the seventh inning.

Pop said to me once, "What are you mumbling about, Raymond? Don't you like the game?"

In the seventh inning with a runner on third base and one out Lefty came up again, and everybody was saying,

"Now's the time. You watch him."

THE Tigers were losing this game by one run, and this was supposed to be the "clutch."

That's what Pop called it. Pop was smoking his second cigar. He was leaning forward, smiling a little, watching Lefty up there, swinging the black bat. Pop seemed pretty sure of things, but I didn't. I don't know why, except that this didn't seem like the Lefty we knew.

You had the feeling that when Lefty picked up a bat, the bat became part of him like a third arm. He was that easy with it, that loose, but this afternoon it was not like that. He was trying hard—very hard to please the home folks, but he was tight. He dug in at the plate and he waved his bat viciously. He cut at two balls, missing the first one completely, and the second time he rolled an easy grounder to first base and was out.

Even Pop didn't have much to say then. I heard him say to the man next to us,

"It's not that he can't hit. Lefty's having a bad afternoon. You're just as liable to have a bad afternoon in semi-pro ball as in the big leagues. That's the game."

It might have been the game, but it wasn't much of a game for me. I felt sick. It was just as if somebody had come around the day before the summer vacation started and told us we weren't having it this year.

Nobody cared much about the score. The Evanstown Tigers were losing, but that didn't mean anything. If they'd been winning by fifty runs and Lefty hadn't gotten a hit it would be the same thing. This was Lefty's game—Lefty against the enemy, Lefty against all of baseball, against the whole world!

It was a pretty low score game, and it was going very fast, and a lot of people didn't think Lefty would even get another whack at the ball before it was over. It looked that way in the ninth, but then the Tigers suddenly started to hit. Maybe they were rooting for Lefty, too; maybe they wanted to give him one more chance to show what he could do because he'd been a Tiger himself once.

There were a couple of base hits, a run scored, and then a hit on error. The score was 3 to 1 for the other team when Lefty threw away a bat and stepped up to the plate, with the bases loaded.

I was down by the screen again because I guess everybody was praying that Lefty would get another lick. All the kids were down there, yelling so loud it hurt my ears.

I watched Lefty late in the afternoon. I watched him while he was standing and then squatting in the little circle they have outlined for the next batter up. When Lefty squatted down on one knee and watched the home plate I had an idea he was thinking, and that he was thinking of something else besides the ball game.

I didn't know whether Miss King was at this game, but I didn't think so the way she'd run away from Lefty in the park. I got the feeling that maybe Lefty's troubles were all her fault, but I didn't want to blame Miss King for anything because she was too nice, and I remembered her sitting in the school house when they had the parade for Lefty.

Everybody went crazy when Hennie Toban made the scratch hit which filled the bases and brought Lefty up to the plate. It was just as if somebody was setting the stage for a show or something.

I remember Pop was standing up, the cigar clenched in his jaw. The cigar was out. His straw hat was jammed down on his head. He was watching Lefty grimly, and he wasn't smiling.

I got the funny idea that Pop was praying for Lefty, too.

I could see the difference when Lefty walked up to the plate. He got up from the circle kind of late after Hennie Toban hit. He'd been there a long time because Hennie fouled off about five balls, and I guess Lefty had a lot of time to think.

WHATEVER he was thinking about I guess he got it settled because when he stepped up to the plate he was smiling, and that was the first smile I'd seen on his face all afternoon. He was loose, too. He let that bat ride out and move back very easily, gently, as if he were having a lot of nice thoughts and he didn't want to lose them because of excited motions. He stood up there with his feet spread apart, the bat resting on his left shoulder, and then moving out. I could see his hands the way they gripped the bat, loosening the grip and then tightening up again.

The pitcher threw one ball past him. It was a strike. He didn't throw the next one past Lefty. I was up close against the screen. I was being pushed by other kids, but I held my place. I saw the bat come around—so fast you could hardly see it. I heard the crack when wood met ball.

There had been other hits made that afternoon, but none of them had the sound of Lefty's. That was sweet; that was full and complete. It was like a chord on the piano. You know it's the right one.

The ball didn't go over the trestle in centerfield because the trestle is about six hundred and fifty feet from home plate, so Pop says. It didn't even go under the trestle, but it did go over the scoreboard in right centerfield where nobody had ever hit one before. It went far out beyond the railroad tracks when they cut in to go under the trestle.

Now a home run is a beautiful thing. I've seen a lot of them. You watch it going out and you begin to feel good but you don't say anything yet. It's only after the ball is out of sight that you begin to yell, and then you yell your head off. You don't want to stop.

A home run is like Christmas coming very suddenly, unexpectedly. And a home run by Lefty, who is from our town, is something different; it's something you remember all of your life; it's something you can't forget.

I WAS coming out the side door into the school yard with Smitty when I saw Lefty standing there again. This was Monday afternoon. All the kids started to swarm around, but Lefty was ready for them. He had a handful of change, a big handful. It must have been a couple of dollars worth of nickels and dimes.

He said, "Beat it down to the ice cream parlor, gang. Treat yourselves."

The school yard was cleared in about twenty seconds after the last kid got his nickel. I stood up at the corner with Smitty just before turning down toward Kramer's Ice Cream Parlor.

Smitty said, "I'll bet he's waitin' for her again."

She came out then, and they were too far away for me to hear anything that they said. I saw our teacher start to walk across the yard toward the gate. And then Lefty walked after her—very fast. He caught her arm and she tried to pull it away. She stopped and she said something, and then she started to walk again, but Lefty was right with her, and it was the old Lefty, the smiling Lefty. He was talking, too.


When they got to the corner they stopped just outside the gate and they talked for a long time, and then when they started to walk again. Only this time it was different. This time our teacher was holding Lefty's arm!

Smitty said, "I think I'll have a chocolate soda."

"Me, too," I said. I watched Lefty and Miss King disappear around the corner and I felt pretty good inside. I don't know why, but I think I'd have felt good even if Lefty hadn't given me that dime for the soda.

CURIOUSITIES ^{BY} Weill

THE SIBERIAN
TIGER IS THE WORLD'S
LARGEST CAT! IT
OFTEN MEASURES **12 FEET**
FROM NOSE TO
TAIL TIP!



OPALS WERE
ONCE BE-
LIEVED TO
BE A SOURCE
OF MISFORTUNE!

THE ONLY
BIRD THAT DRINKS
BY SUCTION IS THE
PIGEON! ALL OTHER
BIRDS TAKE THE WATER
INTO THEIR MOUTHS AND
THROW THEIR HEADS
BACK IN ORDER
TO SWALLOW!



THE MUSKELLUNGE
IS THE **LARGEST**
FRESH WATER GAME
FISH IN THE WORLD!
SPECIMENS WEIGHING
AS MUCH AS
100 POUNDS
HAVE BEEN
CAUGHT!



*Fust the Killin' Fever; Then the Jewel Fever; Then
the Gamblin' Fever*

TREASURE TROVE IN JEZEBEL



By
**STEUART
M. EMERY**

THAT concludes our service," said Mr. Donald Donaldson, closing the book on the lectern. "We shall now call for the customary free-will offering."

His voice, with the ineradicable burr of Glasgow in it, ceased and he beamed through his spectacles, a smile on his sincere, somewhat over-earnest face. Outside the pine walls of the little mission the steady noises of Silver Street proceeded, the yells

of ore-wagon drivers mingled with the clamor of cowboys, raucous shouts came through the windows in the endless racket that went on night and day. There was never any quiet, Sabbath or otherwise, in Jezebel, Arizona, tumultuous, gusty and unpredictable boomtown only miles from the border of Old Mexico.

"Huh?" muttered Union Jones.

The tramp printer extraordinary and right bower of the *Jezebel Courier* stood just inside the door, leaning against the



wall at the rear of the mixed crowd that filled the mission benches. His bald, desert-tanned cranium shone and his blazing red face with the blunt nose appeared surprised as he waggled his grizzled beard. Beside him stood Bushface Biggs, the dynamiter, a perspiring hulk of a man, whose good-natured, somewhat muzzy features were barely visible through a screen of hirsute chaparral.

"Bushface, it looks like we met each other on the way ter the Arizony Palace Saloon an' decided ter drop in here outer the heat jest at the wrong minute." Union fingered the lonely coins in the trousers pocket of his expensive black broadcloth suit. "Yessir, I be gonna have ter give up one o' my last two bucks, havin' no sus-

pender buttons-ter put in the plate. Oh, I be familiar with all them economical skull-duggeries performed on the free will offerin' from my Sunday-school days in the Commonwealth o' Massachusetts. Now, if Mister Donaldson——"

The superintendent of the mission was staring out over his audience with the air of a man seeking something. His kindly gaze rested upon Union and Bushface.

"Ah, welcome, Union Jones, to our congregation! Union, I shall call upon you and your companion as being nearest to the collection plates. I am chargin' you wi' the duties of vestymen. Ma' friends, Union Jones and his companion will pass among you with the plates. Give of your own free will whatever you please. The large con-

trebution or the sma' are equal in the sight of the Lord."

"Good gorrymighty!" blurted Union. "This be what I git fer wearin' my Sunday suit. We be vestrymen, Bushface."

"I ain't got mine on," said Bushface. "It air out bein' cleaned from the wiskey spilt on it."

"You do not have to be wearin' no vest ter be a vestryman, Bushface. A vestryman passes the plate amidst the congregation hopin' for the best, an' brings it up ter the preacher an' if he has good sense, he does not look inter it on the way. I have had me a good Sunday School eddication, I know how a vestryman should look an' act an' so would you if you come from a good home."

"I come from a good home," rumbled Bushface. "The best damn orphanage in Uticy, New York."

On the platform Mr. Donaldson crossed to the melodeon and seated himself. "The offertory anthem," he announced, and his hands went to the keyboard. Reedily the music began.

"Pick up yore bowl an' walk, Bushface," ordered Union, pointing to the pair of big wooden platters on the stand next to them. "Take one side o' the aisle an' I shall cover the other. Watch what I do if you git in a dilemma. Line up, Vestrymen Jones an' Biggs! Git ready, git set, go!"

Down his side of the narrow aisle that split the benches marched Union, summoning an air of conscious rectitude. He passed by the five back rows, occupied entirely by Indians in flapping shirts and tattered trousers who only shook their heads and began to strike the territory where bearded miners, a scattering of range riders and other citizenry sat.

The bowl went in and out from hand to hand, loose silver clinked and here and there green bills appeared beside other objects. There were a few women and children. Union bowed with dignity each time the plate came back and its miscellany grew higher. "Pay dirt," he muttered. He turned, coming abreast of Bushface, who was standing at the end of a row, pointing at a gimlet-eyed individual.

"Lookit, yuh tinhorn!" roared Bushface. "Take back that blasted dime an' shell out. I seen you win ninety bucks at faro last night. Yuh kick in five or I shall boot yore

bottom clear ter Tucson the minnit I catch yuh outside."

"Mister Biggs, Mister Biggs!" pleaded Union agitatedly. "More dignity. You be a vestryman."

"Whut air a vestryman but a collector an' a collector he has got ter git tough," returned Bushface. The offender quailed and thrust a bill hastily into the plate. "Who put in the pinyon nuts?"

"Quietly, Bushface," urged Union. "You git all kinds o' things in a free-will plate like I told you. Yes, ma'am?"

At his own aisle end a grinning squaw in a blanket was proffering a small ear of corn. It plopped into the big bowl and the three small Indian boys, aged twelve, ten and eight beside her wriggled. The two elder future braves reached into their mouths and their wet pennies slid into the plate. The eight-year-old gulped, sat back and beamed with his mouth open. His copper-faced mother poked him, but he made no move.

"Ma'am," said Union politely. "Many be the time I have seed this in Sunday School. Your model little son he has swallered his Sunday penny which he was holdin' in his mouth fer safekeepin'. You take him pronto up the street ter Doc Mac McCarty's office an' there will be no ill effects, in fact, he kin perduce the same penny next Sunday. Yes-sir?"

A WITHERED and gnarled hand was plucking at Union's coatsleeve. The most aged and derelict desert rat he had ever seen, sitting on the next aisle was scrabbling at him. Faded blue eyes peered from an incredibly weathered face and the long, whitish beard was a tangle of rat-tails. The clothes on his body were tattered and hopelessly patched, one bootsole flapped, half off.

"Out thar on the desert I come closet to my Maker," croaked the old desert rat. "They was a time me an' my Jenny, we was a-famishin' and a dyin' o' thirst an' my Maker he saved us. I promised when I made my strike I would give a handsome gift to the fust mission I hit, which be this 'un. Do not look to see whut I air puttin' in, mister." His closed hand burrowed under the scattering in the plate, opened and emerged empty. "Thar, I have fulfilled my promise. Plenty more whar that come from."

"Thankee, neighbor," said Union. "We

be allus glad ter welcome a newcomer. You will find Jezebel be a friendly town."

He moved on as the plate went its way and returned but he managed to get a curious finger in at its bottom that touched a smooth, unidentifiable object. "The usual junk," he muttered, coming abreast of Bushface Biggs at the last row.

"Now what?" inquired Bushface. "I have swamped up my part o' the floor."

"Foller me," counseled Union. He strode up the platform steps and to its rear while the chords of the melodeon went on. "Lay yore loot beside mine on this table. Assume a vestrymanlike posture, side by side with me, until the tune stops. Then Mister Donaldson will dismiss the congregation an' Vestrymen Jones an' Biggs kin go along up ter the Arizony Palace fer a righteously earned drink. There, we be on our way."

The melodeon went mute and Mr. Donaldson stood up.

"I thank you one and all, ma' friends. I hope to see you all next Sunday." In a melody of scraping feet and coughing the congregation crowded for the doors. "Union," said Mr. Donaldson, "I must repair to the bedside of an ailing Indian. Will you most kindly count the free-will offering and keep it in a safe place for me, as vestryman?"

He was gone, moving down the aisle and out the door on the heels of the last of the congregation. Union made a parched sound as a thin cloud of alkali dust, stirred up by some passing wagon, poured in the nearest window.

"Keep it in a safe place fer him," said Mr. Donaldson. "They ain't no safer place I know of, the bank bein' closed of a Sunday, than the safe in the Arizony Palace Saloon fer which we was originally headed. Pick up yore bowl agin, Vestryman Biggs, an' walk. We shall tot up the loot an' enjoy our Old Merry Panther Screech at the same time, like the most substantial species o' vestryman. An' now jest what be that?"

The racket that commenced somewhere in the distance was mounting fast. It consisted of startled shouts that changed into yells of warning and alarm. Union grabbed his bowl and shoved it under his arm.

"Leave us be goin', Bushface, some sort o' hell has broken loose."

They emerged onto a Silver Street dotted with flying figures. For blocks men were

rushing for cover, some of them scrambling to the tops of the awnings over the boardwalk.

"Steer loose! Steer loose!"

"Lasso the critter! Shoot him before he mows us down!"

"Jump fer yore life, Jezzeybel, the long-horn air loco!"

Far up the street the plunging, galloping animal appeared, running wild and tossing its horns and before it everything gave way. It charged from side to side of the hard-packed street, almost blind in its fear and fury. It was coming at headlong pace and whoever it hit would be finished.

"Bushface!" gasped Union. "We have had this before an' allus with the most disastrous results. Eight hundred bucks' worth o' chinaware the Boston Emporium lost that time the loose steer went chargin' inter its household furnishin's. Me, I be gonna climb that barrel yonder onto the awnin' like so many of our worthy long-headed citizens be doin'."

"Union," reproved Bushface, "we air vestrymen which should set a good example an' stand our ground, showin' no fear."

"That damn loco steer do not know we be vestrymen!" gurgled Union. "We ain't even got time ter scamper inter the Arizony Palace. Here he comes, a-snortin' flame an' smoke with sparks on his horns! Good Gaw, he has took ter the sidewalk!"

Swerving at top speed the crazed animal had swung to the boardwalk and was thundering along it. The crowd vanished before its onrush roaring in even louder alarm. Sitting his saddle in the center of Silver Street a grinning cowboy drew his six-gun and fired four shots at the rushing steer that blew the plateglass front out of a store, missing the target completely.

"Climb, Bushface, climb!" urged Union. "There be nuthin' an' no one kin stop that one-beef stampede. No one but——"

From the door of the Arizona Palace swung a startling and colorful figure. The man was of medium height but of extraordinarily muscular build, wide-shouldered, thick-armed and thick-legged and he moved with the speed and agility of a cat. A yellow buckskin riding suit clad his frame, bright red cordovan leather boots reached to his knees, a scarlet plush sombrero topped his head. He swung a black cape in one hand

and his other hand, flashing to his belt came out with a thin dagger that was almost a small sword.

From his mouth a swift shouting in Spanish emerged, he flung the cape from side to side, standing in the center of the deserted boardwalk. The steer's head came up, the cloak bellied in its motion and its lining showed a stark blood red. Distracted by the shouting and confused by the brilliant blaze of color that burst out in front of it the runaway steer stopped, pawed and its bulging eyes glared. Then it snorted savagely, foam driving from its widespread nostrils, lowered its head and went in a leathal rush for the man who obstructed it and the flaunting cape. The horns were low, the powerful neck of the steer tensed for the toss.

"Git out, git out!" rose the warning clamor. "Jump, stranger!"

THE man in yellow buckskin stood his ground. In the last second as the maddened steer plunged on him he danced aside, flicked the cape, and it fell over the horns. In a symmetry of grace and velocity he rose on his toes, his arm came up and with a swordsman's thrust his long steel dagger went in behind the shoulder of the animal. Blinded by the folds of the red-lined cape that hung on its horns, the steer stormed on, but it was for yards only. A terrible shudder racked it, its head dropped, its knees buckled and it collapsed on the boardwalk, a stream of blood running from the dagger that stuck almost hilt-deep in its heart.

"Migaw!" breathed Union. "He has killed the loco steer with one blow!"

Cheers, yells, tumultuous applause burst on Silver Street. The man in the yellow buckskin and the red boots turned. He swept his scarlet sombrero from his head and bowed like a stage actor taking a curtain call.

For the first time Union could see his face clearly. It was broad and smooth and of an orange pallor, and suave hardness. The man's hair was raven black, expensively oiled, and at the nape of his neck a tiny, ribboned queue hung down.

"An American with a queue!" gasped Union. "What kinda new Chinaman has come ter Jezebel?"

"Hooray fer the hero which saved our pants from bein' poked!" roared a wild-

faced spectator. "Who be yuh, Mister Hero?"

"I am Jackson Kelso." The yellow-garbed, theatrical man spoke in a voice of harsh, ruthless timbre. "Late of Mexico City. The only American bullfighter in existence."

"*Viva el toreador!*" exulted a chorus of Spanish voices. Mexican Alley had seen the affair. "*Viva el toreador Americano!*"

"I thank you, my friends of Jezebel," Jackson Kelso shrugged his wide shoulders gracefully. "To one who has killed forty of the finest fighting bulls in Mexico, this mere range steer was child's play. But one must keep the hand in."

He stepped to the dead steer, picked up the cape that had fallen from its horns and flung it carelessly over his arm, pulled out his rapier-like dagger and thrust it back into its sheath.

"I am glad to be of service to Jezebel within the first hour of my arrival with my companions. We plan to settle here."

"Yippee fer our newest valuable citizen!" yelled a cowboy standing by the Arizona Palace hitchrack. "These air yore hosses tied here? You want I should send down ter the corral ter take 'em in? They look plumb done."

"I will say they do," snorted Union. He was looking at the five mounts that stood at the hitchrail, heads drooping, bodies bone thin and coated with alkali, eyes lackluster from weariness. The bloody marks of spurs were on their flanks, quirt lashes showed.

Half of one saddle-horn was shot away and there were scars of metal on the cantle of another saddle.

"Yes, those are our mounts," said Kelso. A strange vigor rode his words, his eyes gleamed as though the recent excitement had imparted new strength to him. But it was a cruel strength. "You may send to the corral. They are done in, as you say."

"They have bin in a battle," observed Union. "They look about ten times wuss nor Paul Revere's hoss musta looked at the wind-up o' his littul gallop. They have bin spurred damn near ter death an' half-founded in what, you ask me, was a gittaway. Our noble newest citizen which kills bulls fer a livin' be on the dodge from Mexico, my brilliant noospaper man's mind informs me. Also he an' his pardners have taken care o' their own

bellies an' thirst before their hosses, which be plain selfishness."

"What is that?" Collection plates in hand, Union and Bushface Biggs had traveled the few yards of boardwalk to the Arizona Palace's door. Jackson Kelso's gaze was on Union, sweeping him from head to foot. His suave face took on a sudden sheen of fury. "Who are you, my red-nosed friend with the loose tongue?"

"I be Jedediah Union Jones, the printer o' the *Courier*, an' at present actin' as vestryman at the mission. My tongue may git a bit loose at times, but there never was a member o' the Jones fambly o' the Commonwealth o' Massachusetts which did not have his head screwed on tightly. You have performed a service ter Jezebel, Mister Toreador Kelso by eliminatin' that loco steer, which was necessary, but killin' bulls in a ring fer plaudits an' profits would seem ter my quaint New England mind ter be cruelty ter animals."

A glare came into the bullfighter's face. "Keep your remarks to yourself, you fool! Killin' bulls is my career."

He pivoted on his heel and swung into the Arizona Palace. Union stood looking after him.

"Killin' bulls may be his career, Bushface, but it be also his pleasure. That be a man which loves ter kill. Did you see how he got all upsurged with vim an' renewed vigget after he had slain his enemy? Jezebel it has got itself a most unvaluable an' dangerous new inmate which would jest as soon kill a *homo sapiens* as an animal."

Bushface Biggs wrinkled his brow amid his thicket of chaparral. "Whut air a *homo sapiens*, Union?" he queried interestedly.

"Not you, you uncurrried mine mule. Forward, Vestryman Biggs ter the countin'-house. Also I would like ter have me a peek at the companions o' Mister Hero Toreador Killer Kelso."

II

THEY shouldered through the batwings into the Arizona Palace where distinctly no Sabbath rules were observed. The roulette wheel clicked merrily, chips rattled at the ~~far~~ and poker tables, a din of conversation mounted under the low, smoke-blackened rafters. At the far end of the bar Push-'em-

Up Regan, small, clean-shaven and spruce, was dealing drinks in his customary sleight-of-hand manner as Union and Bushface Biggs breasted the counter and set down their laden bowls. Union turned and surveyed the room.

"There they be, the bullfighter and his boon companions."

At a nearby table sat the group of five men with Jackson Kelso dominating it. It was a dangerous-looking crew of dust-covered, hard-bitten men who were gathered with the three already half-empty bottles before them. They were of the same indefinable stamp, tight-lipped, wary-eyed, with the secret mien of the adventurer who lives by his wits and his lack of scruples, reckless of danger. All wore six-guns and there were knives strapped to the belts of two of them, an aquiline-nosed, fortyish man with white-yellow hair bleached by the sun and a small individual with a powder burn on his cheek.

"Soldiers o' fortune," grunted Union, "even wuss nor that probably. My noos-paperman's nose fer noos be itchin'. I smell trouble in Jezebel."

"Let this cure the ailment, Union." Push-'em-Up appeared suddenly before him and the bottle of Old Merry Panther Screech miraculously appeared with him. Push-'em-Up stared at the overflowing bowls with their miscellany. "What is this in the way of the honest whiskey?"

"The free-will offerin' down ter the mission, Push-'em-Up, you son of Satan," said Union loftily. "While you was purveyin' likker of a Sunlay, me an' Bushface was there an' we was charged with bein' vestrymen."

"Was you convicted?" asked Push-'em-Up, with his usual air of cynical amiability.

"Push-'em-Up, you littul heathen, you close yore trap." The first double shot of red-eye vanished in Union's beard and he gagged. "Arrgh—warrgh—gloof! Sooperb! One more shot and I shall be in puffect trim ter pick up the smaller coins from the free-will platter with hands which do not shake from last night's libations. Vestryman Biggs, forward ter the mental addition. Discard the debris."

From his own bowl Union plucked pennies, nickels, dimes and the scattering of bills, laying them in orderly separated piles. He closed one eye and squinted at them.

"Pennies, thirty-six. Nickels, seventy-five cents. Dimes, one buck twenny. Quarters, two bucks. Dollar bills, seven. Four white poker chips marked A-P from this bucket o' blood which be as good as currency. Cash 'em in, Push-'em-Up, an' gimme yore slate so I kin tot up the total. Bushface, what you got?"

Bushface Biggs had arrayed his collection in similar piles and with knotted brows was counting on his fingers. "This air most difficult fer me without my glasses, Union," he vouchsafed. "Every time I git up ter two dollars plus I fergit whut the sum was. No, I air not countin' the buttons an' the pinyon nuts. An' here air half a little tot's all-day sucker."

"We throw them out fer Slewfoot Lum ter swamp away," grunted Union, and lifted his bowl in which the debris remained. "Wait a minnit—who put in this nice piece o' green glass? It be wuth nuthin' but it be purty."

He picked the flat green object from amid the miscellany. In the brassy sunlight that came through the plate-glass window it seemed to glow with an uncanny radiance. It was beautifully cut and formed.

"Yessir, this hunk o' glass be most beautiful."

"Pardon me, Union, my friend."

A HAND reached out and took it from him. Lucius Hendricks, Jezebel's leading jeweler, who had been leaning on the bar a few feet away enjoying his Sabbath libation, had moved to Union's elbow. There was a curious look on his thinnish, intellectual face as he drew his jeweler's glass from his vestpocket.

"Never without my tools," he said. "Day and night the boys stop me on the street and ask me for an estimate of anything from diamond scarfpins to grandfather's watch, having lost their all, coppering the queen at the wrong moment. A-hum." He screwed the glass in his eye and stared at the green object. He kept on staring. He said absolutely nothing at all.

"Cut outer an old green hoss remedy bottle, warn't it, Jeweler Hendricks?" inquired Union genially. "Or mebbe a liver cure flask. Those be the bottles which are blown outer this kinda glass."

Lucius Hendricks put his eye-piece back

in his pocket. His face gleamed with professional fervor. "This bit of green glass never came out of any bottle, Union. It came out of a mine. A Mexican emerald mine."

"Outer a—huh?" Union gagged, practically speechless.

"It is as fine an emerald as I have ever seen. I am making no mistake when I say that it would bring \$40,000 in a specialist's market. The legendary Seven Cities of Cibola have come to Jezebel."

"The Seven Cities o'—whoosh!" Union grabbed for the bottle of Old Merry Panther Screech. "Next thing you will inform me this hunk o' glass, I am clutchin' with the redeye label on it is wuth \$100,000 an' mebbe with its contents, it be."

"Whoever found this and put it in the collection plate is a millionaire if he has more of them."

"He has. He has plenty more of 'em, he said," gurgled Union. "It were a funny littul sorter dwarf of a desert rat, jest arrived in Jezebel. I mind me now it was glass I teched pokin' in the plate ter see what he put in."

"Your friend without a doubt has turned up a cache of the riches looted from the Spanish dons and church personages in their flight out of Mexico to California during the Indian risings years ago," said Hendricks. "They fled with incredible wealth in their wagons and carriages and many were attacked and slain. The Indians hid their plunder of gold and jewels all over Northern Mexico and above the Border. It is not the first time a marvelous emerald has appeared from nowhere. Sometimes the fleeing dons cached them themselves. Hidden treasure? It is all over the Southwest, buried and lost for generations, until once in a blue moon an Indian or a white man stumbles on it. Your desert rat has had his blue moon."

"Millions, millions o' jools within walkin' distance, mebbe, o' Jezzeybel?" blurted out Bushface.

"Jools, jools, somebuddy has struck a jool mine!" the excited clamor burst. Eyes gleamed, faces shone, as treasure-fever swept the room.

"Beautiful, is it not?" said Hendricks, and held the emerald aloft. "Here you are, Union. Do you want me to keep it in my safe for the mission until I can sell it?"

"The Arizony Palace safe it be better ter git it inter pronto," said Union. "Push'em-Up, you git a bakin' powder can and we can stuff the collection money an' this emerald in it an' cache it away in yore safe. Be sure ter screw the lid o' the can on tight, you kin not take too many precautions with sech a treasure jool."

Lucius Hendricks placed the emerald in Union's hand. Another hand flashed in and lifted it from Union's palm. Unseen, Jackson Kelso had wrenched himself from his seat and traversed the floor. Between thumb and forefinger he held the green-burning gem and his own eyes burned with a deeper glow. They were avid, passionate, filled with strange desire.

"Ah!" he said throatily. "Ah!"

Lucius Hendricks stared at him appraisingly. "Union!" A sudden crisp note of warning sounded in his voice. "The safe is the place for this, and quickly!"

Union reached out and snatched the emerald from Kelso's fingers. Kelso's face convulsed, his hand shot out and gripped Union by the throat. "Give me that back!" he demanded hoarsely. "Give me that back, or—"

Union's face went purple under the murderous grip. His eyes stood out, his tongue bulged from his mouth. Before him everything was reeling into a black fog and in that fog lay extinction.

"Good Gaw, he air a-stranglin' Union Jones!"

"Rescue Union Jones!"

Kelso flung a glance over his shoulder. Here and there citizens were rising. "Up, men," he snarled. His dusty crew swept to their feet, hands to their belts. The threat of gunfire had burst, as so many times it had done before in the Arizona Palace.

"Give me—"

Driving from the floor with his last strength, Union Jones' knee came up and took his attacker in the stomach. Kelso grunted horribly at the impact and for a second his lethal grip loosened. Union wrenched himself free in that second and the emerald went in a green arc over the bar.

"Catch, Push'em-Up! Safe!"

"Caught." Push'em-Up grabbed the gem in midair.

Jackson Kelso had gone back two paces, breathing stereterously. His orange-pallid face, avid with desire before, now glared

with the killer's lust. He reached for the dagger at his belt and its steel glinted. He held it at the level of Union's stomach. From behind him the bleached, aquiline-nosed man, the runt with the powder-burned face and the others were coming, their guns out and leveled on Union.

"Now, you red-nosed fool, order that bartender to give up that stone! It is mine!"

"Yours, hell!" panted Union. "It be the mission's. You will never git it."

"Then you get this!" Kelso stepped forward a pace, his hand with the dagger drew back for the thrust at Union's unprotected stomach.

"Push'em-Up!" gagged Union, braced against the bar. "Push'em-Up, Winchester, fer Gaw sake!"

"Winchester nothing," said Push'em-Up, "here comes something quicker and better."

The roar split the sudden silence that had fallen and reverberated under the rafters. Black powder gushed across the bar, Jackson Kelso's scarlet sombrero was lifted from his head and blew in a shattered ruin onto the floor. Push'em-Up Regan, both elbows planted firmly on the bar, grinned over the twin barrels of the sawed-off that he had whisked from nowhere with incredible swiftness.

"First barrel, bullfighter. Jest a friendly warning. You want the second barrel, you git it plumb in the center of your manly toreador's chest!"

With amazing agility Kelso leaped aside, putting the body of Union Jones between himself and Push'em-Up's weapon.

"At them, men! Gun them down! I've blocked his shot!"

"You have blocked no shot. Feel this in your ribs?"

The muzzle of the pearl-handled six-shooter jabbed hard in Jackson Kelso's side. No one had seen Sheriff Lew Barton, noted for his ability to appear at the right moment, come through the batwings. Now his gun pressed its target, his voice carried the authority that Jezebel knew it was risking suicide to obstruct. Short and compactly built, he had Abiline and Dodge behind him and what he said went. "Let go that knife; let go those guns, you! Let me see them hit the floor. Cover from the flanks, Jezebel."

Guns were out and in the hands of a dozen townsmen and Kelso's weapon and

those of his crew thudded on the planking. Sheriff Lew stood stroking his tawny, drooping frontier-style mustache and studying his latest catch with keen eyes.

"I am down the street a piece when I hear all this steer ruckus," he drawled. "So I come up here to get a little info on it and I find a worse ruckus, an assault on Union Jones. I know who you are. I have your description on my list as possible fugitives from out of Mexico, who will bear watching."

"You know us?" Jackson Kelso's jaw slackened.

"The law is not without pretty wide sources of information in Jezebel. Only last week a traveler came through from the south by that independent stage line, who had spent plenty of time in Mexico City and we talked a lot together at the Grand Hotel bar, where he gave me much news from below the Border.

"You are Jackson Kelso, the American bullfighter, son of a Yankee soldier of fortune and a Southern opera singer, who got stranded in Mexico City years ago. You were a child when they both died and were adopted by a Spanish bullfighter, your father's friend, who trained you in that job. You have been in plenty of wine, women and card scrapes and six months ago you went crazy with jealousy of your rival who was drawin' the big crowds and the big money. So you faked a quarrel at cards with him and knifed him cold before he had a chance to draw. You were waitin' trial in the Mexico City jail when you broke out and took this charmin' crew along with you."

SHERIFF LEW gestured at the dusty hard-faced men who glowered behind Kelso, stripped of their arms. "Captain Hathaway, the bleached gent, crooked soldier of fortune and filibuster, wanted for embezzlement and killin' a Mexican officer; Runt Reardon, an American burglar, who got that explosion mark on his face blowin' a safe in a bank where he was caught in the act; the other two I don't know. My traveler friend didn't go so far as to describe them, he just said you were all gallopin' north with the rurales hot after you."

"They almost got us fifteen miles below the Border," sneered Kelso. "But they didn't. None of us was ever convicted of

anything, lawman, get that in your head. We were waiting for trial. And there's no extradition treaty with Mexico. You can't send us back. We're safe here."

"I grant you that, Kelso. But p'raps we can make it so unpleasant for you in Jezebel you won't care much to tarry. Push-'em-Up, you can check these visitors' fireirons back of the bar till Pete, my deputy, calls to collect 'em. And now, Union, what was the ruckus about?"

"It was about a green emerald glass jool, worth \$40,000, which was given inter the mission's free-will offerin' an' which this hunk o' toreador tried ter grab an' went loco when I befoozled him."

"I lost my head," growled Kelso sullenly. "I have always been attracted to jewels. I only wanted to look at it again."

"But you was willin' ter assassinate me fer a second look."

"A-hem," said Lucius Hendricks, clearing his throat. "Sheriff Lew, this bullfighter Kelso is of a type that we not infrequently meet in the jewelry business. He is stone-mad, as we call it. The sight of a superlative jewel particularly an emerald or a ruby, drives everything from his brain except the lust of possession. It is people like him, men and women both, who have caused the famous jewels of the world to leave a trail of death behind them through the centuries. This bullfighter's blood lust was up when he killed that steer, the jewel lust followed naturally on top of it. He is what Doctor McCarty, if he were here, would list as psychopathic. He meant to kill Union because he thwarted him."

"I only meant to frighten him," said Kelso.

"You succeeded," snorted Union. "I ain't got no hairs on my head ter rise in horror but my spine felt like a bed o' chilled New England clams. For a minnit I thought I was back at Little Round Top with Pickett's Brigade comin' at me in a wave o' shinin' steel. But yore wave o' steel has ebbed jest like Pickett's. You be harmless now Kelso, you an' yore crew, with yore weapons took away. You gonna jug 'em, Sheriff Lew?"

"Calaboose is bulgin' at the seams," returned Sheriff Lew. "You could not git another prisoner in with a crowbar after that ruckus in Mexican Alley last night where we collected six cowboys and seven Mexicans.

Kelso, if you and your crew git out of Jezebel inside a reasonable time, you can stay here, unarmed, if you are able to support yourselves."

"We have got money," rasped Kelso. "Never mind how we got it." He flashed a handful of goldpieces. "Enough to get us on to Los Angeles where there is a big Mexican population, who would have heard of me. I can get a stake there, or somehow, to get up to Frisco and ship out of there for Spain, the long way round across the Pacific. Do not worry, lawman, in Spain I can step right into the ring and make a fortune."

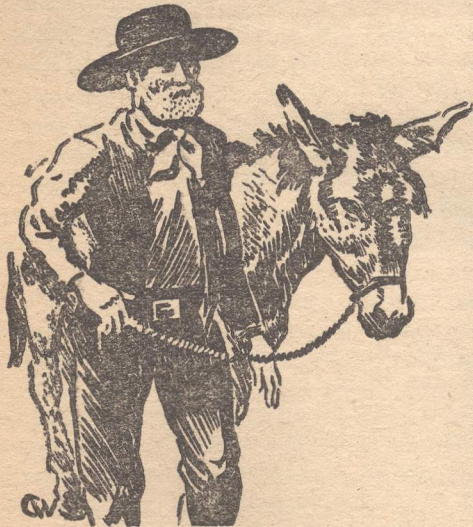
"Then make it in Spain," said Sheriff Lew. "I'll give you three days to haul out of here and in the meantime, you will remain on your good behavior. Your guns and other weapons you can have back when you leave town in case you should encounter road agents on the way to Los Angeles. You heard me?"

"We heard you, lawman."

"And now, who brought this ruckus-provokin' emerald into Jezebel?" inquired Sheriff Lew. "And where is it?"

"In the Arizony Palace safe, right behind me," chirped Push-'em-Up. "I popped it into the pokey so fast nobody saw me do it."

"So that answers that query. Keep it there."



"As for yore other query, I kin reply ter that one." Union was staring through the plate-glass front window at the strange pair in the street outside; the aged, bowed and gnome-like derelict and the battered burro

whose halter he held. "Our donox be outside on the door sill, lookin' like a lost soul. I be gonna rescue him."

He stumped out through the batwings and up to the pair, extending his hand. "I be Union Jones, my friend, who was actin' as vestryman down ter the mission where we had a word or so. I wish ter welcome you at greater length ter Jezebel an' I would be happy ter provide you with enny information you are needin'. Who be you, might I inquire?"

"I air old Saul Soames," croaked the desert rat in a voice that sounded as though it had not been used for years. "An' this air my four-footed companion, Jennifer." Union stared at the burro, loaded down with its pack. It was of a dingy gray color and its flanks were thin and scarred. Strange lumps appeared on its haunches and shoulders and elsewhere in profusion, the marks of cactus scars and contusions patched its body. Its hide was deep with alkali and one ear, with a hole in it, hung down ludicrously. It looked even worse than its owner. "I would wish to see Jennifer air took care of good after which I would seek some repose myself. We have come a long ways."

"I kin fix you both, Mister Soames," announced Union. "Man or beast, I be happy ter extend the hospitality o' Jezebel. Pale an' Wan!" His voice rose mightily. "You scamper right out here, pronto!"

From the door of his laundry shop nearby Charley Wan, the one-man Chinese colony of Jezebel emerged. His wrinkled ivory-yellow face was wreathed in a grin and his shapeless black pajamas bagged on his small frame. "Union Jonesee, my fliend, what for you yellee? Poor Charley's eardlums clackee."

"Mister Old Saul Soames," said Union, "this be Pale an' Wan, an eminent an' trustworthy citizen o' Jezebel, when not engaged in the practice o' spittin' on boiled shirts while ironin' 'em. Out back o' his laundry he has erected some kind o' shed fer Dynamite, the local untamed burro which seems ter have adopted him. Pale an' Wan kin put yore Jennifer in with Dynamite and they will be cosy as two bugs in a rug."

"Put this jackassee in with Dynamite?" inquired Pale and Wan. "Lady jackassee in with Dynamitee, who is gentleman jackassee?" He beamed happily and went over to the lump-crustled Jennifer and rubbed her

nose. Jennifer promptly made a whoofing noise and nuzzled his hand experimentally. "Charley give lady jackassee Jennifeh plentee oatsee, hay and wateh to implove figgeh. Charley washee up lady jackassee and pless out lumpsee with flatiron and tie ribbon on ear. Make Jennifeh into pletty lady jackassee. Maybe love matchee with Dynamitee. Ooh!"

Jennifer, the derelict, whoofed again and Saul Soames gnomelike face cracked into friendliness.

"You air a feller kind ter poor dumb animals, Chink," he croaked. "I air leavin' Jennifer in the best o' hands. Go along with Chinkee, Jenny."

"An' you come along with me, Mister Saul Soames," said Union.

He moved to the side of the burro and expertly unloosened the pack hitches. He slung the ragged blanket-roll, burdened with frying pan, coffee pot and miscellaneous rusty and desert-worn equipment onto his sturdy back.

"I be takin' you up ter Madame Santa Fe's select boardin' and roomin' house fer to repose. She be crowded now, but what with mine cave-ins and steady shootin's there be vacancies comin' up almost daily amongst her list of exclusive boarders. We shall throw up a cot in my room, which you kin have the bed until you have a room of yore own, Mister Soames. It be high noon, exactly the sacred hour o' Madame Santa Fe's Sunday dinner which be amazin'. In ten minutes you will be settin' before more steak, roast beef, hen's eggs, pertaters, greens, cawfee, pie an' what not than you ever seed in yore life."

"Hen's eggs, pie!" croaked Saul Soames. "I have fergot whut they taste like."

"You will be curlin' yore tongue about both immedjiate," vouchsafed Union heartily, "ter say nuthin' o' dunkin' the ends o' yore beard in the only java in Arizony which be free from alkali. After which you kin go fer yore Sunday after-dinner snooze fer the next twenty-four hours on my bed. Termorror mornin' when the Bank o' Jezebel opens, Mister Soames, I shall personally escort you down there where you kin lock up the rest o' yore green emerald strike."

"I ain't got 'em on me," said Soames. "But they air whar I kin put my hand on 'em. I cached 'em close by. Nobuddy but

me an' my burro know whar they air. I do not wanter talk about 'em till I have rested, Friend Jones."

"You do not have ter," soothed Union. He took the aged desert rat by the arm. "Fust comes Sunday dinner an' bed in a nice second-floor rear room which be not so blazin' hot in the daytime because o' the big tree which spreads its branches an' its shade right on top o' the winder. C'mon along, Mister Saul Soames, I shall be the guardeen o' yore health an' yore secret, if you care ter tell it, kin wait as long as you like."

"I shall tell it to you, soon, Friend Jones. I air too old ter go on with it withouten passin' it along fer the benefit of mankind. I have writ it all down on a piece o' paper, how ter git whar ther air not only the green jools but the gold ornaments an' the bar gold. Old they air, older'n the mountains an' time itself an' I be old too. I be——"

The ancient desert rat lurched and his mouth gaped feebly. Union swung a strong arm around him. "C'mon like I said, Mister Soames. You have bin through too much fer too many years. Let the emerald jool mine an' the treasure wait."

He turned toward the porch of the Arizona Palace. "It be all right, Sheriff Lew," he called. "He be in my care."

Sheriff Lew had not emerged onto the boardwalk but someone else had. Jackson Kelso stood there with Hathaway beside him, his face hard, his eyes studying Union and the old desert rat and the lumpy burro, and there was more than curiosity in them. There was steely, malignant purpose. He spoke in a low voice to Hathaway, as Union caught the words.

"So he thinks."

III

"YESSIR," said Union Jones, "there he lies in my bed a-sleepin' like a baby with his beard all nicely arranged outside the covers. After he had et two thick steaks an' half a dozen o' Madame Santa Fe's fried eggs an' a double helpin' o' greens an' a half-section o' pie, I trickled half a pint o' whiskey inter him an' took his clothes offen him, bathed him up an' snuggled him inter bye-bye. After which I set guard over him with a Winchester. There he lies, like I said, with the secret o' millions locked in his

peacefully snorin' bosom. So now it be comin' on fer evenin', I have got Pluto, my little printer's devil, ter spell me, bein' in need o' some healthful stimulant ter repair the strain o' my charitable labors. Old Saul Soames he has got a touchin' confidence in me, thinkin' I really be a vestryman."

"Old Uncle Jones the Sunday Samaritan," remarked Push-'em-Up amiably and shoved the bottle across the bar. "Back to normal on Monday morning with a hell of a hang-over."

"Push-'em-Up," glared Union, "kin not a gennelman from the Commonwealth o' Massachusetts pufform a friendly act without bein' belittled fer it? Some day you may be poor an' old an'—"

"I may git old as time wears on," admitted Push-'em-Up, "but I will never be poor as long as the likker bizness holds up. So out of sheer benignity of heart, I suppose, after Saul Soames has waked up, you will pry from him the location of his treasure cache by strangling him with three-inch steaks and half pies until he has the choice of giving up his secret or being killed by kindness. Meantime you sit guard on him so that no one can git to him except yourself."

"He has got ter be pertected." Union jerked his thumb over his shoulder. At a nearby table sat Jackson Kelso with Captain Hathaway on one side of him and Runt Reardon, the burglar, on the other. Kelso was staring at Union over the rim of a thick tumbler filled to the brim with tequila. It was an implacable, menacing stare. "We have got us a jool-mad bullkiller an' man-slayer in town with his crew. What would they do ter Saul Soames if they could git hold o' him?"

"Or to you for that matter, Union," observed Push-'em-Up pleasantly. "You are not well beloved in that circle after inserting your kneecap in Toreador Kelso's breadbasket. Yet they have money and as a purveyor of spirits, I must serve them, no matter whether their lucre has blood on it, like that \$40,000 green jool, or not. Also is it not better to tempt them to linger under the eyesight in the Arizony Palace Saloon rather than let some other joint get them where we do not know what they are up to? Yes, Jackson Kelso would cheerfully kill Soames, you or anyone else, in order to obtain the secret

of the jewel cache. I gather Prospector Soames did not have them on his person or they would be rattling around in your Samaritan's pockets at this moment."

"He has cached them nearby an' they ain't nobuddy but him, he says, an' his burro Jennifer know where they be. He has not talked as yit an' that knock-kneed, dessicated lump o' female burro, which, you ask me, be the wust-looking animal I ever seed."

"Oh, lady jackassee beautiful now!" carolled an Oriental voice. With his arms full of clean bar towels Pale and Wan was approaching the mahogany, having entered by the back door. "Charley do what Charley say. Washee, plessee, ironee lady jackassee, put in with Dynamitee in sheddee fi' minnits ago. Lady jackassee castee eye of love on Dynamitee on first sightee. Lady jackassee takee love bitee on Dynamitee's neck. All sweet, all plopeh."

The resounding crash that came from somewhere out back rolled like thunder through the Arizona Palace. Another crash sounded, a third and then the wild braying began, punctuated by the splintering of wood and the rattling of tin being ripped loose from its foundations.

"Good Gaw!" gasped Union. "What be goin' on? It sounds like the battle o' Gettysburg bein' re-enacted in Jezebel!"

"Love," said Pale and Wan beatifically. "Jackasseees in love matchee. Lady jackassee bitee Dynamitee, Dynamitee bitee back, then lady jackassee and gentleman jackassee plant hoofs in each o'ther's ribsees, plenty soon settle down in happee mallied life."

"It sounds like married life okay," opined Union. "All over the Five Points district where I dwelt when I was Horace Greeley's best printer on the New York *Tribune* you could hear the racket o' married life goin' on like that every night, particularly of a Sattiday." The crashing, the splintering and the metallic rattling mounted to a crescendo, the braying tore the Arizona night. "Leave us go peek at this pair."

He stumped for the rear of the premises and out the back door onto the sand in the flaming sunset. Not far away beyond the posts that carried Pale and Wan's washing line stood the crude shed, made of odds and ends of timber and strips of tin cans hammered flat. Part of the frail wall was out on its rear side, more of it flew into the air as

burro heels drove like pile drivers. The sound of bucking, biting and squealing was appalling.

"Ooh, happee blidal night!" lilted Pale and Wan.

"An' here comes the happy bridegroom, kicked out on his ear," said Union.

From the open door of the improvised stable plunged Dynamite, the local burro, whose temperamental back had never borne the galling weight of a load. He came out spray-footed and braying, propelled by thudding hoofs on his hind quarters and bounded fifteen yards to safety. He pivoted on a dime, dug his hoofs into the sand and vented throaty defiance at the other burro that appeared in the door. Jennifer's mouth was wide open, a ribbon flaunted in her flop ear, she hurled something like a chortle of triumph at Dynamite, turned around and disappeared in the darkness of the stable. In lonely grandeur Dynamite stood, still vocal.

"Kicked out by his lovin' spouse after she has hurled everythin' movable in the flat at him," offered Union. "Human nature be the same in Jezebel as in New York, it would appear, an' so be animal nature. It was my fault, Pale an' Wan, fer suggestin' you put a lady burro an' a gentleman burro in the same premises together before they had bin properly interdooced. So Dynamite will spend the night outdoors an' mebbe he will be let back home agin in the mornin'."

"Poor Dynamitee," said Pale and Wan. "Charley go soothee injured Dynamitee."

He trotted over the sand for Dynamite and Union shrugged and went back into the Arizona Palace. He stumped through the crowded main room and up to the bar.

"Union," said Push-'em-Up, "your printer's devil Plutarco has just arrived here looking for you with great tidings."

"Pluto, that littul Mexican hellion! I left him sittin' with Saul Soames an' give him half a dollar fer a handsome bonus."

"There goes your half-dollar," Push-'em-Up jerked his thumb toward the roulette table. Bright-eyed, Plutarco Herrera, aged fifteen, hung over the green cloth layout. His unusually intelligent face, marked with the poise of an appalling precocity, was alert and vivid. A small brown cigarro tilted in his mouth.

"Pluto, which I be eddicatin' in the paths

o' virtue an' industry, throwin' away half a buck on gamblin'!" howled Union. He drove for the table and grabbed the small Mexican by the arm. "You come outer that, Pluto, you young hellion! How many times have I warned you agin the evils o' gamblin'? Money is ter invest an' not ter fritter around."

The ball clicked merrily about its bowl. Pluto smiled with youthful charm. "Behold, respected Senor Jones, my more than father. I am feefteen years of age and today is the feefteenth of the month. Also las' night I dream of feefteen lovely senioritas with red seelk stockings. What better investment could one have than to place money upon number feefteen? Eet is the system you yourself pursue."

The rattle of the ball ended, it came to rest and the long-nosed croupier with the green eyeshade leaned forward and looked at it. "Number fifteen," he droned. "Red, odd, first eighteen, second dozen—"

A vicious curse broke from close at hand. Not three players away stood Jackson Kelso, staring at the five double eagles that he had placed on the even layout in front of him. The gambler's fever burned in his eyes. The croupier's rake stretched out and hauled in his stake.

"Cripes!" rose a voice. "That's about four hundred bucks he's sunk in five minnits!"

"So eet ees Numair Feefteen." Once more Pluto showed his perfect white teeth in an engaging grin. "Senor Croupier, the seven-teen and a half dollars, eef you please. Honored Senor Jones, look you, I place your mos' beneficent half-dollair upon number feefteen as an investment and it grows into eighteen dollairs in a matter of seconds. Peecture what I shall have at such a rate at the end of an hour."

"You little miscreant, you come outer here!" bellowed Union. "Or I will yank you out by the seat o' the pants."

Pluto scooped in his winnings and slapped his pocket. "Regard, Senor Jones, my more than father. The pants are filled weeth profit. May I purchase for you a double glass of your favorite Merry Screech of the Old Panther in celebration of my investment whilst I geeve to you the important tidings from the most venerable Prospector Soames? He has awaked, he ees calling for hees friend Vestryman Jones to whom he weeshes

immediately' to impart the story of hees treasure in return for what you have done for heem."

"Saul Soames wishes ter tell me all about his treasure pronto?" gulped Union. "An' he be up there all alone, you deserter from yore duty?"

"Si, Senor Jones. But he ees not alone. The Senor Beegs—*ah, dios*, what chaparral of the face!—who dropped een to chat weeth you now seets weeth him weeth the Winchester on one knee and the glass of whiskey on the othair."

"So Bushface Biggs be up there gittin' inter all my whiskey!" howled Union. "I be goin' ter pull my freight fer Madame Santa Fe's an' git my whiskey outer Bushface Biggs' clutches an' the great secrit outer old Saul Soames!"

He turned and from only yards away met the ruthless, inflamed eyes of Jackson Kelso, standing rigid at the layout. A turbulent flame filled them.

"Number seven," came the croupier's flat voice. "Red, odd, first eighteen, first dozen—"

Kelso whirled and again an oath burst from him. One more pile of goldpieces placed in front of him was vanishing with the croupier's rake.

"Fust he has the killin' fever an' then the jool fever an' now it be the gamblin' fever has got him," muttered Union. "He keeps that losin' streak up, he will have no stake ter git outer Jezebel. Pluto, you little hellion, you stay away from Mexican Alley with yore loot."

SWAGGERING, Union stamped to the door and onto Silver Street. The swift desert sunset had faded and the onrushing twilight shadowed the buildings. Shoulders thrust back, copper-toed boots beating a rata-plan on the boardwalk he strode along and cut into the alley leading to the next street. In minutes only he had arrived at Madame Santa Fe's select boarding and rooming house and was climbing the stairs to the second floor rear.

It was a comfortable and cosy scene into which he burst. The lamp had been lit and at a pine table with a deck of cards and coins and matches for markers between them sat Bushface Biggs and a strangely recreated Saul Soames. A clean hickory shirt and blue

jeans that almost fitted clothed his gnome-like frame, his face was free of alkali dust and he was running a lead comb through the remaining tangles of his eighteen-inch beard.

"Oho!" he croaked. "It air Vestryman Jones. I air a new man, Vestryman, in this rigout you borrered fer me. My luck it still air in."

"He has wonned eight bucks offen me already at showdown," announced Bushface genially, indicating the coins before Soames. "I air playin' cash agin his credit on the emerald jool mine. Set down, Union, an' have a nice glass o' wiskey with us."

"That be a damn handsome invitation from you, Bushface," said Union. "Seein' that I own the whiskey. I most suttinly shall set down an' you kin run along about yore bizness from now on."

"Oh, I shall be skedaddlin', Union," said Bushface in an injured tone. "I have got a hard day ahead o' me termorrer at the Lucky Lode blowin' six tons o' rock outa the way. Some o' that rock air almost as hard as your head."

Grinning broadly he heaved himself up and went clumping down the stairs. Union helped himself to a half-tumbler of redeye from the bottle on the table and sat down opposite Soames, facing the window through which a gentle breeze blew. Outside, full night had fallen and the leafage of the tree was a dense blur.

"I be glad you are feelin' better, Mister Soames," he opened. "There be nuthin' like a few steaks on the stummick ter promote a healthful slumber. My littul apprentice he tells me you sent fer me."

"Yes, I did. He air a nice, bright young lad."

"A most bright young lad," agreed Union. "In fact, there be some times when Pluto would appear to be too bright fer his own good."

"He tole me about the kind an' fatherly way in which you bin bringin' him up, Vestryman Jones. He tole me that due ter your beneficent interest an' teachin's he has got no sech bad habits as smokin' or drinkin' or gamblin' or dancin' with wimmen."

"Arrgh-warrgh!" Union strangled, his blazing red face purple. "The littul— Leave us dispense with Pluto, Mister Soames. He said yore message ter me was that you

wished ter confide the secret o' yore treasure."

"An' so I do. Thar it lies in its cave as it has laid all these years, waitin' for a discoverer to come an' take it away. For forty years I have been traipsin' the desert an' the mountains lookin' for my strike, but it come at last."

The old memories of dust and hunger and hardship and thirst and fear and failure, the eternal struggle of the lone prospector against nature, clouded Saul Soames' eyes for a moment and then they burned with the unquenchable fire of the hope that had carried him over the endless, torturous miles.

"Yessir, the luck it turned. It was an old an' sick Injun that I come on out on the desert, dyin' of thirst and his ailments, whut led me to it. I nussed him like a baby and I got him offen the desert inter the mountains and between whut I know of the Injun talk an' sign langwidge, we made out to understand each other. He had knowed for years of a treasure not so far off an' on Jennifer's back he guided me thar. A high-class Injun he does not keer to be in no one's debt for a service, he was not long to live an' he wished to repay me like I wish to repay you, Vestryman Jones, for your kindness an' friendship, seein' that thar air wealth enough for a coupla hundred people out in thet cavern."

He paused and the prospector's dream come true illumined his face.

"Yes sir, the old Injun showed me along the base of the mountain to a big slab of rock all overgrewed thick with bushes. But by wormin' through the bushes we was in a slit behind the rock an' the slit it led inter the cave. By the light of my torch I saw the gold piled up, the bars, the old church ornaments, the bags of the emerald jools an' the Injun he signed to me to help myself. I made out from him a big caravan of dons an' church folks was massacred by his tribe long, long ago around somewhere closet by after a runnin' fight outer Mexico."

"Things like that happen," said Union. "Jeweler Hendricks was explainin' it as part o' the history o' Mexico an' Arizony."

"So I selected me about a dozen of them emerald stones which bein' flat could be easily hid." A crafty expression came into the old desert rat's face. "The Injun did not last long thereafter, in about a week it was I give him a decent burial. Then there come

a sandstorm which pretty nigh did fer me an' after that I hiked it for the nearest settlement which air Jezebel."

"Nearest settlement—Jezebel?" Union burst out. "How far off from here be this treasure trove?"

"I figger not more nor fifty-sixty miles."

"Good Gaw!" exploded Union. "Fifty-sixty miles from this here room ter a treasure trove cave holdin' millions? Jeweler Hendricks, which sure knows his bizness, he figgered yore one glass jool in the free-will offerin' was worth \$40,000 in the right market. This be incredulous!"

"It air true," said Saul Soames earnestly. "It air a true story. The old sick Injun with the secret he give to me, the green emeralds, the cave I seed with my own eyes."

"It be the oldest story in Arizony. There be dozens of 'em like it," gulped Union. "But it be one o' the truest stories in Arizony. Time after time some prospector has come stumblin' outer nowhere or bin found dyin' on the desert with a solid gold nugget or sech ter prove he struck it rich, but he passes on without disclosin' his secret or he got lost afterwards an' never could find the treasure location again. This time it be emeralds beside gold an' you have proved the emerald in the free-will offerin'."

"I kin prove you a dozen more emeralds. I will show them to you tomorrow. An' the map I drew of how to find the cave."

"Walkin' fast with a light pack I could git there in three days easy," mused Union awedly. "Fill my pockits with them green glass jools an' walk back a millionaire. An' so could any citizen o' Jezebel."

"Go ahead, Friend Jones. Start termorrer at sunset an' travel the desert in the cool of the night. Which in the meantime I shall take my emeralds outer their cache and put them away safe in the bank. Like I told you, they are close by an' the map is with them."

"Where be they? You bury 'em in the arroyo back o' Jezebel?"

Old Saul Soame chuckled like some ancient goblin. "I air a smart man, Union Jones. You larn things out on the desert an' in the mountains. Oncet many years ago I was a very fine shoemaker an' a shoemaker he knows how to hide things in places."

"You hid 'em in yore boots?" demanded Union.

"I did not, seein' that they air fallin'

apart. Nor did I hide 'em in my pack or anywhere about my pusson. Thar air too many bad men waitin' to waylay a prospector who has struck it rich. I hid 'em whar no one would ever guess or could give me away. Hide 'em?" His voice rose in triumph. "Hide be the proper word for it. Termorrer you will know all. Oh, what the heck, I might as well tell you right now. Ho, ho, I have really told you already."

Union's eyes threatened to leave his head. He reached for the whiskey bottle.

"Gimme yore glass, Mister Soames. We must fill an' lift ter this jubilant moment o' revelation." He took the glass the old prospector extended to him and brimmed it up, setting it in the center of the table as he turned to fix his own. Soames' gnomelike figure bent forward to reach it and Union looked up. Beyond the window in the branches of the tree something stirred, something was held out aimed for Union Jones' heart.

He saw the shadow of the lurking man, veiled by foliage and darkness, ten yards away on a level with the second-floor window.

"Good God!" he burst out. "A man in the tree with a gun! Soames, Soames, stay down!"

The shot crashed and Union's body tensed for the shock. But it did not come. In the last split second the old prospector, startled, had jerked upright and the bullet thudded into his body. A look of dull surprise clouded his face, his eyes widened and he pitched forward. His body hit the table, and slipped out of its chair to the floor. A second shot drove into the room as Union leaped for the bed where the Winchester lay, swept it up and fired straight into the blur of the tree. Even as his finger pressed trigger the form dropped from the branches and disappeared from view under the window.

"Missed!"

Union sprang for the window and looked out. In the moonlight a man was running like a deer away from the tree for the shelter of the nearby buildings. The Winchester came up. Its sight took the fugitive between the shoulders.

"Got him!"

Union squeezed trigger and the firing pin fell on emptiness. The running man plunged in between a pair of buildings. Union low-

ered the rifle, jerked its lever and stared at the vacant chamber where the shell should have been.

"That lunkhead Bushface!" he groaned. "I put a shell in the chamber an' one in the magazine fer guard dooty. An' he musta levered out the fust shell peekin' ter see if the gun was loaded, leavin' nuthin' but the one shot."

He turned from the window and stared down at the floor. Saul Soames lay there, a crumpled old desert rat who had made his strike, to whom destruction had come from nowhere. The dark stain was spreading on the breast of the clean hickory shirt and the limpness of his body told all.

"Pore old feller! Drygulched with his scrit on his lips!"

Footsteps pounded outside and a boarder clad in shirt and trousers with his hair disheveled and his feet bare, rushed in.

"Fer Gaw sake, Union, what you doin'?" he exploded. "There I am takin' my early evenin' nap an' you begin firin' off guns. You think it is the Fourth o' July?"

"It is gonna be Doomsday fer some people I know," growled Union. He pointed to Saul Soames. "Bill, you run like hell fer Sheriff Lew an' Doc McCarty, not that the doc will do any good. Put it on the air."

The fellow boarder took one look. "I am goin'!" he blurted and charged out of the room. His voice drifted back from the street outside in the cry Jezebel knew so well.

"Sheriff Lew! Git Sheriff Lew! Git Doc Mac! Killin' at Madame Santa Fe's!"

IV

"**N**OTHING I can do, gentlemen." Doc Mac McCarty, of the flaming burn-sides and the years of frontier experience, stood up from his examination. He had not even opened his bag. "He died instantly. Get him up to Fifty-Dollar Harry's mortuary parlors. Sheriff, it's your turn now."

"I have told you all I know, Sheriff Lew," said Union. The room had filled with eager spectators who parted as two townsmen brought in the shutter and the small, blanket-clad figure of Saul Soames went out after Doc Mac. "The shot come through from the tree and it was meant fer me. Pore old Soames, he jumped hisself up in his seat in time ter git it instead."

"And why should some person want to shoot you, Union?" asked Sheriff Lew, tugging thoughtfully at his tawny mustache.

"Why not?" suggested a helpful spectator from the background.

"That's enough from you!" Git out!" snapped Sheriff Lew. "Git out, the hull caboodle of you, and leave me and my deputy to handle this investigation without any yawping help. All right, Union, we'll just go over the ground again."

Muttering excitedly the crowd of spectators tramped down the stairs, leaving Sheriff Lew and Union and Pete, the burly deputy, alone in the room where death had struck.

"I kin identify nobuddy, Sheriff. I kin give—"

"Ladder," Pete spoke from the window out of which he was leaning. "Ladder here, Sheriff."

"Huh?" gulped Union. He followed Sheriff Lew to the window and looked straight down, following Pete's finger. The top of the ladder, braced against the wall of the house, was not two feet under the sill. "Good gorrymighty, they meant ter come in after they had killed me! They was more than jest one man up a tree, I be gittin' inspiration."

"Out," said Sheriff Lew briskly. "Scout the ground for signs. No, not down the ladder. That'd leave our footprints around it. Back door. Bring the lamp, Union."

Union lifted the lamp from the table and they went down the stairs, out the back door. In the light of the lamp the boot-tracks showed, dim in the sand but there were plenty of them and they told their story.

"Three men, two carryin' the ladder, and walkin' in trace," said Sheriff Lew. "The ladder was taken to the tree first, Man Number One went up it to the branches. Number Two and Number Three then carried it to the wall and set it up. Prints at its base on each side. Then—lamp higher, Union." Sheriff Lew stepped forward as the illumination flashed on the ladder. "Sand on the rungs. They climbed and crouched under the window, waitin' and listenin'. Yes, Union, I reckon you are right. The men on the ladder meant to climb into the room after Man Number One in the tree had shot you."

"Ter git me outer the way as guard," husked Union. "Then like lightnin' they

would jump inter the room from the ladder an' snatch old Saul Soames away. They could knock him senseless easy with one blow. It were a case o' tryin' fer ter kidnap the goose which had the secret o' th goldeen aigs an' wring it from him."

"And who knew Saul Soames had a treasure trove?" inquired Sheriff Lew. "The whole of Jezebel, which is a large field of suspects. Everyone in the Arizona Palace heard Lucius Hendricks' pronouncement."

"An' everybody in the place heard Pluto yowl that Saul Soames was sendin' fer me ter tell me his story. Includin' Jackson Kelso, who was losin' money hand over fist at the roulette table only a coupla yards from me. I was follered here but it was Saul Soames got bushwhacked by mistake."

"You hang your suspicions onto Jackson Kelso?" demanded Sheriff Lew.

"He has killed before. He's stone-mad, probably stony-broke. It be true you denuded him an' his gang o' their weapons but weapons be easy ter come by in Jezebel. Fer fifty bucks, what d'you think a man kin purchase down in Mexican Alley?"

"You can't hold Jackson Kelso and crew on suspicion, Union," said Sheriff Lew. "If it was them, they'll have an alibi. An alibi can also be bought for a reasonable sum in Mexican Alley. If I jug them, without a doubt half a dozen Mexican bravos will come forward and swear they were all drinkin' together at the time. I've hit that stuff too often to want to hit it again. Suspicion is one thing, evidence to arrest one another. And, damn them, there's no evidence they left around here."

"So what?"

"So it looks like Jackson Kelso and pals jog outer town on their way to Los Angeles at the end of the three days' grace I give 'em. The secret of the emerald treasure and the gold will be buried with Old Prospector Soames in Boot Hill as so many frontier secrets have been buried. Pete, impound the ladder for the office. At least, we can try to find out whose it is and if they can help."

"Hell!" said Union. "There be a hundred home-made ladders like this one in Jezebel. They lie around loose up agin' buildin's an' stores an' out back of 'em fer drunks ter fall over. An' speakin' o' redeye, Sheriff Lew, now that we have come ter a cold dead end on this sleuthin' business, I am makin' tracks

back ter the Arizony Palace an' see if I kin refresh my inspiration with a few shots o' same." He rubbed his hand across his forehead. "Old Saul Soames he said somethin' most peculiar jest before the bullet hit him. He said he had already told me the secret o' the location o' the emeralds he brung out with him. Mebbe somewhere along in what he said ter me was cryptograph or an anagram or a you-know-what which he figgered I could solve. He was a real nice old feller which wished ter benefit mankind with his lucky strike an' I would blasted well like ter run his abolisher ter earth, ter say nuthin' o' locatin' his find."

"You're a lot brighter with your foot on the brass rail, Union," said Sheriff Lew. "Give me any of your brilliant inspirations that may develop after the fourth shot of redeye. In the meantime, I'll go along with the routine sheriff stuff. Maybe some witness, some informer, will turn up with what we want. Mr. Donaldson of the mission no doubt will put up a big reward outer that jewel gift Saul Soames made. Pete, got that ladder? We'll be goin' along."

THE deputy shouldered the ladder and he and Sheriff Lew went around the corner of the building. Union stood for a moment alone, looking over the empty, moonlit sands.

"No evidence be correct. Nuthin' ter connect Jackson Kelso nor nobody with the dirty act." He licked his dry lips. "There be redeye a hull lot closer than the Arizony Palace, a full bottle of it up in my room. An' there I be goin'."

He went in the back door of the house, clumped through the kitchen and up the stairs to his quarters. It was a peaceful and quiet atmosphere he found in the small, neat chamber with the lamp once more back on the table and the shadows veiling the dark spot on the floor where Saul Soames had fallen. Union lifted a portion of redeye, loaded the Winchester from the box of shells on the bureau, and sat down.

"Arrgh, warrgh!" he gurgled. "Leave us see what thought comes. Leave us retrace everythin' like a Hawkshaw or a Pinkerton fer ter solve the anagram. Pencil an' paper fer notes, where be they? Only a cub reporter or an' experienced noospaperman ever goes without his notes on paper." He produced

an envelope from his inner pocket and a stub of printer's pencil.

"Fust we shall set down Essential Fact Number One which be that nobuddy but Saul Soames an' his burro know where the loot he brung out or the map ter treasure cave be. Saul Soames he kin not speak no more, his burro which has observed his lucky strike never could. So there we be stuck, in which case it be essential ter have another brain-stimulant."

The redeye gurgled through his beard and he shuddered. His eyes gleamed. "Essential Stimulant Number Two has promoted Essential Fact Number Two. What was it Saul Soames said which was most outer the way? He had bin fer a shoemaker an' a shoemaker knows all kinds o' places in which ter hide things. Now where would a shoemaker hide somethin'. Let us consult our noospaperman's notes."

He closed one eye and studied the blue scrawls. They read so far: "Secret—Saul Soames—burro—shoemaker—hide—"

"We be either gittin' somewhere very slowly or nowhere fast," he meditated aloud. "Howsoever we shall continue an' leave no stone unturned. Good Gaw!"

The object that had sailed up from outside and passed through the window fell with a startling thud on the floor not a yard away. It was of lavalike blackness and around it was wrapped a belt of white.

"It be a stone which has turned up of itself! A stone with writin' tied around it!"

He rushed for the window and looked out, with the Winchester ready, but there was no one in sight. He came back to the table, picking up the stone on the way and slipping the message from the binding cord. Badly scrawled but legible the words read:

If you want to know who killed Saul Soames come immediate to the big tree at the end of the third alley from here. Come armed if you like but come alone. I saw it all.

A Friend

"The eyewitness Sheriff Lew hoped fer has turned up, or mebbe it is an informer has turned up," ejaculated Union. "Whichever it be under the tree which has sent fer me, I be goin'. This be not the fust time a noospaperman has had a quick break in a killin'."

case from some unknown source. Come armed if I like, he sez, an' I do like. Come alone, he sez, which I would prefer, desirin' fer Pinkerton Jones ter solve this killin' all by hisself."

HE TOOK the stairs with the Winchester cradled under his arm and went down them and out onto the street, moving fast. At the mouth of the third alley, hardly more than a sandy track running between darkened buildings until it ended on the desert, he stopped and sent his glance warily along it. It stretched bare to its end where the tree rose, casting its straggling shadow on the sand. Union advanced along the alley and almost at once a figure slipped out from behind the tree trunk and held up a white handkerchief in signal. Union kept on going and moved his Winchester to the ready as the tree and the dark figure showed up not more than fifty yards away. The man held both hands above his head, waving Union on with the one that held the handkerchief, and at that distance his face under the down-drawn hat was unrecognizable.

"Mexican or American?" muttered Union. "In a minnit I shall know. In a minnit I shall know everythin'."



He stepped past the back of a deserted, tumbledown shack whose open door gaped blackly on the alley. He never saw the two shapes that darted murderously from the black pit of the door, he never heard the swift, soundless footsteps that rushed him from the rear.

"Get him!" came the hoarse, low command and the first blow struck on the top of Union's unprotected head.

"Got him!" husked the answer and the second blow crashed.

Union reeled forward, falling. In his last flickering instant of consciousness he realized that a bag was being thrust over his head, blinding him, and that he was being lifted up by rough hands.

"Sucker!" he gasped. "Old Sucker Jones!" Then he passed out.

V

UNION JONES opened his eyes and blinked. He was in a realm of shadows and of an unaccustomed aroma. His head was pounding and confusion filled his mind. He closed his eyes and the confusion and the shock began to ebb away.

"Where be I?" he asked himself. "I have bin assassinated. But there be no smell o' burnin' around so I must have waked up in heaven. No, it be not a gentleman's heaven, it be a hoss' heaven. It be oats an' grains an' hay an' sech I smell."

He tried to struggle into a sitting position and failed. His hands were tied in front of him and his ankles also were wound with rope. As his eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, he could see that he was in an empty corner of a large, high-raftered building stacked close up to the room with bags of feed and bales of hay. Lantern light filtered in from around an angle a few yards away and he caught the low sound of voices from somewhere out of sight.

He drew in deep breaths and strangled, coughing in the thin dust of the feed sacks.

A figure emerged promptly from around the angle of bales and the light of a lantern fell on Union. "Ah!" said Jackson Kelso ironically. "So the thick skull of Union Jones is undamaged as I figured it would be. Captain Hathaway knows how to hit so as to cause only a temporary knockout and with a slungshot Runt Reardon is without a peer."

Behind Kelso crowded his crew, all four of them. The bleached Hathaway smiled in a sardonic fashion and Reardon grinned as though he had a pleasant memory of some recent incident. All were wearing guns again.

"Old Sucker Jones," muttered Union dis-

consolately. "Ter fall fer a bait like that." He raised his voice. "It was damn handsome o' the captain an' the littul safe-blower not ter smash my brains drippin' on the sand, I suppose."

"Dead men can't talk," said Kelso. "You can. It was sheer bad luck that Soames got the shot meant for you."

"So it was you up the tree," snorted Union. "I allus figgered it was. An' two o' yore charmin' crew on the ladder ter snatch Soames."

"Right, Jones." Kelso's smooth face grew utterly evil. "I had my sight squarely on your heart, I had you cold, when the old fool jumped up. Hathaway and Reardon, my ablest aides, had the ladder marked down and the entire plan was drawn within minutes after I had heard you describe the location of your room to Soames on the open street. Only darkness was needed to get you and make off with Soames. It wouldn't have taken long to make him talk in a quiet place. It won't take long to make you talk. Soames is dead and cannot tell the location of his treasure but you can."

"Huh? Me?" gagged Union.

"Your voices in the room carried clearly to me only a few yards away in the tree. What I did not catch Hathaway directly under the sill did. Only a few sentences are lacking. Jones, where is the cache of those dozen or so emeralds and the treasure cave map that Soames hid close by?"

"He never told me. Yore shot got him jest as he was about ter tell me."

"You lie! Prop him against the wall, men, and strip his shoes off. Hathaway, get a cigar going. You'll talk, Jones!"

"I kin not talk about what I do not know nuthin' about." Cold sweat began to run down Union's face as, bare-footed, he leaned against the wall in his new position. Hathaway was drawing on a lighted cigar, bringing its end into a red-hot coal.

"All right, Hathaway, go to it!"

The heat of the glowing cigar began to scorch against Union's sole. He groaned in horror.

"Lissen, Bullfighter Kelso," he got out raggedly. "You did not hear anywhere near all old Saul Soames' conversation. You couldn't have, what with bein' way out in that tree an' Hathaway havin' ter keep his head down. You caught the last sentence

okay in which the old man said, 'Ho, ho, I have told you already,' but yore remarks about havin' heered it all be jest bluff. Soames hadn't told me nuthin', he give me some kind o' riddle or anagram ter figger out, which I was doin' when yore stone came through the winder an' I fell fer it."

A SHADE of doubt passed over Kelso's face. He motioned and Hathaway drew back the cigar. Union gasped with relief.

"Be I correct, Bullfighter Kelso?"

"Yes, damn you!" snarled Kelso. Frustrated rage succeeded doubt in his features. "We didn't get nearly half of Soames' story. I've got your notes, we searched your person naturally." From his pocket he drew the blue-penciled scrawl on the envelope back. "No, you wouldn't have been scribbling this nonsense if you had the secret. Or would you?"

"I be jest as anxious as you be ter locate the cache," offered Union. "An' I be stopped as cold as you are. You will have ter ride outer Jezebel empty-handed."

"Not so empty-handed, Jones. Even if we never find the treasure of emeralds cached somewhere near Jezebel and the map to the cave there is a small fortune still within our reach. The \$40,000 stone in the safe of the Arizona Palace. A few well-placed questions and I had all the information necessary on the Palace's layout. This is Sunday night, everyone with a job goes to bed by four a.m. and there will be only a single bartender, a swamper and a scattering of men at the gambling tables in the place. So we go in armed at four-thirty and hold it up. We had plenty extra guns and knives in those saddle-bags on our horses that were taken to the corral. While I and the others hold the guns on the crowd Runt Reardon, our box expert, will blow the safe. Instead of going to Los Angeles and Frisco, we shall head east to New Orleans, sell the jewel there and sail for Spain. You see?"

"Hold up the Arizony Palace?" gasped Union. "Blow the safe? With what do you blow the safe?"

"Not two hundred yards from here there is a shack painted red where plenty of dynamite is stored. I noted it coming into town. Reardon will enter and get all the explosive he needs."

"Bullfighter Kelso," grunted Union, "you

be a smart man. I know where I be now, I should of guessed before. In the big provision hay an' feed storehouse jest outside town ter the west with the mine supply company's explosive shack on the desert beyond."

"Exactly. We brought you here under a tarpaulin in a wagon, still hitched outside. There was no one, absolutely no one, who saw the assault on you. And so—"

"An' so, you git the \$40,000 glass green jool in the safe an' Mister Donald Donaldson's mission be out a fortune. But that be all you git."

KELSO stared down at him, thought on his face. "After all, you might not be the red-nosed clown you seem, but an extraordinarily clever liar! You can consider the cigar butt test as only postponed. Under pain, one of two things will happen: either you will yell your head off without being able to add a word to what you have already told me, or you will yell a great deal that is important that had to be wrung out of you."

"I don't know nuthin." Again the sweat beaded Union's forehead. "All the clue I got be those notes an' they don't mean a thing."

Kelso looked down at the blue penciled lines he still held.

"They be so much nonsense."

"You've said that before," bit out Kelso. He made as if to crumple the envelope and throw it away. His gesture stopped abruptly, his fist unclosed. He smoothed the paper, staring. Then his eyes lit with a wild light.

"Nonsense! Nonsense, Jones? You are a thick-witted fool after all. It's here, it's here on this paper! The location of the emeralds and the map!"

"Oh, migaw!"

"I could be mistaken, but I do not think I am. Not from what I remember. The secret has been standing out in front of you, Jones, ever since noon."

"An' where be the cache?"

"I'm not telling you." Around Kelso his crew muttered with avaricious hope. On Hathaway's bleached face satisfaction shone. "As I said, I might be mistaken in which case we blow the safe. In the meantime, we mount and ride up the arroyo behind town to our destination. To the treasure!"

"A-aah!" spread the clamor.

Kelso was speaking in clear accents. Here was a leader who thought fast and decisively in action. "Reardon, you stay back here with Jones, as guard. In fifteen minutes step outside this building and look toward Jezebel, left side of Silver Street, rear. If you see a lantern's light, blanketed three times, then burning clear we have succeeded."

"And then?" said Reardon.

"Shoot Union Jones, or better, knife him with that stiletto at your belt, and join us. No, Jones, I am not going to let you live and lodge the charge of killing Soames against me."

Union said nothing. His eyes bulged glassily.

"Okay, Kelso," said Reardon. "And if no signal shows?"

"Wait here. It will mean I've gone wrong in my hunch. In that case, there will be a final workout on Union Jones."

Union shuddered. "An' if that workout fails, which it will, the finish will be the same fer me. Gaw, Little Round Top was nuthin' ter this jam I be in!"

"What were you muttering, Jones?" demanded Kelso.

"Jest prayin'. I be gonna start now an' keep it up."

"All right, men," said Kelso. "Start moving. I'll tell you on the way where we're going and why. Reardon, after you've done with Jones get him in deep among these oats bags and he won't turn up for a month. Don't miss that signal."

"I won't, Kelso."

JACKSON KELSO and his men went around the corner of the piled bags and Union heard the door of the building close behind them. He could picture the cavalcade riding silently through the moonlight in the rear of Jezebel to whatever spot Kelso had picked, stopping there and then the flashes from the lantern, and then—Union groaned, his mind racing, while Reardon lounged on a loose bale of hay. Bits and pieces of memory flickered into his mind, it turned suddenly back from the hopeless future.

"What was it Kelso got outen them notes o' mine which I couldn't?" The thought hammered. "What was it I writ down? What was it—Gaw!" The word jolted out of him aloud.

"What are you yellin' about?" sneered Reardon.

Union sank back. "Nuthin'," he murmured. "A bomb jest went off in my brain. I have solved the mystery o' where the treasure cache in Jezebel be, jest like Jackson Kelso did. But it come too late ter do any good. He has got it, sure as hell."

"Looks like the fifteen minnits is getting up," said Reardon. He slapped the hilt of the knife at his belt significantly. "I am for a look-see outside."

Union braced himself a little against the wall as Reardon went around the corner. "When he comes back it may be the immedjit knife work on my gizzard," he moaned. "Or if it ain't immedjit, it will be suttinly shortly after that."

DESPERATELY he began to wrestle with his bonds but they held firm and he gave up, panting and hopeless in the sultry gloom. The lantern's rays flooded the floor but most of the corner in which he sat was in shadow. And then close beside him there was movement, a board next to the floor was coming away, lifting outward.

"Good Gaw!" he breathed. "Be I seein' things what ain't there? Be I hearin' things what ain't there?"

The soft, scraping sound that had risen was continuing. A pair of hands, then the arms began to slide into the building through the foot-high aperture where the board had been.

"Now it be a littul man what ain't there!"

The diminutive body was following, the head first with the plaited queue attached at its nape.

"Pale an' Wan!"

"Oooh, Union Jonesee!" Pale and Wan came crawling snakelike through the gap and got to his feet, round-eyed with surprise. "Union Jonesee in most funnee touble. Charley hear talkee, Charley cleep in to help Jonesee."

"An' how in heck did you——"

The laundryman dropped the canvas sack he was still clutching. "Charley cleep in for oatsees foh Dynamitee. This oatsee housee b'long wealthee Hipp Blothers. Hipp Blothers laise plice of oatsees on poor Charley, poor Charley cleep into Hipp Blothers oatsee housee help self evely Sunday nightee, make come outee all even.

Thlee weeksee ago Charley ply off board at bottom, cleep in all cozee and plopeh."

"You have crept in jest in the nick o' time," said Union hoarsely. "You got a knife on you? Cut off these ropes."

"No kniffee, no gunnee, Charley not an armed robbeh. Charley an honest plice-fixeh."

Union stared despairingly around at the walls of his improvised prison; the tall stacks of bags, the bales of hay. Only the small frame of Pale and Wan could get through the opening he had made. Then his eyes gleamed, his beard bristled.

"There's a safe-blower outside aimin' ter shoot me when he comes back. Kin you lift one o' these weighty bags of oats?"

"Hoo!" lilted Pale and Wan. "Easee for Charley. Charley cally huddled pounds wet washee in basket on headee."

"Then climb up on top o' these bags." Union lifted his bound hands, pointing to the shadows up under the high roof. "Git the biggest one you kin lift an' when the safe-blower comes in ter fix me, drop it on his skull. He will go out like a light."

"Dlop oatsee baggee on skullee? Charley can do."

"Scramble."

"Charley scramble." Pale and Wan skipped to the wall of filled sacks and went up it like a monkey, hands and feet finding holds on the projections and in the interstices. From the top he grinned down delightedly.

"I am callin' in the safe-blower." Union began to yell. "Reardon, Runt Reardon! Come in here! I be ready ter tell all!"

"What's that, you old fool?" came Reardon's voice, somewhat muffled by distance.

"I be ready ter squawk!"

FOOTSTEPS sounded and Reardon walked around the angle. He smiled crookedly, looking down at Union helpless in his bonds.

"So you come to your senses, you old goat. You say you got something for me?"

"I got plenty fer you. You will be surprised, Safe-blower Reardon. Come closer a bit an' I shall give it ter you."

Reardon slouched forward and stood hardly two yards from Union. Up in the shadows poised the small wiry figure with the big filled sack in its arms.

"Yes, Mister Reardon, I shall give it ter you. Okay, Charley!"

The heavy bag dropped and struck full on the top of Reardon's head. A ghastly cracking sound accompanied its thud. Reardon went down, spread-eagled, limp in the sudden extinction that had fallen from above.

"Neck cracked like a pipestem," said Union. "He got his surprise. Slither down, Pale an' Wan, an' cut me loose."

Pale and Wan slipped down the wall of bags and took the knife from the sheath at Reardon's belt. Union's ropes came away and he stood up, rubbing his wrists.

"Closer squeak nor Little Round Top, I repeat. Gimme Reardon's gun, Pale an' Wan. You done noble."

Pale and Wan passed the gun to Union, his face one broad smile. "Charley wish he could dlop own oatsee baggee on plice-liftee Hipp Blothers' skullee like that."

"Now we be goin' an' goin' fast,, Pale an' Wan. Foller me." Union charged around the corner of the bags, down the corridor between the stacks that led to the door and out of it into the night. A lone horse was tethered to the hitch-rail outside the building and beyond it loomed a light spring wagon with a pair of mules.

"That be what they brung me out in. I be goin' back in that a heck of a lot faster than what I came out in it. Pale an' Wan, unhitch them mules an' climb in over the tailboard."

He lifted himself onto the driver's seat, swung the team as the halters came loose and lashed with the whip snatched from the floor. Startled, the mules burst into speed, headed for the lights of town. Pale and Wan, screeching wildly, got himself aboard the rear and clambered forward to a place beside Union.

"Where we goce, Jonesee? Where we goce?"

"Ter the treasure an' the bandits which be tryin' ter lift it!" roared Union. "That damn Kelso he has probably got his paws on it right now. Giddap!"

The whip sang out onto rumps and the gallop of the mules went into a crazy pace that sent the light wagon reeling on its wheels. The first lights of Jezebel flashed by, ahead lay the broad reach of Silver Street and its crowds.

"Charley's bottom bloke! Poor Charley bouncee into sky!"

"Fergit yore bouncin' bottom!" bellowed Union. He stood up on his feet and belabored the team. Snorting, they went into even further velocity. "Every scind counts from here ter the Arizony Palace. But we want Sheriff Lew fust." The wagon rocked along Silver Street and Union let out a howl. "Lights in Sheriff Lew's! He be there!"

With a terrific wrench he drew the mules up alongside the low frame building with the lighted windows. Inside in the front room a group of men stood before the table where Sheriff Lew Barton sat.

"Still investigatin'," cast out Union. "Well, I have broke the case. Sheriff Lew, Sheriff Lew! Pronto! Outside! The mystery be solved! Come a-runnin' with yore gun!"

"What's that, Union?" Sheriff Lew stared at him through the open window. He leaped to his feet. "Pete, men, come along!"

They rushed onto the sidewalk and Union waved the whip. "Climb aboard, Sheriff Lew. Git in, posse. It was Jackson Kelso killed Saul Soames, Sheriff Lew. He spilled it ter me when he kidnaped me an' damn near assassinated me."

"Where's Kelso now?" bit out Sheriff Lew. He and his companions were aboard the wagon. The whip cracked and the startled mules were off down the center of Silver Street, the sand flying out behind their hoofs.

"I'll show you Jackson Kelso an' his crew in one minute or you kin kick my pants from here ter Los Angeles!" yelled Union. "They will be ready ter fight. Arizony Palace, here we come! Arizony Palace, here we are! Foller me, posse!"

Union hit the street in a bound and rushed for the door, bursting through it.

"Push-'em-Up, Winchester! Git yore sawed-off. Anybody got his gun on come with the posse."

HE TOSSED Reardon's six-gun to a bystander and grabbed for the rifle Push-'em-Up thrust across the bar. On he plunged for the rear with a stampede of running men behind him. He drew up at the open door and looked out onto the moonlit desert.

"There they be, Sheriff Lew," he said, pointing. "Hathaway and the other two settin' their hosses an' holdin' Kelso's next ter Dynamite's stable. Kelso inside with Jennifer, old Saul Soames' burro."

Light was shining through the plentiful cracks in the crude building and the three mounted men loomed sinisterly beside it. The figure of Jackson Kelso came suddenly out of the door, leading Jennifer by a halter. He flung the halter to one of the men and with incredible agility mounted his own horse.

His voice rang in triumph.

"I hit it! We've got the treasure! Flash that lantern signal to the Runt to do in Jones and join us in the arroyo. We're off!"

"Jackson Kelso!" Union's proclamation was a resounding bellow. His Winchester rose. "You ain't goin' nowhere. Nor you ain't goin' ter do in Union Jones. Put yore hands up, all o' you!"

Kelso sent one look and one only at Union, standing out clear of the door with the crowd emerging behind him. His hands came up but they came up clutching metal and so did the hands of Hathaway and the two other men.

"Fire!" shouted Kelso. "Ride for it!"

The crash of gunfire shattered the night. Flame and smoke leaped from the saddles, it leaped from the posse behind Union. Bullets traded the short distance, cracking. Hathaway had his horse whirling up on its hind legs for a shield and was shooting alongside its neck while lead thudded into it and it screamed in agony. Then it went down and Hathaway went down with it, pitched out of the saddle and lying on the sand.

Of the two men next to him one bent double groaning and the other had both his hands elevated, empty.

"There goes three of 'em!" shouted Union. "Now where's Kelso?" He caught the blur of horse and man that drove along the side of the shack. Jackson Kelso had pivoted his mount in whirlwind speed amid the maelstrom of bullets and was traveling fast, untouched. "There goes Kelso! Along the stable! Git him, git him!"

Union's rifle veered and he sent the snapshot at the flying target as Push-'em-Up's sawed-off roared at his elbow.

"Oh, migaw, he be clear! He got away!" There were no shapes visible any longer of man and mount. In a driving rush Kelso had jerked around the corner of the building and vanished. "He has put the shack betwixt him an' us an' covered his gitaway. Be-

fore we kin sight him agin he will be five hundred yards off, disappearin' inter the arroyo. Push-'em-Up, run like hell!"

Union charged forward and sidewise to get the building out of his way. He stopped, panting and dropped to one knee with the Winchester at his shoulder. Far out on the desert, almost at the arroyo's rim, he could see the racing horse. But there was no man in its saddle, it ran burdenless in its panic. Then it was gone, down into the gully and the desert stretched vacant.

"We got him!" breathed Union. "Either you or me we got Jackson Kelso with our last cracks. He will be lyin' out back o' that shack dead or otherwise done fer. The man which killed forty fightin' bulls in the ring an' a few men beside has bin brought ter his finish by a jackass an' a lady jackass at that!"

VI

"A N' NOW," said Union, "fer the treasure cache."

He stood in the center of the Arizona Palace's crowded premises, thronged with the eager and murmuring crowd. Doc Mac McCarty was just finishing tying a bandage on the upper left arm of a citizen who sat in a chair, holding a stiff shot of bourbon in his right hand.

"That be the last of our few casualties which you be tidyin' up, Doc Mac. Our late bullfighter an' his crew did not do much hittin' o' the citizenry seein' they was shootin' offen the backs o' buckin' hosses. So now Kelso an' Hathaway an' Reardon be on their way ter Boot Hill an' Sheriff Lew has calaboosed the other pair, considerably chipped up. Which brings us back ter the treasure cache Jackson Kelso had in his hands an' which I now hold in mine."

"Union," suggested Push-'em-Up, "your recent grueling experiences have affected your mind. You hold no treasure in your hands."

"What be this?" Union drew his hand from his pocket. In its palm glowed a beautiful flat emerald. "I picked this outer Kelso's pants, unbeknownst ter you, the minute we found him a corpus back o' the shack. Where this come from, there be the rest o' the green glass jools, ter say nuthin' o' the map ter the mother lode. Doc Mac, now you have patched up the male patients o'

Jezebel be you prepared ter operate on a female patient?"

"What for?" inquired Doc Mac.

"Fer emeralds. I found her most wisely hangin' aloof from the battle about seventy-five yards an' brought her round an' tied her out in front. I shall bring her in." Grinning broadly, Union shouldered out of the batwings and they parted again a moment later. A sleek Jennifer with a ribbon through the hole in her flop ear docilely came along behind him on her halter.

"Here be yore female patient, Doc Mac," proclaimed Union. "You observe this flap in her hide which used ter be one o' her bumps?" In the clear illumination of the overhead oil lamps the slit in the burro's skin gaped. "Jackson Kelso opened that up with a knife in the shack by lantern light an' took out the green glass jool I jest showed you. Now you open up these other damn lumps on Jennifer's hide with yore medical scalpel an' take out the rest o' the jools. This lady jackass be a walkin' emerald mine."

An incredulous tumult rose to the rafters. Doc Mac smiled genially. "The old drug-runner's dodge, what? Slit open a burro's hide, slip in a packet of dope, sew it up again and an innocent burro crosses the Border. Line up your female patient, Union, and I shall operate. This isn't going to hurt the animal, a burro after a few years in the desert is about as insensitive as a limestone mesa."

"I shall insensitize her completely," announced Push-'em-Up. "I shall once more become Faithful Nurse Reagan. Back in a moment from the reserve stock."

Doc Mac ran his hand over lump after lump of the collection with which Jennifer was almost covered. She stood patiently, blinking a little in the light. "This is easy, gentlemen. Most of these lumps are old scar tissue from injuries, others aren't. But the cutting and the sewing were done by an artist. A doctor couldn't have performed better."

"He was an expert shoemaker," said Union. "Old Saul Soames told me he had bin fer a shoemaker an' it was that clue which give me the answer ter his funny riddle or anagram or whatever it was. With my brilliant noospaperman's brain I had writ down fer notes 'Saul Soames—burro—shoemaker—hide'—an' Jackson Kelso he

got it pronto while I had ter wait a bit. Sure, Saul Soames was a shoemaker who sewed his cache in his burro's hide, so, o' course, she knew where it was all the time. Now, Doc Mac, will operate it out."

"Who holds the burro while the operatin' air goin' on, if the burro do not like it?" inquired Bushface Biggs bulking beside Union.

"This will hold the burro," remarked Push-'em-Up cheerily. He was back from the storeroom holding a huge wooden bucket that foamed and from which emerged a strange, cloying and heavy aroma. "This is imported Guinness stout from the estate of that English remittance man who got it from St. Louis and kept it out back. It was about all the estate he left, as a matter of strict truth, and he owed us plenty, so I took it over. All donkeys love stout. Many is the time my Irish popper useter tell me how as young ruffians he and his friends would fill up a fish-peddler's donkey with a bucket of stout after which it would take four strapping Dublin constables to carry home the donkey. In two minutes this lady jackass will be insensitive to ennything except the lovely impact of Guinness under the ministrations of Faithful Nurse Regan. Burro, burrow in."

He held the foaming bucket under Jennifer's nose. She sniffed once, tentatively, a second time interestedly, and her nose went under the foam.

"Proceed ter operate, Doctor," said Union. "Vestryman Biggs, grab yoreself one o' them free-will offerin' plates we left here an' take up the collection of emeralds as they come a-poppin' out."

THE roar that rang out only moments later was terrific. Under the scalpel a lump on Jennifer's hide parted and the first green treasure emerged and went into Bushface's bowl. Jennifer switched her tail as though a fly had annoyed her and kept her nose in the Guinness, gulping it down. The minutes passed and the pay load went on appearing. Suddenly Doc Mac held up a pair of thin, folded tissues that his practiced fingers had drawn from the concealed lump.

"You can read and write more or less, Union. Give these an inspection."

Union unfolded the thin tissues and his jaw dropped. "The map! The map ter the

mother lode of emeralds an' gold bars! An' this other one, it says what?"

A smallish gentleman in a plug hat with pince-nez on a veined nose, who stood next to Union, reached out and plucked the second paper from him. Attorney Goodfellow was known in Jezebel as its most rapid-thinking legal representative and the possessor of an unusually wry humor.

"It says 'Last Will and Testament', Union. I shall inform you as to its provisions and whether it will hold in court."

"Go ahead," gulped Union. "Me, I shall study how ter git ter the innumerable millions in the cave, fifty-sixty miles from here. Yessir, it be drawn down here on this bit o' flimsy paper ter the queen's taste. The X which says 'cave' under it, the dotted line leading ter it, the mountain, the water-hole—it be all here."

"It is all here, also," pronounced Attorney Goodfellow, lowering his paper. "Slewfoot Lum!" The wizened, gap-toothed swamper grinned. "Bring me a double shot of bourbon from the bar as a retainer in case I am called upon to offer this testament for probate. It calls for the bequeathment of the total estate of 'one Saul Soames, testator, with the exception of a single emerald, to the Ellenville, New York, Orphanage, in remembrance of their loving care and bringing up."

"Ellenville Orphanage!" It was a jubilant bellow from Bushface Biggs. "Right next ter Uticy, Noo Yawk. The best damn home in Americy. It was thar I was brung up, too. Hooray, hooray! Cream on the porridge from now on, six aigs fer breakfast, milk by the gallon, all the orphans sick ter their stummicks with cake an' candy, new clothes fer Old Pop Dibble, an' his wife which took the most sooperb care of us orphans an' seed us through all our ailments an' sent us out inter the world with wonderful advice. All the boys Pop uster recommend the West ter. I air goin' right back thar with this bowl o' emerald jools an' pour 'em in Mommer Dibble's lap. She will shell green peas no more, she will shell emeralds."

He shook the wooden platter and it clacked with its contents of a dozen glowing stones. Doc Mac McCarty stepped away from Jennifer.

"That's all, unless this lady burro's stomach happens to contain another trove, which

I doubt. I have no intention of crating her to San Francisco for an X-ray! So the orphanage makes out with a fortune. And what do you make out with the map, Union? Does all Jezebel start its rush?"

"This be a wunnerful map," said Union. "It be the most wunnerful map I ever seed. It be all here, like I said, everythin' but the startin' point. There lies the incredibul, stoopendous treasure in its cave an' there it will lie till the Day o' Judgment. Old Saul Soames kept his big secret ter the end. Until you know where you be supposed ter start from how kin you walk along ter the treasure?"

"No, Union, you can't," Doc McCarty smiled pleasantly. He took the map from Union's shaking hand, studied it and handed it back. "The old treasure trove story. About all this is good for is to frame and hang over the bar. Within fifty miles of Jezebel there are six ranges of mountains, including Mexico. Union, you have toiled and risked mightily and the orphanage has won, but I am afraid you get nothing."

Attorney Goodfellow coughed importantly. "It is still possible for Union Jones to obtain a beneficence from this occasion. In the last clause, regarding the emerald which is to be diverted from the general overall bequest to the Ellenville Orphanage Testator Soames states that its proceeds are to be devoted to the maintenance in every comfort and luxury of his faithful female companion Jennifer and that a guardian is to be appointed for said female to administer the funds, which I imagine by what I have heard would not be less than \$30,000. In case I am named to probate this will, I shall ask that Jedediah Union Jones, citizen of good repute of this town, be appointed as guardian of the female burro heiress, Jennifer Soames under, of course, a suitable bond."

"Me, appointed guardian ter a female jackass!" howled Union.

"I think that you have won the right," stated Attorney Goodfellow. He slapped his empty glass on the tin tray Slewfoot Lum held at his elbow. "Another retainer, Slewfoot. Yes, by your heroic conduct I consider that you have the prior claim, and that not a voice will be raised against you. My fellow citizens of Jezebel!" Attorney Goodfellow spoke in his best forensic manner. "Shall we

put it to a *vica voce* vote? Should Union Jones be made the guardian of Jennifer Soames?"

"He should!" rose the howl.

"They be two of a kind!"

UNION clapped a hand to his brow. "Oh, migaw!" he gasped. "Ain't I goin' through enough mental anguish tryin' ter bring up that littul Mexican hellion, Pluto, my printer's devil, without bein' made the guardian fer a female burro. Be I supposed ter send her ter boardin' school ter learn manners an' how ter be a lady? Be I—"

Braaaa! Braaa! Braa! The braying almost rocked the room. Dynamite had wandered in through the batwings and stood braced in front of Jennifer.

His mouth was wide open and his teeth were bared as though for battle.

"Migaw, he seed her through the winder an' come in hell-bent fer combat! She will kick him ter Halifax!"

Jennifer raised her head. Her eyes were

placid, almost soulful. She reached out her muzzle and whickered softly.

"She ain't gonna kick nobuddy," observed Push-'em-Up. "It is the Guinness workin' on her, softening up her stummick and heart. She is a transformed female. She is full of likker and love."

"Oooh!" jubilated Pale and Wan. "Oooh, happee blidal nightee again!"

Dynamite snorted, pawed the floor, turned and made for the batwings. Jennifer walked after him obediently as though in answer to a command.

A wild gleam leaped into Union's eyes. "The problem be solved!" he roared. "Quick, Sheriff Lew, quick, you be a legal Arizony authority! Pronounce 'em man an' wife! Dynamite has took the female jackass Jennifer Soames offen my hands. Git the heck outer here, Dynamite an' Jennifer an' repair ter yore bridal suite. Bless you, my children! An' now, as guardian o' the happy bride an' custodian o' her wealth, the drinks are on me!"

THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

CONDUCTED BY PETE KUHLOFF

SCATTER SHOTS FROM THE MAIL BAG

Old Brass

QUESTION: In 1940 and early '41 I purchased several boxes of "Remington Kleanbore .348 Winchester" 150-grain cartridges.

Only a few rounds were used before I went into the Army for the next three years. Now it is 1948 and this next hunting season these cartridges will be at least seven years old. They were kept in a dry place all the time I was gone.

Do you think they will be safe to use?

I know that the Army at times used small

arms ammo that was quite old and on occasion used artillery shells from 1918. But I'm not sure of civilian ammo.

Any information on this will be greatly appreciated.

J. H., Mich.

Answer: During the last hunting season I used some .33-caliber cartridges (the fore-runner of the .348) that were at least ten years older than your shells—and with no ill effects.

It is a good idea to be cautious with very old stuff, but I would have confidence in most anything up to about ten years of age if there were no cracks in the brass or other signs of deterioration.

Another Civil War Gun

Question: Please give me some information about the following rifle, Gallagher's Patent, July 17, 1860. This is a breech-loading carbine, cap and paper-wrapped cartridge lined with brass. The gun is in very good condition.

J. J. H., New York

Answer: Mahlon J. Gallagher's Breech-Loading Carbine was covered by U. S. Patent No. 29157.

These guns were made in .54 caliber, the cartridge being exploded by a percussion cap in a manner similar to the system used on the Burnside, Smith and other Civil War weapons. The Gallagher was designed for easy extraction of the fired cartridge case.

This gun was not so popular with the Ordnance Department, but nevertheless, 22,728 were manufactured in Philadelphia, Pa., by Richardson & Overman during the Civil War at a cost of \$508,492.94, and 8,294,023 cartridges were produced costing \$211,893.92.

I have seen Gallagher carbines listed in dealers' catalogues for from \$8 to \$25.

A Fine Target Revolver

Question: I have been reading your article, "The Shooter's Corner," in SHORT STORIES magazine for a good number of years; it is always the first thing I read. So, after all these years, I finally have some questions to ask you myself.

I am the owner of a Smith & Wesson handgun about which I would like some information.

The gun is a very heavy revolver of approximately twelve inches over all; it has a six and one-half inch barrel. The few cartridges that I have are Rem-UMC .32-44 caliber. It is single action and has the build and weight of a heavy .45. It is in fair condition but needs some repairs.

A regular .32 pistol (automatic or revolver) cartridge will go into the chambers but they fit very loosely. It takes six cartridges and the ones I have are in two different forms, both loaded with balls (see sketch).

The casings are straight their entire length with a flange at the base. They are center-

fire. Now the questions: Can you give me some history about this gun? Where would be a good place to have it put in first-class condition (it needs a general overhauling)? What does the .32-44 stand for, and why don't the .32 revolver cartridges fit it? Is it possible to get ammunition for this gun and, if not, where can I get the ones I have reloaded or get equipment to reload myself? Also will it shoot a slug as well as a round ball?

I guess that is about all I can ask. I hope I have given you enough information. By the way, it has the regular S. & W. break with the ejector pushing the empties out when the gun is broken.

T. J. K., Pa.

Answer: Your revolver is a variation of the famous Smith & Wesson Russian revolver which was chambered for the .44 S. & W. Russian cartridge. This accounts for the "44" in .32-44.

The S. & W. Russian revolver was manufactured for the Russian government from 1870 to 1875. About 250,000 were made. The story behind this gun is that a Russian Grand Duke, in this country to purchase weapons for the Imperial Russian Army, went on a hunting trip with William Cody (the famous Buffalo Bill of history and legend) and was so impressed with the performance of Buffalo Bill's S. & W. .44 that he placed an order with the manufacturers for 250,000 revolvers. It took all of the resources of Smith & Wesson for five years to fill the order.



POWDER, 11-GR. BULLET, 83-GR.

CARTRIDGES FOR THE .32-44 S & W RUSSIAN REVOLVER)



POWDER, 17-GR. BULLET, 93-GR.

In the meantime Colt had practically a free field with the domestic market, and the fame of the Colt revolver spread far and wide with the development of the old West. And thus the Colt is generally recognized as the frontier revolver.

The S. & W. Model No. 3 was chambered for a special target cartridge (among

others) known as the .32-44 and was manufactured from 1887 until 1910; 4,333 were produced in this caliber. The .32-44 bullet measures .323, while the regular .32 bullet measures .313.

As you have mentioned, the bullet, conical or round, for this cartridge is seated inside of the case, which is straight and uncrimped. The cases were made in two lengths, and the revolver may be chambered for either. The longer case being generally preferred, as it could be used for all loads. The factory load in this case was 17 grains of 3FG black powder behind a 98-gr. conical bullet. While the load in the shorter case was 11-gr. of 3FG black powder and the 83-gr. conical bullet.

The more popular loads were 9-gr. of 3FG black powder behind the 83-gr. bullet, and 4.5-gr. of the same powder behind the 50-gr. round ball, cast in bullet moulds number 32362 and number 32363 respectively. These moulds are manufactured by the Lyman Gun Sight Corporation, Middlefield, Conn., who publish the *Ideal Handbook on reloading* (\$.50).

It is interesting to note that the full charge (17-gr. black powder with 98-gr. bullet) as well as the 11-83 charge, in a good gun, will make ten shot groups at 50 yards that a 2-inch circle will cover.

Also, the same sight setting for a gallery load of 4-gr. 3FG black powder at 12 yards, may be used for all the 11-83 charge at 50 yards.

The .32-44 cartridge has not been manufactured for some years, but you might be able to locate some through dealers in obsolete ammunition.

I believe that Pop Eimer, Joplin, Mo., would do a good repair job on your revolver.

Cartridge Collecting and All's Outs in Free

Question: I just mailed a letter to this guy P. J. Medicus who deals in obsolete cartridges and new ones, too, at 18 Fletcher Street in New York City, incidentally mentioning the fact that you were a friend of mine, which same is true even if I do have a helluva time finding you.

You see, Peter, I look you up the first thing two times a month and have been doing it for years but lately the goin' has been getting tough; I find you over the hill, back of beyond, then someone puts you in front, now I find you hiding in the middle. This is the first thing, as I said before an' I for one want to know what the hell goes on here.

Now, don't forget what I said about Mr. Medicus, and dammit quit hiding.

H. K., Mich.

Answer: Thanks for your letter of December 27th!

I have just received a note from Mr. Medicus and he tells me that mail is still pouring in! I was interested and pleased to find that so many readers of *SHORT STORIES* were interested in cartridge collecting.

This hide and seek game in SS is alotta fun!

Good collecting!

Lever Action Twenty-Two

Can you give me the name and address of a reputable gun firm that manufactures or sells, through the mails, a lever-action, repeating .22-caliber rifle?

What is the cost of such a rifle?

I haven't done much shooting with a light-caliber gun, but I am partial to a lever-action gun.

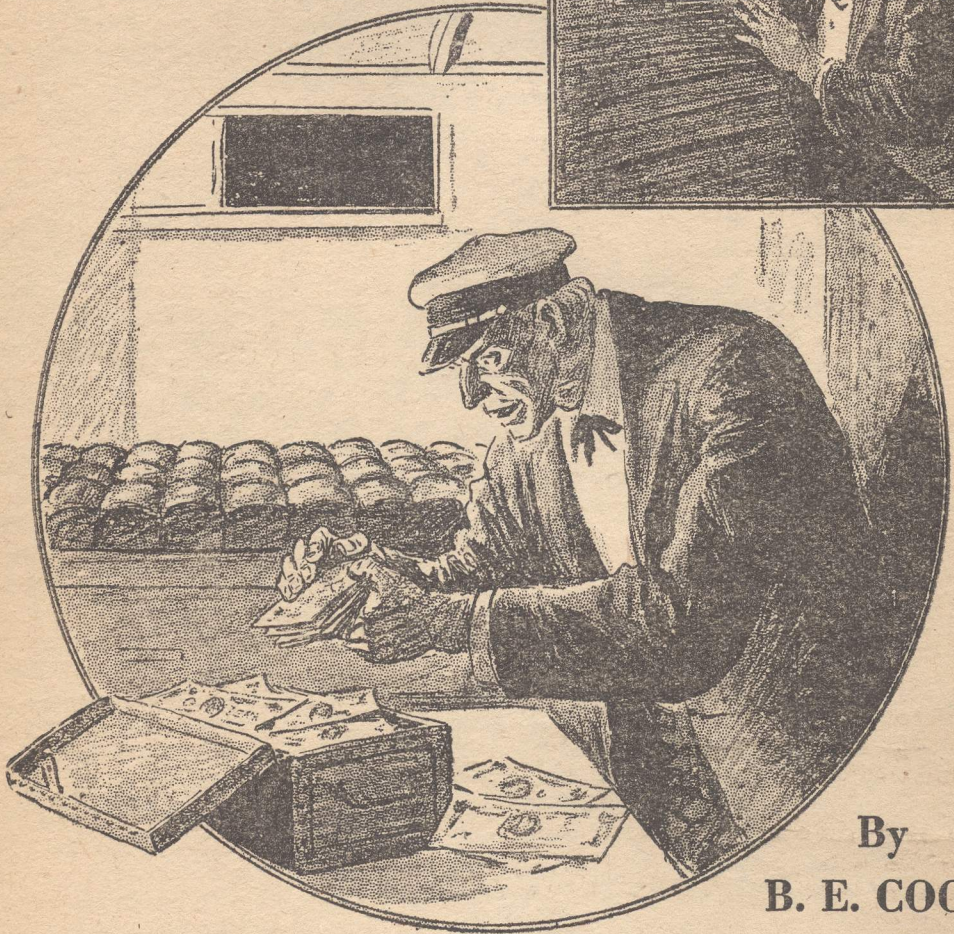
I would appreciate it if you could give me this information as I have been unable to purchase such a gun here where I am stationed.

D. R. B., U. S. Navy

Answer: The Marlin lever-action, .22-caliber repeating rifle is the only one of this type that has been produced for many years. It lists at \$50.45 and is a very fine gun. You should be able to purchase one from most any large gun store.

Inasmuch as you have been unable to find one locally, you might try Abercrombie & Fitch, Madison Ave. at 45th St., New York City, N. Y., or Parker-Whelen Co., Inc., 827 14th St., N. W., Washington, D. C., or Stoeger Arms, 507 5th Ave, New York City, N. Y. Good shooting!

*Andy Leighton—One of Those
Downeast Seamen, a Career
to Carve Out, and a Single
Track Mind*



By
B. E. COOK

THE VILLAINY OF AHAB FOZZARD

THE three-master *Myrtle Caine* hung helpless in a slowly rising northeast wind and sea. Pollock Rip's five-second glow showed off her port quarter and in the distance, above the beach,

Chatham Lights blinked four times in stern warning. The schooner's acting second mate and engineer had her in irons.

Mate Andrew Leighton woke abruptly in his bunk. Loss of way on her and the grinding of the spanker boom's jaws had brought

him to. He broke out of his room and stared unbelievably at the old skipper forcing himself up from a book to go above. Leighton gave the library lining the after side of the cabin a muttered curse and beat Captain Fozzard up the companion stairs.

One look at the situation was sufficient. "Shift y'r helm!" he ordered the man at the wheel.

"She's by the head. Too much of the damned hard pine's for'd," the distraught engineer complained to conceal his unfit-ness.

Leighton did not stop to argue; old Fozzard was coming, he'd do the growling. He ran down on deck to take charge of the men at fore and main sheets and jib.

"We-ear ship!" the Old Man bellowed downwind. The helm eased up, the spanker boom crept aft. Engineer Higgins raced forward, still cursing cargo, vessel and skipper, to lay the stays'l to the wind.

Leighton's men gripped fore and main sheet ropes under flaying canvas, staring toward the Rip's white flashes which now came at them. He watched the vessel's swing with concealed relief until the skipper's bellow came again. Then "ease off," he ordered and the *Myrtle Caine* was on her way around.

Leighton stood poised to correct any false moves among these sailors combed from waterfront dregs and roused suddenly from sleep. He felt the wind haul aft, heard the spanker sheet draw taut in its blocks. Now! He shouted an order. Stays'l and fores'l shifted over and the mains'l went slowly, stubbornly. He took a hand.

The *Myrtle Caine* came on the new tack with canvas booming and with the light-ship's beacon much closer; but she was crawling up into the wind again and she should make it.

At length came the final order to trim sheets.

Andy Leighton saw his men down the fo'castle cuddy and turned aft, but he did not go. Higgins came out of the bows, peered down the hole, saw Indigo the cook still afoot and went down sidewise. There, thought Leighton, is the trouble with him; he hobnobs with the ship's cook and the sailors take liberties with him. This time he's ducking a brawl with the skipper who, meantime, stands his watch.

Which thought centered his mind on Ahab Fozzard and his fits of astonishing loose talk, of boasting that exposed the inner man and left Leighton more than disgusted. Often he consoled himself that deck officers in steam would not prove as blatant and glib, as unconventional, as egotistical. He hoped to God none of his future commanders there would have libraries that kept them from their responsibilities to the ship, lost for hours on end in a book.

He pulled at a mainmast stay and swung on it, partly to stretch himself, partly to test the slack in it. He'd have to set up rigging before the Old Man paid off this crew. Paying off. Money. The mere thought of ship's money stirred his resentment. Old Fozzard would have been called a "clipper" today; there was no expression so apt for his greedy kind in those days at the turn of the century.

He could hear the Old Man now, boasting to anybody who'd listen, "I built this vessel. Ol' Cap Cousins, retired said he'd take up thirty sixty-fourths in her only if I'd take twenty-five myself. So, b' cracky, I did and he got coupla women in town to take up the other nine." Over and over the old miser gloated in this same speech.

Tonight Leighton could not go back to bed while the vessel crawled off a lee shore. The northeasterly wind might easily drive her onto those evil sand bars a mile off Nauset Beach; just where they lay nobody knew because they shifted with every out storm.

He paced along the lee side in the wind's moaning and the gear's complaint. His mind persisted on the Old Man now raving at Higgins gone aft with pie in his fist and face. In keeping with common practice in those times, Andy Leighton was getting his time in sail before trying for a third's ticket in steam. The *Myrtle Caine* was to see him through the last six months of it; tonight he felt restless about it all.

The reason was Captain Ahab Fozzard and letters he had received from home. It appeared that he had stepped into a controversy wherein Fozzard had neatly maneuvered himself into complete control of the *Myrtle Caine* by questionable tactics. But nobody could put the finger on it.

The story was this. Out of a vessel, Fozzard had begged or borrowed money enough to assume twenty-five sixty-fourths in a

vessel half built and lost in bankruptcy. By promise of big dividends in the southern pine trade, he had induced aged Cap'n Cousens to take thirty shares; Cousens had persuaded two women in town to buy the remaining nine on his say-so.

But the *Myrtle Caine* had become a peculiar investment. She carried large cargoes for a three-master, but her dividends came only when Cap Cousens bedevilled her master. It reached the point where the aged, ailing man threatened to sell his and the women's holdings to the chandler who supplied the vessel. Fozzard had reason to fear that move. He pulled a fast one; he took on Cousens' nephew Dixon as mate—with the stipulation that he have the option on the Cousens shares for one year. That, said Cousens, could leave the women's investments at Fozzard's doubtful mercies, but he reluctantly consented to the deal. However, he sent his nephew aboard with instructions to learn what was wrong.

Tonight Leighton knew that Cousens' maneuvers had failed. The retired skipper had died in a few weeks and his nephew Dixon had been lost overboard in a gale as many weeks afterward. But he could have told the whole Cousens tribe what part, at least, of the reason was for the stingy earnings. Captain Fozzard must have spent a bag of cash on the library in his cabin; he spent time there like a genealogist looking up a John Smith. Hours on end he seemed to forget he commanded a vessel, resenting the interruption of meals, mumbling quotations out of books on legal subjects, losing sleep by night and rarely appearing on deck by day.

Here forward in the groaning gear and cold and darkness off Cape Cod, Andy's observations made every word and deed of Ahab Fozzard synonymous with money. He was no left-handed commander of a vessel. Despite his seeming neglect of her, the *Myrtle Caine* was earning money.

Toward morning he murmured into the wind, "I'll write a letter about this, so help me, when we get to Boston."

THE *Myrtle Caine* had been south again and brought another cargo of pine north, this one to New York's East River. Traffic on the bridge over Blackwell's Island had quieted somewhat for the night. Leighton

could have seen the island from the end of the lumber pier, but the vessel was his responsibility as she had been for days and nights like this. He kept an eye and ear on the stealthy activities of dock thieves operating gang fashion as usual around him. The wharfinger had been duly palmed; they'd not sneak lines off the *Myrtle Caine*. In one of his explosive outbursts Fozzard had said, "It pays to pay—the night watchman. East River's got a Hell Gate in more ways than one. Ho, ho-o-o!"

Leighton took in slack against the rising tide and inspected the new tension on turn-buckles; he had at least got this much work out of the crew now gone. The gear was tight, so was the former crew by now.

Still bored with the prospect of much still remaining of an inactive night, he went below to reread the reply to the letter he'd sent to an island villager on the Maine coast. Among other less consequential things, his distant relative had written: "No, Ahab Fozzard has never touched home since his last visit to Captain Cousens now dead. . . . Too bad young Dixon had to die at sea or anywhere for he inherited the Captain Cousens' fortune as you probably have heard, being with Captain Fozzard . . . thirty shares in the *Myrtle Caine* and the estate has been in and out of the courts ever since."

Leighton had not heard. He began to realize that old Fozzard's tongue did not spill everything. So Dixon had inherited thirty shares in this vessel? What a situation! A mate with more of a stake in her than her master had.

Farther along in the letter, Leighton read the story "going the rounds hereabouts" regarding the delays and whatnots into which the Cousens' estate had become snarled. This, too, might be significant, he surmised, but no names had stood out enough to be mentioned. Was Fozzard's greedy fist in it?

Leighton turned the oil lamp in the cabin low again and went on deck in the cooler air off East River. The Sound steamers had all gone out the Gate. An occasional tow-boat puffed by. He was deep in his musings when Captain Fozzard came before him as a deeper shadow at the break of the poop.

"There you are!" the high-pitched voice exclaimed in feigned surprise.

Intrigued by the note of insincerity,

Leighton did not move from the wheel box. He watched Fozzard come slowly, for him, looking around him and forward to ask more sharply, "Where's Mister Higgins?"

"Ashore, Cap'n. Indigo went soon after."

"Damn fool Higgins, toadying with a ship's cook. He'll never rate aft."

He sounded too relieved. Andy hadn't said they went ashore together. He felt sure now that Fozzard was attempting to turn the attention away from himself. He was much too self-conscious—and so unusual in coming back aboard at this hour. Andy decided to stay put, forcing the little sharpster to show his hand.

It came in an impatient burst. "Mate, go for'd. Coil those lines snug into the eyes of her where they won't tempt the light-fingered when the big timbers go out the bow ports tomorrow."

This, obviously, was but an excuse to be rid of him aft so he murmured, "Bow lines 'way for'd" and went down off the poop. He turned back in the dark and Fozzard still stood there, his sparse figure blotting out a small patch of the lights from across the river. Andy went on.

IN THE bow, however, he removed his shoes and stole aft again. He crept up onto the poop and, down on his knees, peered through a cabin window. His eyes were his greatest asset at sea, but he doubted them now. Fozzard had a tin box open on the table, the sort of box that clothiers in those times were wont to hand out to the customer with a suit, a strongbox. This one was full of paper currency and Fozzard's fists clutched two more sheafs of gold certificates, trembling over the open box. Sweat coursed down his gaunt features, the little eyes gleamed their mingled joy and confusion and fear of getting caught in this predicament.

The box would contain no more.

As he stood there, obviously trying to decide where to hide what was gripped in shaking fists, as he struggled to think above his overwhelming emotions, the bills in the box swelled out, spilled over and undid him.

Leighton saw his eyes roll, his arms tense, his stingy lips frame a curse. Then the old miser blew his top, banged both fistfuls into

the loosening, crawling hoard of cash. It flew. It spread over the cabin floor.

Suddenly the man cried out another curse, clapped a hand to his offending lips and looked up the companionway, around at the windows. Leighton withdrew, thinking: The *Myrtle Caine* pays poorly but earns well; Fozzard has an option on the Couzens' shares; the Cousens' estate has been in the courts ever since Dixon's death at sea. Was this the answer to any of all that?

He chanced another look through the little window. Fozzard had stuffed all the bills into the box, was jamming it shut while perspiration rained onto it from the most evil face Leighton had ever seen. The bony hands were slipping on the wet metal surfaces. Fozzard hugged the thing against him. Presently he darted a wild glance up the companionway and, only half assured, ran on tiptoes to the ship's small iron safe and thrust it inside.

"Well," Leighton mused aloud, "he'll not leave it that way for long; he loves it too well. Maybe I'll catch him stowing it neatly."

THE next morning a messenger boy came aboard asking for the captain. Within the hour the captain assigned Higgins to look after things and ordered the mate to accompany him ashore. His facial expression and his nervousness bespoke a crisis, but he walked in grim silence.

"Where to, Cap'n? The bank?" Leighton inquired naively.

Fozzard all but stopped in his tracks. "What a question!"

"All right, I'll put it this way: Am I your bodyguard or what?" Off the vessel, he felt freer to needle the skinflint. "Maybe you're taking me to the theatre. Going to introduce me to Lillian Russell? How about Dockstader instead? I like his stuff."

The scrawny face wrinkled in a grin. Abruptly his eyes twinkled in the bright glow of an inspiration and he said, "Think you don't like women, hey? I've a niece down in Sayresport that'd just about suit your style, Mister. She'd like to make a trip anytime, anywhere, in the vessel. I'll have to write her."

"No thanks, Cap'n. I'm a long way yet from supporting a woman. Seriously, where are we heading?"

The wry expression returned. "The boy came from my chandler. He'll want an order, blast him, and he'll growl instead of thanking me. I'll handle him though," he added hastily. "You wait outside the office and we'll look at some new stuff for heaving lines."

The chandler completely upset Fozzard's plan of action; more than that, he threw it in reverse. The pair from the *Myrtle Caine* were led into a wainscotted box of an office built into the front of the store space with windows, some of them opening into the store. "Captain Fozzard," said he severely, "I have summoned you regarding our bill against you."

"Good Lord," Fozzard snapped, "my vessel's in charter. I've told you a dozen times she's earning, she'll pay—"

"Too many times, Captain," the chandler interrupted sternly. "If I hadn't summoned you today, hadn't caught you aboard the vessel, how much longer would you presume to allow this bill to run? I want cash, not promises. How much can you put down?"

ANGER flushed Fozzard's face. He cursed his tormentor brazenly and turned to walk out on him. The big chandler's heavy hand caught his arm. "Ahab Fozzard, either you make a two hundred dollar payment or I start legal proceedings at once." He released his arm and rubbed his palms together, saying, "Had my eye on the *Myrtle Caine* for some time, Fozzard. I'd like to own that vessel and you know my connections for getting crews—and I've a smart skipper in mind."

Fozzard blanched. So abrupt a change after the flush of anger seemed to Leighton to make a ghost of the man. "You couldn't get her if you tried," he cried defiantly. "You can't beg, buy or borrow one sixty-fourth of her."

"You think so."

"I know—" Fozzard glanced impulsively behind him. There stood Leighton. "Get out! Look at some coppered stuff for heaving lines, I told you."

Leighton nodded and left them. Outside in the vacant store, he shouted: "Yes, I do. Let me see some light line." This to an imaginary clerk, but it served his purpose. Now he could perch on an anchor stock under an open office window and hear—

". . . that's the facts," Fozzard was saying fiercely. "I own twenty-five, that estate's got thirty I'm after and the nine in two women's hands'll get you no control. What's more, I'll pay my bill when I get to it and if you crowd me like this again I'll stock my vessel elsewhere."

Just then the aroma of a Sweet Caporal drifted in through the open window to both their noses. Fozzard jumped, flung the door wide and beheld his mate smoking. For the second time, thought he, I'm cursed with a mate that knows too much of my affairs.

But he couldn't shout that; he couldn't admit anything like it here. His mouth and eyes opened wide in a gaping stare. "A mate smoking cigarettes!" he cried scathingly. "A sissy! Get to hell aboard ship till I find me a man for a mate."

ANDREW LEIGHTON had no intention of quitting the *Myrtle Caine*. More than ever, he determined to finish his sailing ship time where he could keep an eye on Ahab Fozzard. The miser intrigued him and so had the chandler. Moreover, one event in the vessel's recent past had been growing upon him, whetting that peculiar who-done-it appetite which lurks in most curious minds, seamen's included.

Therefore he went back aboard the vessel, confident that the Old Man could not replace him. The chandler had passed Andy a significant look at parting; the man had grasped the fact that Fozzard's mate had not overheard their argument by accident or by clumsiness. That chandler, through his connection with agencies ashore, would forestall any attempt by the old scoundrel to acquire a new mate.

But Andy did not go directly aboard, allowing Fozzard time to leave the chandlery, he looked at rope in other establishments, then returned. "We seem to see eye to eye, sir," he said speculatively.

"We do. I expected you back here," the chandler answered.

"For the heaving line stuff?"

"No, he got it. Listen to me. To my way of judging, your skipper is a nasty man for an enemy. I meet up with a lot of them, I know them. Most of them are very smart, upright masters of sail, but this one might resort to any extreme out there at sea beyond the reach of the law's sharp eye. Evi-

dence, remember, would come ashore under his sworn signature. Better look out."

"I've been to sea with him, sir. What's on your mind?"

The chandler eyed him speculatively and replied, "Kind o' guess I judged you correctly. Mate, Captain Fozzard has money somewhere. I want to know where. He owes me nearly two-thirds of the vessel's value."

"Yeah. And she doesn't pay dividends," Leighton corroborated. "Why don't you tie up that vessel as you threatened?"

"Not while most of her stock is under contest in the courts. We're now speaking confidentially, of course? Good. I'll tell you what that man is up to, from information I've gathered. Ahab Fozzard is accumulating the vessel's earnings in cash; in banks it could be traced, so it is hidden. He will buy up the thirty Cousens' estate shares, keeping the estate in hot water until he's ready. He won't be ready until he's salted away enough additional money to retire on, Down East."

"In short," Leighton suggested, "he envied old Cap Cousens' ease in long retirement."

"And his position of affluence in the village, it would seem. Cousens, maybe you've heard, made Fozzard beg for the use of his name. Nobody would sell Ahab Fozzard a vessel, man!"

"He took twenty-five shares in her," Leighton argued. "Somebody loaned him the price of those."

The chandler smiled benignly. "Captain Cousens did," he said.

Andy left the chandlery with an excusable degree of satisfaction, that day; he had learned a thing or two more about the miser and he had not revealed the hiding place of Fozzard's hoard.

MATE ANDREW LEIGHTON had two abiding traits of character, either one of which might some day prove the making of him or as readily be his undoing. He was blessed with exceeding curiosity and cursed with a single-track mind. The astute ship's chandler certainly had discerned the one; quite as likely he had guessed the other.

For only a man thus endowed would have returned to the doubtful mercies of Ahab

Fozzard. The lanky, diminutive miser might put up with Indigo's two-day hangovers or even with Higgins' lack of dignity and his gluttony; but there was no berth, for long, aboard the *Myrtle Caine* for any person who showed a curiosity in the Old Man's secretive financial affairs.

Captain Fozzard had to be towed all the way out the Narrows. He paid through the nose. He turned the vessel over to his mate with the fewest possible words and hurried below, closing the little doors and slide behind him. He opened the safe, put his papers in and hefted the money box fondly. Still there. He sighed in relief. Once more he had cleared a northern port and gotten away from the chandler without surrendering much of his pile.

Rising off his knees, he glanced belatedly up along the port and starboard rows of small windows at either side of the cabin. "That Leighton!" he muttered and the evil in his eyes boded ill.

He sat at the mess table and drummed his gnarled fingers, planning a grim repetition of a crime. It had succeeded once, it should again; this fellow was more heady than clever. But there'd be plenty of time for that, time to work out the details. It must be done toward the last of the trip coming back north.

Suddenly the cabin roof thundered over his head. He sprang to his feet, enraged at being startled, cursing. He scrambled out on deck just as the mate bounded lightly off the cabin top.

Seeing the fire in his eyes, Leighton said reassuringly, "It's nothing, Cap'n. This here spanker's topping lift sounded loose in its blocks and I went aloft for a look-see."

Fozzard snarled, "And rode down the length of it!"

"Not quite," Leighton chuckled. "Too far overboard."

"And you wonder why it's noisy. God made a mistake, but you're not a monkey. Use the mast ladders hereafter, mister." He paced away to the forward end of the poop, growling, "The skipper was a fool that brought you aft." To himself, however, he made a mental note: he'll do it again. Again!

Thus began the undisguised viciousness that no amount of good nature could assuage. Fozzard criticized the mate's every

move; he gainsaid every decision; he countermanded orders to common sailors. They had grown into a system in their handling of the vessel. When, for instance, the skipper shouted "Helm alee!" Leighton's resultant orders to the men down on deck put through the necessary maneuvers involving foresail, mainsail, staysail and jibs.

This trip south, the incensed Fozzard overrode him. The little man had become the victim of his venom. He feared what the mate had on him and he hated the younger man with a fury surpassing all judgment. He also feared the chandler and his threat to seize the *Myrtle Caine*. He sprouted a dread lest chandler and mate unite sometime soon to expose and ruin him. All the way to Savannah he nursed his fears and fury; all the way he schemed.

That time, the vessel was loaded quickly.

Now she was deep in another cargo of hard pine and starting north. But his evil luck—he called it—set in. A squall caught him in the throes of still another fear and it was immediate. The mate stood watch. Fozzard had seized the opportunity to pack his ill-gotten cash in neat piles into the box.

ON DECK, the mate took a four-point bearing off a buoy at the outer edge of a long sand bar. She stood in too close for safety in the head tide and wind rather light. Then Leighton discovered the dark rough water under an approaching squall. Right away the vessel must be headed on a starboard tack and away from buoy and shoal. He shouted, "Helm alee, Cap'n. Squall coming!"

It caught the little rat gloating over the money piled loosely on the cabin floor. He came off his knees cursing the man who seemed always to catch him in a fix. He scrambled up the stairway, terribly afraid somebody was going to see that cash display. Confusion had him cold when he took over.

Already the mate was amidships. The helmsman had manned the spanker sheet, hauling in on the long boom. Fozzard looked at the buoy coming astern, at the roughening sea, the black cloud overhead—and all that cash on the cabin floor! He was beside himself. He cursed his helmsman for leaving the wheel. He screamed at Leighton a rapid confusion of orders that

threw all the work on deck in like confusion all the way up to the eyes of her.

The vessel broached to. The buoy came abreast the boat in the stern davits. In minutes only, the *Myrtle Caine* would be rooting her sternpost into that sand and farther, there to stay indefinitely.

Probably most mates would have let nature take its course in weather, sand and Fozzard. The vessel was his responsibility. But Leighton knew something of the guilty strain upon the skipper. He even suspected more and worse hidden guilt, a matter which he himself hoped to shove in the man's face some day. His greatest concern at the moment, however, was the human lives aboard the vessel. They were in jeopardy, therefore he broke the tradition of the sea, the rules and everything else.

Quickly he took Higgins out of the bow and put him in charge on deck. He himself ran aft and took over. Fozzard's shrill objections and threats vied with the shriek of the wind that struck in black fury. He did everything but throw punches; no, he could not knock Leighton down.

Dogged, methodical and unmoved, Andy got the wind abaft beam. The *Myrtle Caine* lay over somewhat, despite her load, as the wind boomed the length of her. Slowly he got way on her and moved her out from the shoal into deep water. He turned around to make verbal amends where he should have received a measure of dignified appreciation—

Captain Fozzard was not there. He had gone below.

FROM that hour, no doubt clouded the captain's mind regarding what he would do to Andrew Leighton. The young mate had become not only a threat to his financial deviltries but the ruination of his standing as master in sail. Never again did he speak to him unless necessary and he watched him with green eyes.

Fozzard went to work on the mate with a promptness and bitterness that got at least one early result; he became one of the few persons who ever succeeded in rousing Andy's temper. The incident occurred east of Cape Henlopen. Andy had endured special orders of vile food, all sorts of things stored needlessly in his too small room and more such irritations—all without protest.

The pay-off came when he went above into the wind and pitch darkness to relieve the Old Man at midnight.

He was right on the minute, yet Fozzard cursed at him for oversleeping. He tied his shoes and Fozzard thundered, "Take y'r foot off o' that bitt."

Leighton held his temper, saying, "I've got her, Cap'n" to rid the vessel's quarter-deck of the human viper's presence.

"Not yet," Fozzard countered. "You had a look at this here topping lift. By the looks of things, mister, about all you did was slide down it. Now go aloft and this time take some o' the slack out of it."

The crazy fool! Take up slack against a windfilled sail? The little would-be tyrant had gone too far. But the mate obeyed, he went up the ladder against the mast. By bull strength he may have shortened the lift by an inch. Meanwhile he guessed the skipper's real purpose: Fozzard had sent him aloft to see him heed that recent command to come down the ladder, eh?

Andy shouted down, "Best I can do" and swung himself out onto the topping lift. He'd slide again, he'd call a halt to this petty irritation. Suddenly the lower end let go. Halfway down it, he was slammed against the mast. Sharp contact with a hoop broke his grip. Down he plunged and the Old Man cried, "Now you've done it! That'll teach you."

Fozzard was gone below when, by the light of a lantern, Leighton discovered where the rope that lashed the lift to the boom had been cut almost in two at several places. That occupied the mate's attention for some time; it roused him to a survey of the situation between himself and his foe. It awoke him to the fact that the Old Man could sail her from here in without the necessary services of a mate. Significantly, too, Fozzard must have done this same thing on the trip in which Dixon had been "lost at sea"—he'd sailed her in alone.

Another contributing factor: the chandler had said, "He might resort to any extreme out there at sea beyond the law's sharp eye."

Leighton's first, impulsive conclusion was to quit, look out for his life until she got in, then be done with everything connected with the *Myrtle Caine* and her criminally-inclined skipper. But as the watch wore on, his singleness of purpose asserted itself.

There were persons Down East whom Fozzard certainly had cheated and still was deceiving about their money. The chandler too, although he wasn't completely deceived, was being cheated after a long period of tolerance bordering on generosity. And of course there was the matter of young Dixon; he had disappeared under circumstances very questionable in the light of what Leighton now knew.

But the world was peppered with duped investors and over-tolerant creditors and lost lives. As the President so often said, it was the "strenuous life" and a man named Darwin wrote a book about the survival of the fittest. So who was he, Andrew Leighton, a Down East seaman with a career to carve out, that he should ferret for a chandler or attempt to bring a murderous little tyrant to book on so little proof?

He closed his quest with that watch's end. He set aside his one-track willfulness and swallowed his curiosity. All this Fozzard evil was none of his business at all; so, at dawn, he turned the quarterdeck over to Higgins, wiped his hands, mentally, and went to bed in the cluttered hole that Fozzard had made of his room across the cabin from his own.

IT WAS the last night at sea. The *Myrtle Caine*, gently lifted along on this south-east wind, would be docked by a tug during the morning. The mate came out of the cabin stairway into midnight darkness once again. Quickly, from long habit, his eyes took in the helmsman beyond the wheel, the relief standing close by, ready to take over, and the skipper pacing nervously with hands at his back. It promised to be a rainy watch.

Leighton laid his oilskins on the cabin corner to leeward. He went to a large coil of hawser and from its center hole took up a small coil of the new heaving line yet to be cut. It came up more easily than expected, but he didn't notice that at the moment; he was concerned about the wind which kept lifting his weather clothes off the cabin.

He weighted them with the new line and Fozzard's pacing stopped abruptly. "Lay that new line back in the coil o' hawser it belongs in!" he yapped as though something had hit him.

Leighton would have challenged the pettiness two days ago; tonight he chuckled at it and heeded. Old Fozzard overheard that sound. He was too small in both nature and stature to ignore the whimsy mirth of a bigger, better character. Furthermore, the mate's new indifference frightened him after having failed to knock him out in the fall from aloft a previous night at this same hour.

Ah, but Fozzard as abruptly remembered what he'd rigged so painstakingly tonight for a second and better try; no, Andrew Leighton would not go ashore to contact the chandler. He went below musing in grim confidence; if the mate went ashore at all, this trip in, it would be on a stretcher. By the time the captain stood alone in the cabin below deck, he was laughing without restraint, ready to wait for the clatter and confusion, ready to go above and raise merry hell with that clod-footed young ox who rode down topping lifts.

An hour or more later, the helmsman struck three bells, the lookout made like response on the fog bell forward and shouted, "All's well, sir. Lights are bright"—and Andy saw the wind whisk his oil-skins off the cabin top into the air. He rescued them and reached again into the nearest coil of rope. Again he brought out the light line. This time, however, he hefted it—who had cut it short?

"All there is left here wouldn't reach to a pier, rounding the end," he said. Holding it in the binnacle light he discovered that it had indeed been cut. He recalled the cuts in the line on the boom and right away his suspicion came up hot. Only Fozzard would do that without his knowledge of it. What the devil was the Old Man up to this time? The older lines were not that worn.

He peered up into the rigging here aft; he examined the lower fastening of the topping lift. Somewhere during the last watch, he believed, Fozzard had made use of a considerable stretch of light line. He looked carefully at the deck, the other rope stuff, the other small lines. Then he gave up.

But that queer tingling up his spine persisted, that recollection of poor Dixon's disappearance would not down tonight, the last night at sea. Fozzard did not bother with cutting new rope ordinarily; he did

nothing unusual without some unusual purpose behind it—and he was after Leighton, perhaps as he'd gone after Dixon and got him.

Fully aroused by then, he went along one side of the cabin on tiptoes to the spread of the shrouds and examined the setting-up gear for new pieces. None was there. He turned away and here it was, a trap, an expert tangle of line almost invisible in the darkness down the steps leading to the main deck. It had been designed to break somebody's bones, to ruin a man on the blind run.

He crossed over to the other side and encountered the same design. Still he found it difficult to believe that any man would dare to flirt so closely with another man's ruin, possibly his death. Then he thought of another move, one which should confirm the plan or else—but there was no else. He looked down through the portside windows along the cabin's side whence he could see directly into Ahab Fozzard's room. The wily old man was lying on top of his bedding, dressed for the weather, poised in position to up and run headlong.

No longer could there be any doubt; the deduction was almost too simple. Fozzard would suddenly burst out of the cabin stairway on deck, stare up at the big spanker critically and, as he too often did, yell angrily, "What in tarnation goes on up here? Helm alee!" That cry, of course, would send Mister Leighton on the run off the poop to rouse the crew—

The mate paused only for a moment in thought; it was his life or Fozzard's, or his broken body or Fozzard's. Either way, he would look out for himself and he remembered again the chandler's warning. Braced there ten feet from the wheel, he broke into a chuckle as an idea grew in his brain.

He shed his boots and hurried forward. Indigo fell in with the plan instantly; he loved a practical joke, scarcely sensing its full import. His favorite sailor joined in it to please him; his sea bag was stowed to quit the *Myrtle Caine* anyway.

Leighton was back on the poop when a blood-curdling scream filled the night wind. A man forward was being attacked by the crazy-drunk cook. With a knife. "Cap'n! Cap'n, come quick!"

Fozzard, of course, was not actually

asleep when the mate rushed in at him, yanked him to his feet and rushed him up on deck. He aimed the dumbfounded skipper forward toward the screaming and pushed him headlong before he could do anything to act on his own judgment, before he could even think of the trap he had rigged. And at the break of the poop Leighton shoved him on down toward the deck.

THE *Myrtle Caine* lay beside the same East River pier in the rain and the pungent fumes of wet lumber. Her mate beckoned her waiting crew aft for the final rite, the pay-off, then went directly below. He looked in on the miserable Ahab and stifled a smile. One eye was swollen shut and black, the other peered balefully from beneath a long cut, white as bone in the seam and flanked by the flush of near inflammation. Ahab was miserable to the nth degree, he ached from balding crown to bony heel. A sprained ankle, a bruised hip, a sacro-iliac misplacement and a mean stomach all combined to bind him to his bed just as securely as five fathoms of the new line would have done.

Over and over again he cursed that trap—but of course he had devised it to protect himself and his reputation against his mate's prospective chatter ashore. Now the mate was abler and freer and more in command of the schooner than he himself was. But he entertained another and better thought: So long as I'm confined here, he can't get ashore to spill talk to the chandler or anybody else. Meantime I have to invent a way to thwart him after this chapter ends for me.

He looked up and there stood the mate, gawking in at him, almost grinning. "You damn fool," he scolded petulantly, "what's wanted now?"

The noise of several pairs of boots overhead startled him. He glared at Leighton, suspecting the police, the chandler, anybody bringing evil.

The mate explained calmly, "The crew after their money. They're through."

"I can't pay 'em. Can't you see, for cripesake?"

"I see more to it than merely paying off. I'll dole the cash out."

The one open eye glared at him. "No. Run 'em off o' my quarterdeck."

"Cap'n"—patiently and firm—"either they'll be paid or you'll have the crimphouse er gentlemen on your hands. Tough guests."

Fozzard caught his breath from a spasm to groan stubbornly, "I said, no!"

"Cap'n, your chandler got you two of those sailors."

Ahab turned chalky white and terror blazed in his eye. He thought fast for a way out of his dilemma but no way came and Leighton said slowly, "So give me the combination of the safe and I'll rid the vessel of them before they start to work up trouble."

Fozzard listened to them rustling outside the stairhead. He writhed against the quiet self-assurance in his mate and he felt a bit nauseated as he always did at the prospect of forfeiting good money from his pile. Not until he heard the rasping grate of a boot venturing onto the stairway did he make up his mind. The lobscause punks, they were daring to enter the after cabin! His stingy lips whispered the safe's combination and he lay back with a knot of nerves in his stomach. Curse that trap—and the man it had not crippled!

Leighton went directly to work. He opened the safe and a feeling of a big stroke of good luck swept through him. He recalled the chandler's request; ah yes, now he'd be able to report the exact amount of cash as well as its location.

He drew out the tin box when a second thought came up: he was not going to deal again with the chandler at all. Hadn't he decided at sea to be done with the *Myrtle Caine* and Fozzard and everything connected with them?

The Old Man groaned, in there abed, while his mate counted out bills to beer-thirsty human dregs and sent them above, one by one. Each groan came double barbed, one from pain and the other from financial loss. Once he tried to sit up where he might look out into the cabin at Leighton's handling of the currency; he couldn't believe the man capable of honesty. But his effort was rewarded with a breath-cutting sweep of exquisite misery, sudden and almost strong enough to drift him into unconsciousness. He dropped backward to his rumpled pillow, drenched in a cold sweat. Once more he gasped a curse—that trap!

It was still raining when the last of the crew went ashore.

Andrew Leighton did not report "all paid off" to the skipper. While the latter scolded and demanded to know what he was doing out there, he counted the rest of the money. It was all in small bills, miser's bills, and it required considerable time.

FOZZARD must have dozed off. Andy had commenced to stow it into the box in neat fashion. Abruptly footsteps sounded on the deck above. They made sharp, staccato sounds and they occurred much faster than any sailor's feet would have landed, and the noise of driving rain seemed to drive them faster.

Before he could rise off the chair, down the companionway came a woman exclaiming, "What a rain! And what a vile place to get to! Where is the"—she squinted a second look at Leighton in the subdued light—"the captain of this vessel?"

Leighton stood between her and the money on the cabin table. There he proposed to remain and he refused to be hurried by this female apparition as he surveyed her carefully. She was older than he, must be nudging thirty. She was brusque of manner, voice and speech and too businesslike. She had none of the nice air that most women in that day exhibited when boarding a vessel.

But she soon discovered the money and her eyes widened. It became plain, now, that her purpose here involved money. Before she could come out with it, however, in another burst of words, Captain Fozzard woke up, listened to the minute sounds of more than one person in his cabin and raised his cackling voice in a demand. "Who the merry hell is that?"

The woman looked sharply to Leighton as the one who should reply. Leighton did not; he had detected more than a demand. Old Fozzard, by the tone of his voice, evidently knew the answer. All too well he knew this female and she was not welcome.

As though to brush aside any spoken antipathy, she cried, "Oh how do, Captain Fozzard? I am Myrtle Caine." She looked toward his doorway, not quite venturing to go in.

"O, my God!" came a low groan from within.

To relieve the moment, Leighton said, "Madam, you've got this vessel's name," and he wondered if this was the woman Fozzard had threatened to bring on for a trip.

"No, she's got my name, was named for me," came prompt correction. "I am Captain Cousens' niece."

"Oh I see," Leighton responded indifferently, concealing his relief. He half turned toward the money and made up his mind to get her off his hands as quickly as feasible. He didn't fancy the way she divided her attention between it and the captain's doorway.

He showed her in, then stowed the tin box full of money still into the safe. He locked the safe and went up on deck to collect his senses. A fine kettle of fish, this! More than ever before, he was ready to get out and could not. The spare room was cluttered full of piled high bedding and he foresaw that this self-assertive woman would demand its removal. The stevedores were about to unload the lumber and that operation would require his watchful eye. The custom house must be visited, the Chandler told that old Fozzard had aboard here three times the money due him.

He shook into his oilskins in the fitful rain and perched himself on the edge of the cabin near the companionway. For once in his life, rain harmonized with his mood and feelings. Cook was ashore getting drunk and Higgins had gone uptown after new rings, he'd said, for the donkey. And a very purposeful, over-dressed woman must be fed and provided a room. Cap Cousens' niece, eh—he rose away from the cabin and stood squarely on his feet in the wave of a new realization: she might be Fozzard's niece too, that one he'd said hailed from Sayresport! "Holy cats!" he muttered in disgust.

HE BEGAN to hear their voices clearly up the companionway. Soon it became evident that they were not on the best of terms. Old Fozzard had a mare's nest on his hands and she'd caught him in no condition to either himself get away or run her ashore.

By and by the verbal conflict subsided. Myrtle Caine then was on deck before he could escape a part in the conflict. She

made some inane—he thought—remark for an opener while sizing him up for something. He pulled his wet sou'wester down tight over his brows and said, "I've got a lot to do" and started forward.

"You are his mate then," she said speculatively. "Of course."

"And the whole crew at present. You arrive at a most inconvenient time. Andrew Leighton's my name and I'm leaving this vessel just as soon as—"

"Wait, Mr. Leighton," talking rapidly, "I've come all the way here to settle some vitally important business with that—that man, and he refuses to even talk about it. I am Captain Cousens' niece, but I'm also his heir and this man has kept the estate tied up in one snarl after another until we actually need the money. I say need!"

"Who's 'we'?"

"Mother and myself. Ever since my cousin was killed on this vessel she has been an invalid. It's expensive, I tell you. I'm at my wits' end."

She looked it. Leighton saw it in the lines down her face. She had turned the fateful corner from youth into spinsterhood and there was no indication that she enjoyed the change. If ever she did get her heritage, he mused, it might conceivably become an inducement for some man her own age to marry the woman. He said indifferently, "Too bad, madam, but I see nothing I can do about it."

She jolted him with, "Mister Leighton, I believe he killed my cousin! He went here as mate. My uncle died shortly and left him thirty shares in this very vessel. He owned more than Captain Fozzard did and we all know how he grabs for money, shares that mean money and anything else.

"I wasn't surprised to see that pile of cash on the table, and it looks queer to us that Eddie Dixon was reported lost at sea right after he became a mate that owned more of the vessel than her captain who swore he'd own every last plank in her."

Andrew Leighton tallied her story and conjecture with what he knew and the same old question came up to hound him again: Had Fozzard rid himself of Dixon somewhat as he'd attempted to at least cripple if not kill him, Leighton? "What proof have you?" he asked quietly. "None at all. It happened at sea."

"Very well, but he has the money right here and now. He can buy up those thirty shares; yes, and mother's and mine too and he—"

"You two are 'the women in the village' with the nine shares?"

"We most certainly are!"

While she ran on, he faced her challenge. The thing to be done was, force the old rascal to buy and pay cash on the spot for thirty-nine shares. The problem, of course, would be to force him. It would leave him a rather poor little devil and probably at the mercy of the chandler, once the latter learned about the sale. Said he, "I can't promise you a thing, but we'll work on him."

"Yes, yes," the woman agreed almost too readily for dependence on her conduct, once she went below again with help.

Leighton eyed her face, the taut expectancy, the fighting expression and the despair. Only the good Lord, thought he, knows what she's likely to do and He does not say. "Miss Caine," he warned, putting deliberation in his voice for effect, "you be sure to remember down there that I say 'we do this thing together and agree on everything! Don't you bust in on my speech. Listen carefully instead. You're likely to learn something."

THEY were not gentle about it. They moved him out of that tiny room into the cabin and arranged him in a chair. He yowled against the pain it would cause him and they promised that as soon as he should do what was right they'd lift him back to bed. Now, Leighton decided, I've got him "in irons" like he had the vessel off Georgia that day. The longer he holds out against me, the worse he's going to enjoy the chair.

The mate reviewed every step he had taken in accumulating information that laid wide open the ways of Ahab Fozzard. He told him what he had learned from the chandler and what that cheated individual was ready to do to him. He went into surprising detail in the matter of the Cousens' estate and damned him for dragging two helpless women into actual poverty. Oh, he talked like a lawyer!

The big moment came without warning. It hit the miser like a .32 slug. "Cap'n Fozzard, you killed Edward Dixon aboard this

vessel!" Leighton declared boldly. "He did not fall overboard in a gale, homeward bound. I have read the detailed record of that voyage to get evidence and I found that you encountered no wind blowing more than thirty miles an hour. You murdered him."

Fozzard's face went a dusky blue. His hands shook. Stark fear flooded his eyes in spite of all he tried to do to conceal it. He attempted to shout, but Leighton was at him again before a word could come out.

"You yourself cast his body into the sea. And since you got away with one riddance of a mate you hated, you tried it on me off Cape Henlopen. Fozzard, you aimed to kill me. You!" He thrust a long finger to Ahab's nose. "You cut that topping lift lashing with a rusty knife, expecting me to swing out off the stern and fall overboard. And because you failed that time, you rigged a trap to kill me on deck last night. You—killed—Edward Dixon. Ahab Fozzard, you murdered an officer at sea."

Fozzard squirmed and a shaft of pain knifed through him. He broke into a chilling sweat. He glanced toward his room and couldn't get to it. He was a prisoner, unable to so much as turn aside from the boring eyes of his accusers. Every bone in him ached, his head swam, but he managed to think and his anger surged above his torture of conscience and body as he thought: These two devils are not the law! He set his jaw, glared out of the open eye in bleak defiance and croaked, "I don't scare." Even to himself, it sounded lame.

"All right, Cap'n," Leighton declared coldly, "it's time for the next move." To Miss Caine he said, "You stay right here while I go onto the pier. I'll get the police."

"Police!" Fozzard screamed, nearly toppling off his chair.

"That's right," Leighton said and he headed up the stairway.

"Here, here," Fozzard yelled. "Damn you, I'll—ouch!"

Leighton went on up and the woman looked after him in amazed uncertainty, more than anxious to ask him a question but remembering his orders.

"Mate, you come back here."

"You've had your chance," Leighton said, buckling his weather coat on the stairs, "now the police will make you confess."

Fozzard forgot his condition at mention of the police. He shot his arms overhead. "I'll settle with you two," he screamed. "What in hell do you want of me? Come back here. Leighton, come—" He fell off the chair, cursing the trap, Leighton, the police, the woman.

SHE beckoned for help and Leighton came; it was working out just about as he had planned it. He hoisted Fozzard onto the chair without ceremony, yet without actually hurting him appreciably. "You miserable criminal," he said incisively, "when I tell the police what I know and the chandler chimes in and this woman spills her story—" He whirled around on his toes and the oilskins made a rustling sound and raised their castor oil smell. He went to the safe, opened it and spanked the tin money box down on the mess table. He flung off its cover. The tin rang on wood, the paper dollars rose above the box top and the woman glared at them.

"You rascal," Leighton growled at Fozzard, "you're paying this woman for thirty-nine shares in this vessel here and now. She's yours!"

Mine. My vessel. All of her mine. The Fozzard scowl lifted for a moment. The long drawn-out contest was ended. He'd forfeit most of his cash, but— He paid. He signed away his option against the estate's shares.

Finally he was in bed again.

When the two went up the stairway into the rain, the woman gripped her pocketbook and hurried, but Leighton alone knew all that he had accomplished. He heard its confirmation in a final squawk from the old miser down behind them. "I been robbed," Fozzard complained. "That cussed chandler'll own this vessel 'fore I can get her to sea!"

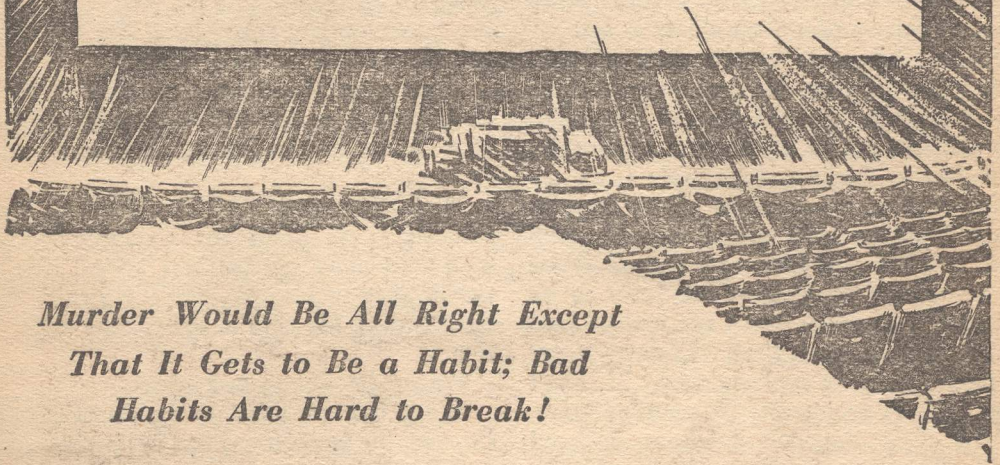
On deck, the woman scattered the money about her person, undeterred by the presence of a man. Said she, "You've handed him something though, this fine piece of property all his own."

"Madam," said he, "how would you like to sail a vessel your chandler had a considerable claim on and coveted her? And fear to enter port lest the law close in on you as a possible murderer?"

THE DOUBLE FEATURE MURDERS

By A. V. HARDING

Author of "Ticket to Doom," etc.



*Murder Would Be All Right Except
That It Gets to Be a Habit; Bad
Habits Are Hard to Break!*

CHARLIE REDPATH sat in his swivel chair and looked up at the visitor. His gaze was one reserved for people asking to be pushed over Niagara Falls in a barrel.

He said, "Son," (although the difference in their ages was certainly not that much), "what the devil makes you think you want to be a detective!"

"Son" was tall, with the gawkiness of the tall and lean, big hands and infectious grin, a twinkle in the blue eyes to go with it. The grin turned on with a bit of embarrassment like when the newcomer a few moments earlier had said, "My name is McConnell.

Luther McConnell," and added hastily, "but everybody calls me Kik."

Redpath went on, not waiting for an answer.

"You fellows read a few detective stories and listen to those corny programs on the radio, and right off you want to become private investigators. I'm telling you straight, it's not like that. The thousand-dollar fees, the beautiful females making passes at you. Nope, it's hard work, McConnell, dirty work a lot of times. No glamor, and—" Redpath's eyes roamed over his shabby office furniture—"the big dough just doesn't seem to come your way."

McConnell smiled again. Apparently, it

was the easiest thing he did. Redpath sighed and shook his head.

"What'd you pick on me for, anyway?"

"Just walking," replied the other. "Saw your plate on the front of the building downstairs. I just took a chance."

"Frankly my business doesn't warrant an assistant—right now." The detective added that last for his own morale.

As an afterthought he reached for a square of paper and dipped his fountain pen—that-didn't-fountain into an open ink slot.

"You come from the other side of town, didn't you tell me? Why not go see Big Ed Galliber? You're in his district. He's a big man in these parts, you know, and besides, that's what an assemblyman's for. 'Luther,'" Redpath started to spell out the name.

"Just make it Kik," said the young fellow quickly.

The investigator continued writing.

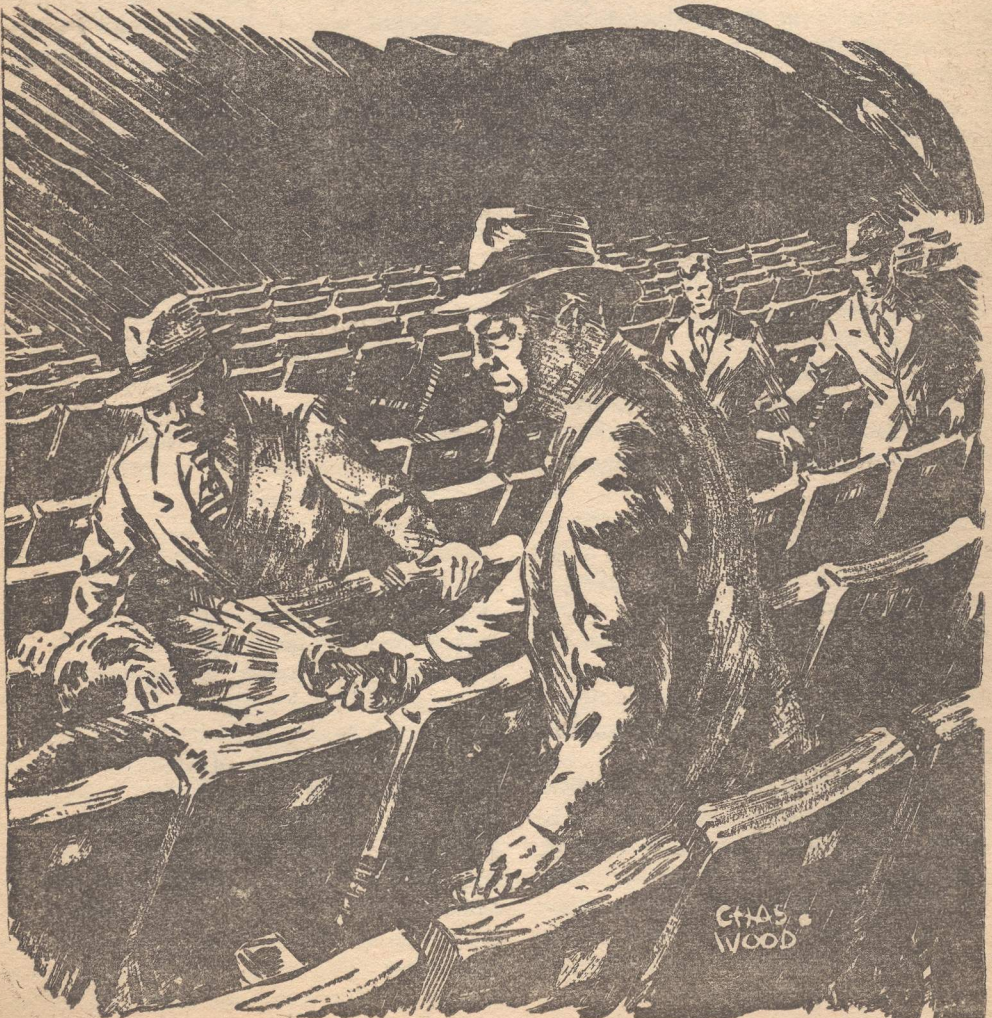
"Take this over to him. His headquarters are in the State Theater Building. You don't need an introduction being a voter. How long did you say you were in?"

"I was in the Army five years," replied Kik, néé Luther.

"Vote and a veteran," murmured Redpath. "Big Ed can't let you down. He'll fix you up with something, Son. Running staples for a grocery. Driving a cement truck. Cleaning the flues in the Old Ladies' Home. Something honest and substantial. But you don't want to be a detective!"

Redpath leaned back in his chair, indicating that that was his final declaration.

McConnell stood for a moment looking as though he were about to have another



thought, but it didn't crystallize into words.

Instead, he said, "Well, thanks anyway, Mister Redpath," and departed, closing the frosted door which read "Charles Redpath—Private Investigations" softly behind him.

The detective studied his fingertips and then stared out the square of window at the gray-sided buildings across the street. He told himself that he'd done almost as good a job as cracking a murder. He'd stopped a "might-be up-and-coming" nice kid from wasting his time becoming a private dick—or so he thought.

REDPATH reached into the center drawer of his battered desk and took out a magazine. He found his place. It was a detective story, and the private eye depicted therein was just being promised a fat fee.

He'd been reading for better than an hour (you do that in this business when there *isn't* any business) when the telephone jangled. He reached for it, keeping his forefinger in the page.

"Hello," the earpiece said. The voice was hushed, hurried. "This is Kik McConnell at Galliber's. Look, Mister Redpath, I thought maybe if I could scare up some detective activity, you'd think again about taking me on as your assistant."

"I told you before, Luther—"

"Things are popping over here, Mister Redpath, what I mean! You'd better come over on the double—and the name is Kik."

"Look," argued the investigator wearily, "I sent you over to Big Ed Galliber's to get rid of you! Don't tell me you're going to try to bite the hand that fed you!"

"This is straight," the other end of the phone protested. "Come on over here. I think there's a big job, and I'm turning it over to you in consideration for becoming your assistant."

The phone clicked, and Redpath glowered down at the dead instrument as he cradled it. He thought for a few minutes. After all, he'd been reading magazine stories all day about detectives with nary a client in the flesh. Besides, if this were on the level, anything to do with Big Ed Galliber would mean money, good money.

Redpath clapped on his hat, locked up the office and took the lift downstairs, de-

clining at the bottom against taking a taxi, and boarded a streetcar.

BIG ED GALLIBER had the Bay Rock district of the city wrapped up. He'd had it tied up for a good many years and added rope at every election. Galliber had been the butt of considerable criticism. There'd been efforts to discredit him and have him thrown out, but the people in his own district wanted him in and that was that. He handed out the patronage and fees with an iron hand. Nobody who did right by Big Ed Galliber regretted it; those who tried to oppose him usually didn't last too long.

He'd been mixed up in a variety of rackets and given enough rope to hang thirty ordinary men—but Big Ed somehow never got caught, and of course it helped to have most of the Police Department and some of the courts on his side!

Redpath got off the car and stood opposite the big stone-fronted building that housed the State Movie Theater, and upstairs the clubhouse, organization headquarters and living arrangements of Ed Galliber.

The detective noticed the movie title on the marquee as he went into the building. "The Guns Roar Purple"—"a gripping, thrilling saga of gangdom." Galliber owned the movie palace too and had distinct tastes in cinema.

Redpath turned in at the door, above which read "Clubhouse Rooms Bay Rock District Available for Smokers. Inquire at Office. Follow the Arrow." Standing just outside the portal was a nondescript-looking individual with a box suspended from his neck on two thongs. In the box was assorted chewing gum and candy. He gesticulated at his wares, but Redpath shook his head. The detective thought the peddler eyed him closely as he passed by.

There was a flight of stairs, with worn rubber non-skid tips. Redpath mounted them two at a time. The second and third floors had several frosted glass doors leading off the hallways, labeled "Committee Room," "Club Room," and the like.

The fourth floor revealed two wood-paneled doors. The investigator chose the nearest, turned the knob and pushed the door inward gently. He was in a living room. He walked across the thick carpet, uneasy

in his mind now about what the pitch was. Easing open another door, he found himself in a den. This upstairs was like a maze.

Another portal at the far end of the den beckoned and he walked silently to it. As his hand fell on the brass knob, he heard the noise. The noise was blonde, curvaceous and long-legged. She was young and fresh, the sort of girl you could take home to the family—only the family would feel uncomfortable about that cannon in her hand. The cannon pointed straight at Redpath. He felt uncomfortable too.

She came closer and the silence was terrific. Her eyes were dilated with fear and her lipsticked mouth was open a little. She might just have been crying but there was no weakness in her face now.

"Hello," said the detective.

Her fingers tightened perceptibly on the revolver.

"You're mixed up in it!" she hissed between those perfect white teeth. "You're working for Big Ed—maybe you. . ."

"Now wait a minute," Redpath remonstrated, waving his hands.

There were enough emotions on this girl's face to fetch him a nice bullet hole. He took a step forward.

"Let's straighten this thing out, but first put away. . ."

"Keep still!" She flourished the gun under his nose, and his eyes lit on the sight of her forefinger clamped under the trigger.

He moved his own left hand, then quickly stepped forward and sideways. He caught her wrist and she screamed. Redpath had the gun now and hardly felt the toe of her shoe driven home against his shin.

But he did feel the strong arms that snaked out from behind him, pinioning his own. The girl wrenched free, pistol and all. The investigator tried to struggle, but the arms around him were steely. He twisted his head backward as the girl stepped forward menacingly holding the revolver like a club. As Redpath turned, he caught a glimpse of his assailant. Before he could gasp, "Luther McConnell!" something thudded into his temple and he went under.

HIS sense of feel came back first. He was lying half-propped up on the floor and his hands, palms down, felt the softness of a thick carpet. He opened his eyes and

took a quick look, but at that moment his temple cracked open with a vicious throb of pain where the blond girl had slugged him. He clamped his eyelids shut and groaned, but underneath that stab of pain, his brain was working.

That first look had been provocative. He'd have to try again. He slid his eyes open with his hand up to his temple. Yes, there was someone sitting in a chair directly in front of him. Redpath opened his eyes a bit more and stared. The woman stared back. For the second time since entering Big Ed Galliber's, the investigator wondered what to say. Then he realized it didn't matter. Because the woman was quite dead.

THE shock of this discovery cleared the detective's brain, and he became aware of the others in the room, sitting or standing in a semi-circle. One of them shifted uneasily, and Redpath turned his head to meet a particularly malevolent stare. The man was dark-haired and swarthy. Redpath recognized him as Sid Trellis, one of Big Ed's leading lieutenants. Trellis contributed for the room at large.

"Sure, the Shamus done it. It's written all over him!"

Redpath looked further. There was the blond girl, only this time she was wringing her hands and not a revolver. The detective's eyes rolled painfully on. Kik McConnell stood next to the girl. McConnell grinned shamefacedly as his eyes met Redpath's.

"Why you big ape! What's the idea?"

At that Trellis stepped forward menacingly. "Shut up. Shut up, you, and stay put!"

Redpath shut up and stayed put. Trellis' hand was in his pocket. There was more in the pocket than his fist. The detective had seen enough gun this afternoon and he still hadn't the faintest idea how the land lay.

There were three other people in the room. A colored maid who kept lifting the soiled end of her apron up to dab at wet eyes.

Then there was a thin-faced man with a cane whom Trellis addressed as "Shard." Shard looked rather appalled by all this and answered in hushed tones. The other member was a typical young Big Ed

Galliber punk lounging against the wall with his hands in the pockets of his overly tailored suit, the corner of a toothpick working in his mouth. A tan fedora was balanced on the chair beside him, but Redpath was sure it was there only by the grace of someone else's manner, instead of drawn low over the punk's shifty eyes.

There was silence, finally broken by Trellis' irritable "Chris' sake! When're the bulls going to get hère!"

Nobody had an opinion, but a few moments later Trellis' query was answered. The investigator recognized Lieutenant McGuire, otherwise known as Honest Frank McGuire. Honest Frank owed his spot on Homicide to Ed Galliber. There was the usual stooge sergeant along. Everybody talked at once.

Out of the hubbub, Redpath picked up some points: (a) the deceased was Mrs. Big Ed Galliber; (b) she was more murdered than deceased.

Honest Frank's eyes roamed distastefully around the room. They lit on Redpath, who was struggling to his feet now, and grew uglier.

"What's *he* doing here?" McGuire asked.

"That's Suspect Number One," Trellis replied. "Found him snoopin' around up here a little while ago. Had a gun on him, too."

McGuire turned his beady eyes from the detective and fixed them on his sergeant. That worthy had been examining Mrs. Galliber.

"What's it, Sergeant?"

"Shot. Shot a couple of times through the chest."

"If you ask me—" Redpath offered.

"Nobody's asking you," the lieutenant snapped.

"Still, if you did, I'd say maybe Mrs. Galliber. . . ."

"Wait a minute!" It was the girl's voice and she was walking forward into the center of the room. She had a hold on herself now, but it was precarious. Even as the words tumbled out, her shoulders began to heave and the glistening blond hair fell about her eyes.

"*He* did it! He knew she was going to divorce him. He only married her for her money. She was leaving him and he knew

it, and I'll tell you something else. She was planning to change her will. . . ."

"You don't mean—" The lieutenant stopped abruptly. His face showed that he was flustered, and being flustered he became angry. "And who are you, anyway?"

Trellis supplied the answer. "That's the missus' kid sister."

"I tell you it's the truth!" the girl broke in. "He was rotten to her. Believe me, I know. I've only been here a short time but you could see it!"

"Lady," said the still-outraged Honest Frank, "you don't go around accusing Big Ed Galliber of murder!"

"Oh, yes, I do, and I am! I don't care who he is or how important he is around here. She was my sister and I loved her even if he didn't." She broke into convulsive sobs.

McConnell came forward and led her to the corner of the room. McGuire was breathing hard and his sergeant looked stupefied.

"You got a phone?" the police officer asked. "Now don't nobody try to leave this building. There is a policeman down at the bottom of the stairs," he called over his shoulder as he went into the next room.

SHARD and Trellis began whispering together. The colored maid with a final snuffle wrenched her saucer-sized eyes away from Mrs. Galliber's body and mumbled something about getting back to her kitchen. McConnell was still comforting the girl in the corner.

Redpath tried his smile, and the punk glared back. No source of information in that direction. He went over and tapped McConnell on the shoulder. The girl's look was only slightly less unfriendly than the young gunsels'.

"Luther," remonstrated Redpath. "What is the big idea? Who gets what and why—and thanks, pal, for jumping me in the other room!"

Kik McConnell tried a grin.

"Sheila, this is Charles Redpath, my employer." The introduction continued over Redpath's grunt of protest. "This is Sheila Bailey, Mrs. Galliber's sister. She's been living here for a while with them."

The girl's glance was still uneasy and said, I don't like you.

Redpath stuck to his subject, "What was the idea of the roughhouse next door?"

"Well, what were you doing prowling about?" Sheila demanded, her blue eyes darkening with suspicion.

"Luther phoned me."

"Please, Mr. Redpath, the name is Kik."

"Anyway," Redpath went on, "this dear boy called me and told me to hotfoot it over."

"A likely story," she snapped.

Kik McConnell looked as if his collar was too small for him. "That's the truth, Sheila," he admitted uncomfortably.

Honest Frank came back in the room, pausing for a moment with Shard and Sid Trellis. Then he spun on his heel.

"You, Redpath. I'm taking you down to the station house on suspicion!"

"Hey, wait a minute, McGuire," the investigator wagged his head. "That's pretty fast work even for you. What've I done?"

"Someone did it," Sid Trellis murmured pontifically. "McGuire here tells me you are sort of a shady private detective. We all know there are plenty of elements in this city who'd like to get rid of our chief or hurt him some way through his family."

"So I'm shady!" colored Redpath. "That's fine coming from you." He addressed his remarks to Honest Frank. "Sure, I've cut a few corners—who doesn't?—but I don't owe my job or my bank account, such as, to a political boss, and by God if I couldn't do better detecting than you've done, I'd turn in my tin badge!"

"Shut up!" yelled McGuire.

"Shut up!" echoed his sergeant, with all the vehemence of a man plugging his only line.

"You're making a hell of a mistake," the investigator warned as they flanked him and guided him toward the door into the hall. At least it amused him to see McConnell. The tall youngster was standing uncomfortably now, looking after them with a worried expression.

"So long, Luther!" the detective waved gaily.

The sergeant nudged Redpath's shoulder and they began to walk.

"What'd you think of the girl's theory?" Redpath asked.

He repeated the question before Honest Frank had a chance to answer, Shut up.

"I mean, suppose it was like she said—Big Ed Galliber putting away his wife. What would you do?"

"Shut up!" It was the sergeant this time.

"That repartee's killing me, fellas."

THEY'D started down the stairs. Someone was coming up towards them, fast. The steps were thundering. The someone rounded the flight beneath them and came into view. It was a youngster dressed in an usher's uniform. He was panting and his eyes were popping out of his head. His face was white, turned pink, and white again.

"Where's Mister Shard!" he gasped. "Somethin' terrible, terrible!"

"Out of the way, kid," ordered McGuire curtly.

The usher must have sensed Honest Frank's authority.

"Are you a policeman?"

"Lieutenant of Homicide."

"Then I guess it's all right if I tell you—"

"Tell me what, kid? Make it quick!"

"It was awful! We just found him sitting in the movie."

"Who? Spit it out, Sonny. I'm not playing guessing games with you."

The usher let it go with a mighty triumphant gasp. "Big Ed Galliber! He's sitting in the movie house orchestra, only I guess all the blood's out of him. He's dead, mister. Somebody stuck him with a knife or somethin'!" Then he remembered his duty. "Is Mister Shard upstairs? I got to tell him. He's the manager, you know."

McGuire was paying no more attention to the boy now, and the youngster tore on up the stairs. Instead, McGuire looked at his sergeant and his sergeant looked back at him.

"Well," breathed Redpath.

The sergeant opened his mouth to say something, undoubtedly Shut Up. McGuire snapped, "We'd better investigate this. You hang with us, Shamus."

They tumbled down the stairs two at a time and took the side entrance into the movie house. A few stragglers waiting for the evening show were standing around curiously in the lobby, sensing something wrong. The ticket-taker was half in and half out of the entrance-way to the orchestra.

"Where's Mister Shard?" he asked beseechingly as the three bore down on him.

McGuire pushed him aside. "Where is he?"

The auditorium was empty now and the dim house lights were lit. Against the background of upholstered seats, Redpath could see the bulk of a figure about half-way down on one of the side aisles. The ticket-taker pointed mutely, unnecessarily, in that direction, and the three hurried down the carpeted aisle. The other young usher was standing a few rows away, gray in the face, his voice hinting that he was about to be very sick.

"There he is," he murmured.

"Let me have your flashlight," McGuire ordered.

He took the torch from the boy and bent over the slumped body. "It's Big Ed all right," he reported.

He stepped gingerly and looked down between the seats. Redpath followed the direction of his eyes. Galliber had bled . . . and bled! Dark red had run down the inclined concrete until it hit the rim of the carpet where it had soaked in, leaving an ugly semi-circle. There was a tear in Galliber's coat just at the shoulder, and a gaping wound where the blade of a long knife had been driven savagely through the neck. The proverbial "stuck pig," thought the investigator.

The two policemen were going over Galliber's body carefully. Redpath stood by watching. The shaken young usher had retreated, and they were alone, and in that aloneness the orchestra seemed immense and gloomy.

Redpath saw the sergeant take something from Galliber's left-hand coat pocket, and peering as closely as he could, he saw what that something was. The two policemen eyed each other and the object disappeared quickly into McGuire's own coat pocket. Then the lieutenant, after delegating the other man to stay by the body, tapped Redpath on the shoulder and said, "We'll go back upstairs."

THEY walked up the aisle and out past the group of startled curious people in the lobby, out the side door into the adjoining passageway. McGuire looked worried. The turn of events had come too sud-

denly for one of his ponderous mentality. Redpath surreptitiously eyed the bulge in the other man's pocket and wondered just when Honest Frank would say anything about it. The private detective had seen the sergeant take the medium-caliber revolver from Galliber's pocket, had seen him break open the cylinder and had seen what looked unmistakably, even in the dim light, like two discharged cartridges. And even Honest Frank ought to be able to remember that Mrs. Galliber had been shot twice by a medium-caliber revolver!

Upstairs the party had broken up. At McConnell's suggestion, Sheila had gone to her room to lie down. Sid Trellis and Max Shard were engaged in low conversation. The colored maid had disappeared to her kitchen, and the punk had subsided into a leatherette chair to peruse an old racing form.

The usher had come and gone with his grisly message but there was incredulity, even outright disbelief, in the room that Redpath and McGuire returned to. Trellis came over hastily.

"Is it true, Frank?"

They were all first names in the Galliber organization.

The tone of Trellis' voice cried, Say it isn't so, and Max Shard was right behind, his body bent somewhat over the cane he carried, his thin face white.

The Lieutenant of Homicide sat down heavily. "I don't get it," he said.

Trellis and Shard exchanged glances. "Then it is true!"

Honest Frank bobbed his head. "Boys, the Assemblyman's dead downstairs!"

Even the punk lowered his racing form at that. He glowered at the room in general.

"This is gonna bust things wide open," Trellis announced finally.

There was a moment of silence and then Shard inclined his thin, bent body forward.

"How long can you hold onto this thing, Frank?"

McGuire's thick fingers drummed nervously. "I don't know. It's hot! Really hot! I should call the D. A. now."

Redpath noticed everybody looked unhappy at that and he smiled to himself. The D. A. was not a Galliber man, which was as good as saying that he was probably not corruptible.

"Of course if we could wrap this case up good and quick," Trellis smirked. "If you could turn it over to the D. A.'s office all neatly solved, we could at least keep things kinda in the family. And it wouldn't look bad for you, Frank. Well, guess I'll take a look downstairs."

The men's eyes met for a brief moment as Trellis went through the door. Then Charlie Redpath cleared his throat.

"Guess I'll be getting along if it's all the same to you. It's been nice but—" his voice trailed off.

Sheila Bailey had come back into the room, and the detective marveled that she could still look so lovely with the faint traces of tears streaking her face. McConnell whispered to her quickly. Filling in, Redpath thought. The news about Big Ed put the look of genuine surprise on her face.

Redpath's attention snapped away from Sheila at McGuire's pronouncement, "Nobody's going anywhere!"

"Look," the detective observed. "Why don't you 'fess up, McGuire. You don't know what you're doing. You can't hold all of us here indefinitely. This thing is too big for you to keep under your hat. It's bound to get out of the district, McGuire, and when it does, you'll look like a sap! You'll look like the small-time, corrupt chisler that you are!"

Honest Frank was on his feet, red with fury. His eyes glittered dangerously. He took three threatening steps towards Redpath and the investigator tensed himself.

IT WAS the sound of new footsteps entering the room that stopped Honest Frank. Trellis, who had returned, muttered something irritably and McGuire turned. It was the shabbily clad peddler Redpath had seen outside the building earlier.

The peddler, still carrying his little tray of saleables, made motions with his hands. He looked pleadingly at McGuire. The noises from his throat were incoherent, gurgling sounds.

"What's the matter with him, sick?" McConnell questioned.

"He's a dummy," Trellis supplied. "Deaf-mute. Some hanger-on, seen him loafing around here. Think Big Ed used to give him passes into the movie. Galliber

was soft that way. He's selling shoe-laces. . . ."

"Chewing gum," corrected Redpath.

". . . All right, chewing gum. Why Galliber let him hang around, I don't know. He's nuts."

"Looks to me as though he wants to tell us something," the private investigator put in.

The deaf-mute stopped before Redpath, made unmistakable writing motions with his empty hand.

The investigator went through his pockets under the disapproving glowers of Trellis and the two policemen.

"I think the guy wants to write something—haven't got a pencil."

"Don't let the Shamus run your case, Frank," Trellis needed.

"Heh, you. Get out," the Homicide lieutenant ordered. His words may have been lost on the peddler but their meaning was plain.

The beggar headed for the door, cringing almost pathetically at the vehemence of the police officer.

As he neared the portal the young punk came alive, smirking, flipped a pencil at him. The peddler caught and scribbled frantically on a gum wrapper.

"Heh!" bellowed McGuire, face purpling.

"That's right, Frank," Trellis put in. "Let's cut out the three-ring circus."

As the lieutenant advanced menacingly, the shabby peddler dropped the wrapper in the punk's lap and fled precipitously.

The young gunsel picked up the paper and eyed it curiously, his flat, tough face mouthing and frowning as he tried to make out the scrawl.

"Lemme have it," McGuire made a grab but the youngster, his eyes turned ugly, snatched his hand away, crumpling the paper as he did so.

"Heck with it, Frank," Trellis advised. "That dummy doesn't ever make sense. He's a coot."

McGuire fumed. "I give the orders." But he turned away, and as he did, the punk contemptuously touched a match to the crumpled paper and watch it burn to black ash.

Redpath sighed noisily. "The deaf-mute couldn't have less ideas on this business than you fellows."

McGuire turned on the pricate investigator.

"Beat it, Shamus. You're lucky I don't break your skull open with a billy, but get outta here fast!"

The investigator's eyebrows went up. "I don't mind hanging around. I've got used to the idea."

"Get out!" gritted McGuire again.

"What about my client?"

"Your client?"

"Why yes, Sheila Bailey."

Something sounding suspiciously like a derisive noise came from her corner and then words.

"I've hired Mister McConnell here. He's representing me. I don't like you Mister Redpath, and I think you'd better go!"

Redpath smiled. "Of course, anything you say, Miss Bailey, but you see McConnell is my employee. If I'm out of the case, he's out too. Isn't that right, Luther?"

McConnell exhaled audibly, "Yes." But he was smiling.

Sheila Bailey subsided. McGuire's forehead wrinkled and he muttered under his breath. Redpath picked out the most comfortable, deepest chair in the living room and settled himself in it. He was sitting on something, and he felt around, noticing that everyone was watching him. He pulled to light the racing form the young punk had been reading. Faces relaxed. Except the young punk's. He snatched at the form. As he bent from the waist, Redpath could see the outline of a big piece of hardware at his hip pocket.

"Hope you line up the daily double for me," murmured the investigator.

A SILENCE as thick and heavy as the maroon rug on the floor settled over the room and its occupants. Once they were interrupted by the uniformed policeman from downstairs. He appeared with a dignity from the coroner's office. The late Mrs. Galliber was the recipient of this official visit, and Sheila Bailey wept again.

It was dark outside now, Redpath noticed. Sitting in his chair he could detect ever so faintly the clamorous and distant sounds of gunplay. The sounds came from the open corridor door that led downstairs to the theater.

"The show must go on," Redpath

thought to himself as he reflected on the real drama that had taken place in that movie house a few hours previous.

He turned his head. Trellis sitting on that side grinned at him. "The Guns Roar Purple. They've got a swell scene in it. Plenty of machine guns blasting and things blowing up. It's pretty good for that sort of junk."

Redpath marveled at the powerful sound track that could be heard up here on the top floors of the building.

In a few minutes the sergeant joined them, the coroner's official having likewise finished his business with Big Ed.

"What're we waiting for?" asked Redpath.

"Have to shoot your mouth off, don't you?" McGuire's face was red.

"I'm a detective," the investigator replied easily. "I think about these things. It's my business."

"You're a lousy detective," Honest Frank countered.

"Yes, I'm a lousy detective all right. Lousy until I make a pinch. And you know something? Somebody's going to have to make a pinch sooner or later. Luther," the detective called to his newly deputized assistant. "What's your end of this?"

The sergeant started to say Shut up! but Redpath anticipated him.

"It's a free country, isn't it? I'm getting a report from my assistant."

"Why don't we talk some of this through? It might help us," Shard weighed in.

Trellis, McGuire, the sergeant and the young gungel didn't agree and looked it.

"I came straight over here from your office like you told me to," Kik explained. "The door here was open and I just walked up. I knocked outside this apartment and she came to the door." He indicated Sheila Bailey. "She was crying something awful. The first thing I know she's pulled me in and showed me this body. I'm sorry—Mrs. Galliber. I told her . . . well, the first thing that came into my head," he appealed to Redpath, "that I was a private detective.

"She seemed kind of suspicious of me after she quieted down a little and she was asking me how did she know I hadn't done it. She told me a lot of stuff about how her sister was ready to give Galliber the

sack and they were splitting up and that there was a killer loose in the building.

"Then she got hysterical again and she shook and got so white, it scared me. I guess I'm sort of a flop at comforting people. Anyway, next thing I knew Sheila gave a little gasp and I had to catch her from falling.

"After I put her on the sofa and saw she was beginning to come out of it, I called you, Mister Redpath. It looked like a situation you'd want to be in on.

"When I got back to Sheila, she was sitting up and holding her head between her hands. She talked some more to me for a while. For quite a while.

"I guess it was then that we heard someone in the next room and she said if I was on her side this was my chance to prove it. From somewhere, a drawer I think, she came up with one of the biggest revolvers I've ever seen. I was to back her up, although it didn't look to me as though she needed much backing up with that cannon in her hand. We planned that she would slip around through a side door and surprise this whoever it was in the next room. I was to come in through the other door.

"The noise was you," Kik grinned at Redpath, "and of course to make it look good, I had to grab you when you started to take the gun away from her. After all, I was working for her by then.

"Honest, I didn't know she was going to slug you. That's where you came in. Told it about right, Sheila?"

THE girl nodded without looking up.

"Where I went out!" adjusted Redpath. "Anybody else got any thoughts?"

"I was downstairs in my office in the theater," Max Shard supplied, "when Miss Bailey called me. She told me something terrible had happened. I saw Sid Trellis around and we came up together."

Sheila nodded in corroboration.

"And where were *you*?" Redpath looked at the girl. "If you were here on this floor, you certainly must've heard two shots."

"I don't see where you get off. . . ." Honest Frank expostulated.

"Let him talk, Frank," Sid Trellis put in easily. "I never saw a private detective yet who got anywhere."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," the detective acknowledged.

"But I wasn't on the floor," Sheila held her hands together tightly. "I was up on the roof. We have a little sun deck there. I got sleepy and I think I may have dozed off. I didn't hear a thing. I'm sure I didn't!" She lapsed into silence.

"There's one theory about all this that looked pretty good—in the beginning." Redpath studied his nails, picked out a finger and rubbed it across his lapel. "It won't come as any surprise to anybody if I make like one of these newspaper peepsters and say that it's pretty common knowledge that Mrs. Galliber had a nice piece of coin and Big Ed hadn't been any less anxious to marry her because of it."

The punk bristled, but Sid Trellis waved a hand.

"Political campaigns take dough," Redpath went on. "Especially when you rig the vote up pretty nice. Big Ed had lots of ability in that direction, but a little extra do-re-me helps."

"I always said that," Sheila Bailey agreed. "I knew he never loved Mary."

"Now we understand from Mrs. Galliber's sister that the two were thinking of breaking up."

Sheila nodded vigorously again.

Redpath continued, "And there've been rumors like that around town. Well, in this country the husband doesn't get alimony from a wife who divorces him. It might be better if she had an accident—or some such. We can't forget that Big Ed needed that money."

It was bristling time for the punk again.

"You've got a lot of 'ifs' in there," said Trellis.

"Oh sure, it's just mental exercise," the investigator admitted. "I do this to pass the time instead of card tricks, but you'll admit, it might have happened that way. Big Ed had a reputation for getting what he wanted. He got the girl, and before she got on to him, he was going to get the dough. It could add up."

"There's only one catch, Shamus," Honest Frank put in.

"Now what's that, Captain?"

"Big Ed Galliber was killed too, so that means your whole theory's wrong!"

"That's pretty smart for a man on the

Police Force," admitted the detective. "Pretty straight thinking, McGuire. You ought to get an extra chevron for that. Yes, theory number one had to be discarded the minute we found Assemblyman Big Ed Gal-
liber stone cold dead in the movie house. Well, folks, I guess this'll go on far, far into the night."

Sheila put in the next word.

"It's past suppertime. Would anyone like a cup of tea or coffee and something to eat?"

There was a general murmur of assent.

"I don't know whether Minnie's still holding down the kitchen or not. If not, I'll get the things myself."

"That's a thought," McGuire brightened. "Send what's-her-name Minnie out here a minute. I'd like to ask her a few questions."

"Always true to the script," Redpath wagged his head. "There's no butler, McGuire, so you're taking the next best thing as a suspect now. The maid."

SHEILA'S erect back disappeared in the direction of the kitchen, and in a few minutes the colored woman appeared. Her eyes rolled unhappily and she tugged at the strings of her apron.

"Miz Bailey says yo wanna see me?"

"Yeah," Honest Frank straightened. "What do you know about all this that's been going on, Minnie?"

"Dunno nothin'. Nothin' at all."

"You didn't see anything or hear anything?"

"No suh."

"Where were you early this afternoon?"

"Ah was in mah room, suh."

"Where's that?"

"In de back. Long way from heah! Um hum!"

"All right, Minnie. That's all."

The colored maid fled as though nothing pleased her more.

In a few minutes Sheila appeared with a tray loaded with coffee and sandwiches. She passed them around. Redpath nibbled at his sandwich hungrily. Ham and cheese, a good reminder of how long it had been since he'd eaten that day. The others ate and drank enthusiastically.

Redpath placed his empty plate beside him next to the flower urn on the table. He

balanced the coffee cup in his hands feeling its warmth through the china sides. He studied the steaming drink intently as though seeking a solution there.

The punk who'd laid aside his racing form for the food and beverage drained his cup, then ran his fingers around his collar and complained that the room was hot. The sergeant seconded the motion. Sid Trellis stepped over to a window and threw it open. He yawned on his way back to the chair.

Kik McConnell, who'd been standing in the corner near Sheila, bent his long legs at the hinges and sank onto a chaise lounge grinning dopily. Max Shard ran a long, slender finger under his nose and looked at the ceiling, preoccupied. Honest Frank McGuire put his hands back of his head, nodded as would the most callow watchman on all-night duty, and then closed his eyes.

Redpath watched the room go to sleep one by one. He himself slumped forward slightly, his legs sticking out in front of him ungracefully. He let his head loll backward, and closed his eyes.

The room was now quiet as death, so quiet that the ticking of the ancient brass clock on the sideboy was clearly audible. It ticked away the seconds and the minutes, and then there was softly and carefully the beginnings of movement, stealthy tiptoe movements in the chamber.

Redpath let his head slide forward ever so slightly so that when he willed it, he could open his eyes and see through their slits. In this position, he suddenly smelled the strong aroma of coffee. It came from the flower urn beside his chair where he'd surreptitiously dumped his cup.

The movements were nearer. He tried to trace their course, but it was difficult and misleading. They seemed to circle his chair but perhaps they didn't. He fought with himself to keep his eyes tightly shut. He made himself relax.

The steps had stopped. That meant whoever it was was studying something. Redpath dared not chance a look until there was no other sound. The investigator became more and more fidgety as the moments passed. The muscles of his eyelids began to relax as he started to draw them up very gradually. In a second now he would see.

The blackness of his self-imposed night

was just beginning to streak with the faintest room light let in by his slitted lids when a crushing force hit him on the head. He went down into his chair, through it, below it and beneath it into a blackness deeper than the drugged one he had avoided.

THE first face Redpath saw on life's agenda was the freckled honest, yes, honest visage of Kik McConnell looking anxiously at him. Sheila Bailey was beside Kik and there were the others. Redpath, without satisfaction, noticed the satisfaction on McGuire's face.

"What happened?" McConnell was saying in a tone of voice to indicate he'd asked the question before.

Redpath felt his head. It was a poor, tired battered head. He thought irrelevantly of the radio private eyes who were always being slugged. It was amusing in fiction. Not so funny in actuality.

He felt numb, woozy. "How long have I been out?" he managed.

"An hour or so. We were drugged," McGuire muttered with a look dripping handcuffs at Sheila Bailey.

"It's a good thing it wasn't poison," Max Shard tried a smile.

Redpath staggered up and walked a few steps shakily. His head began to clear and the sponginess slid away some. Obviously his "accident" had been a side issue. They were all back at the blonde girl now, going hammer and tongs at her. She looked helpless and harried, only McConnell defending her.

"Don't be silly," she cried almost hysterically. "Why would I possibly want to put a roomful of people, including two policemen, asleep for a few hours?"

This was a new angle on the whole business, McGuire attacked. "We've had everyone in this room practically in the death cell except you. You didn't like Ed Galliber. Probably didn't get along with your sister. You had an argument with her only last night!"

The two policemen growled triumphantly. Redpath thought, that was a new one. He guessed they'd grilled the maid again while he'd been unconscious.

Sheila was frightened now. Her blue eyes looked wildly from one to another and McConnell wasn't doing much good. Redpath

thought probably what she needed was a lawyer, not a detective. He looked at his watch. It was nine p.m. Shard also peered at his timepiece, then cleared his throat.

"I ought to be getting back to the theater," he mentioned to McGuire. "I'll be downstairs in my office if you need me. Is that okay?"

McGuire thought a moment. "Okay."

Shard limped out of the room, leaning heavily on his cane. McGuire droned on in his monotonous voice.

"Now what the hell do you suppose went on in here while we were out? Would you rather tell us down in the station house, sister? No one else got near those eats."

Then Sheila, astonishingly, broke down.

"All right, I did it," she sobbed. "I knew the pills were harmless. Mary used to take them a lot and so had I a few times. But I swear I didn't hit him," she indicated Redpath.

"You see, oh, I know you won't believe it. It seems fantastic. I'd arranged a piece of sugar in a certain way beside one of the cups. That was to identify mine. The one without the sleeping potion in it, and when I passed the tray around, I got mixed up. That's the truth. Please try to believe me!"

Her eyes appealed to everybody, but only McConnell seemed sold, or perhaps the word should have been smitten, Redpath thought.

Sheila went on with her story. "I got the cups mixed up. I was a little confused, but I didn't know for sure then and I didn't know it until I drank mine. I don't know who got the one without the drug, but whoever it was must have been the one who hit Mister Redpath." Her voice trailed off.

"Well," beamed Honest Frank. "I guess that ties the thing up. Your story's pretty flimsy, Miss. Doping officers of the law, you know, is kind of serious when they're investigating a murder case and you're a suspect. No, that story won't go. Switching cups!" he sneered.

"Lady, I'm going to take you down to the station house and book you on suspicion of murder!"

"McGuire," said Redpath tiredly, one hand still on his aching head.

"You shut up!" Honest Frank roared back.

"But I want to save you from—"

"Shut up!" echoed the sergeant, his beefy shoulders hunched forward belligerently.

Sheila looked as though she were going to dissolve into tears again. Then she straightened her shoulders, her chin came up and she said, "All right, but I've told you the truth."

They all thought at first the punk was agreeing. He made a noise that went "Awwkk." He said "Awwkk" again like a sick crow. He stood there in the semicircle midst the others and turned purple and white and green.

The group watched fascinatedly as his hands came up as though he were going to undo his tie. It almost looked as though he were getting ready for bed. His collar button popped. But he didn't look sleepy, not with his eyes bulging and his tongue running out like an impudent little boy's.

The punk said "Awwkk" again and stared right through Redpath, who got ready to catch his eyes as they started to pop out. Then very quietly without another sound, the gungsel slid to the floor with an easy thud. He lay there, and after they got over the surprise of this new development, first Redpath and then the sergeant bent over him. They felt his pulse and his chest and they looked at each other. The three "Awwkks" had done it. The punk was dead.

IT SEEMED more than fifty minutes, and yet Redpath's watch said ten to ten. The boys who make the medical cases for the Police Department had already come and taken away Galliber's young gungsel. There'd been talk about what the poison was. It sounded like cocaine or procaine hydrochloride, "inducing paresthesia dyspepsia and death."

Lieutenant McGuire was sweating it out now. His case against Sheila was at once weakened and complicated; anyone could have slipped the poison into the punk's cup after she had brought the tray into the living room, and as everyone had taken their coffee at random, the girl drinking the one that was left, the whole issue was somewhat clouded.

Honest Frank looked around the room defiantly and finally settled almost beseechingly on Redpath.

"What about Max Shard?" he murmured.

Nobody said anything. "What's with him, Sid?" the detective-lieutenant pushed.

Trellis gave a fill-in. Shard had been in the Big Ed Galliber organization for years. He was, Trellis admitted, a whiz with figures and had considerable legal knowledge. He had been manager of Galliber's movie house downstairs for seven years.

"And," reminded Redpath interrupting, "from the evidence you learned gentlemen of the Police Department gathered earlier, he was in his office totaling up receipts with a couple of ushers and in full view of dozens of other people at the time fixed by the medicos of Mrs. Galliber's death."

McGuire deflated.

"I dunno why you have to listen to a private dick," Trellis objected.

"Shut up!" yapped Honest Frank.

Redpath smiled to himself. Apparently the rift in the ranks was broadening.

"You're itching to make an arrest, McGuire," the investigator went on, "but don't make a monkey out of yourself!"

"I'm not making any arrest . . . now," Honest Frank intoned.

"What was the idea of letting Max Shard go?" Kik McConnell put in.

"Don't you see, Luther?" Redpath answered. "None of us are under arrest. The lieutenant has said so himself."

"Lieutenant," observed his thick-bodied sergeant, both hands fumbling in his pockets, "I got an idea somebody's went through my things."

He held up a black summons pad with a pencil stuck in a looped leather thong. "I always carry this open side up. Now it's down!"

McGuire looked impatient. "Anything missing?"

"Well, no. Don't seem to be."

"Well then, man, what're you complaining about?"

Redpath, though, had had the same feeling. A man gets to know his pockets, what's in them and where, and although like the sergeant, nothing of his was gone, he'd felt too that the open button on his hip wallet pocket was more than a coincidence. Being a private detective of the real and not fictional quality, he counted his money carefully and walletted it away, securely buttoned down in his back pocket.

Trellis asked, "Is it okay, Frank, if I go?"

"Yeah, I guess so. But where I can reach you, Trellis."

"I thought maybe I'd drop in downstairs at the movie. I'll check with you later."

Sheila and McConnell went into the kitchen to make some more coffee.

"And this time I'll make it," Kik observed pointedly.

THE sergeant lumbered off downstairs to check on the uniformed policeman posted below.

"You're supposed to be pretty smart, Redpath. What's your slant on this?" McGuire having observed the ceiling for several minutes without finding any help there turned to the private investigator.

"You're in a tough spot," Redpath replied. "Being a Big Ed Galliber man yourself, you've got to watch how you walk. Still and all, the way things have gone, you might gain a bit. There's bound to be a shuffle-up since Big Ed's death."

"Can that," the policeman growled. He went on. "There're too many suspects. That's the trouble. Everybody and anybody could've done these killings. Even you."

"And even you," the private investigator came back cordially. "Tell me, what did you find in Galliber's pockets?"

The homicide man's eyes narrowed. "That's police business."

"Now wait a minute. How did this confession start! I was sitting here dreamily at peace with the world. And you said—what was it you said? Something like I was supposed to be smart and what did I think. You asked me, and when I start to try to help you, you get sore. See, I saw you and the good sergeant take a revolver out of Big Ed's pocket."

Honest Frank flustered up a bit. "Got to be careful about those things, Redpath, you understand. With a man like Galliber, with his pull and connections, you gotta handle these things close to the vest, understand me? That was all there was in his pockets. Well, that and a razor blade."

"A razor blade?"

"Yeah, you know. One of those little sharp-on-one-side ones that come with the safety razors."

"What about the gun, McGuire? Did it lead you anywhere?"

"So help me, it was clean. The boys dusted it off and went over it here a little earlier. Nothin' on it. Not even *his* prints."

"There were two cartridges used," Redpath guessed.

"That's right. You noticed that when we broke it down there?"

"And just naturally it was the gun that killed Mrs. Galliber?"

"Could be. That'll be for ballistics. But, Redpath, why in hell would a man shoot his wife, wipe the gun he shot her with clean of prints, put it in his pocket and wait for the cops to catch him? And why in hell would Big Ed Galliber shoot his wife anyway? And that doesn't tell us who killed him and who killed his kid body-guard!"

"Is that what that sorry youngster was!"

Honest Frank nodded. "Kind of a protégé. Big Ed used to like to get 'em young. Well, I think I'll go downstairs and see if Trellis and Shard are still around."

"Keep prayin', McGuire," the investigator warned. "If somebody skips, you'll have a *real* suspect."

"That holds for you too, Shamus."

McGUIRE ambled out of the room and Redpath decided to join Sheila and Kik in the kitchen. The investigator noticed Sheila was making an effort to be more cheerful. She and Kik hit it off so well, he thought to himself. It was tough luck that they had met under such morbid circumstances. These two should be canoeing on a lake somewhere or riding along a moonlit road in an open car. They looked fresh and young, and in spite of all that had happened, untouched by the sordid chain of events.

Kik opened a cupboard to take out some cake plates and knocked a silver ring to the floor. He picked it up, and Redpath spotted the initials "M. G." on it. Sheila lost most of the color in her face and the smile went away like the sun under a cloud.

Kik saw what he had done and said simply, "I'm sorry, Sheila. It's too bad that you have to be around here right now, reminded of all these things."

Redpath thought so too. Although Sheila had fixed more food, none of them ate very

much, and Kik's joke about had she drugged them again fell flat. Sheila turned to Redpath.

"Do you think the lieutenant would mind if we went downstairs and sat in the movie house a while? We'd stay in the building, of course, but just to be with other people, even if it's just to see a newsreel or one of those awful gangster pictures. Anything's better than waiting around up here!"

Kik enthusiastically seconded her motion. The inter-building phone jangled and McConnell answered. It was Max Shard. He was asking for the lieutenant and then he said, "Oh, never mind. Here he comes."

McConnell broke in, "Mister Shard, can a couple of people get in free to see your movie show if one of them is Miss Bailey?"

He grinned into the phone and hung up. "They're reserving a whole row for us, Sheila. Why don't you come down with us, Boss?"

"I'm not your boss!" expostulated Redpath. "I've told you—"

"Why, I thought you said earlier Kik worked for you, Mister Redpath," Sheila questioned.

THE investigator subsided, defeated. Then Sheila said, "Kik, you know where my room is. Would you mind getting my glasses for me on the dressing table? I can't sit through a movie, much less a gangster picture, without them."

McConnell departed, apparently oblivious of the obvious device to get rid of him.

"Well?" asked Redpath.

She looked at him with those deep blue eyes. You could lose that thing they call male reason in them, the investigator decided, and it was clear Kik McConnell already had.

Sheila spoke. "Mister Redpath, we didn't get along very well in the beginning."

"You didn't like *me*," corrected the detective. "I had no opinion about you, Sheila, except that I don't get terribly attached to girls who slug me with pistol butts!"

"Everything's so mixed up. These people are all so—well, crude. That's what I realized about poor Mary's life. Married to that Ed Galliber! Anyway, Mister Red-

path, you know his type and the crowd of hangers-on that go along with him."

The investigator nodded.

Sheila continued, "I don't think I can trust anybody but you and Kik."

That was it, the investigator thought. The helpless little girl line. That always hangs 'em up by the heels.

"There are so many things I don't understand about this and I've tried so hard to. We said it sort of in joke, but I wish you'd help me—represent me." Sheila looked at him wistfully.

"That's very nice," answered Redpath. "I'm in here slugging now. Sort of habit, like the old fire horse. Tell me, have you got any angles, Sheila?"

"I suspect everybody, and I'm afraid, terribly afraid, Mister Redpath." She put her hand over his.

"Is there anything you haven't told me, Sheila? I mean, is there anything you know that I don't? I came in on this case through the back door, don't forget." (Both literally and figuratively, Redpath thought to himself.)

Sheila thought for a moment. "Well, there was something funny."

"Funny?"

"About that medicine. The drug I put in the coffee. Oh, I know I shouldn't have done that. It was always kept in Mary's medicine cabinet and yet when I went out to the kitchen, there it was big as life on the sink, almost as though someone expected me to use it. Honestly, that's what put the idea in my head. If I hadn't seen it, I'm sure I wouldn't have thought of it, and I knew it was harmless. But who put it there, Mister Redpath? I don't think anybody knew much about it except me, Mary, and Ed."

"By the way, Sheila, you never did tell McGuire the sixty-four dollar question. Just why did you slip those mickys over on us?"

With a characteristic gesture, Sheila tossed her blonde corn-silk hair. Her chin came out and the purple irises of her eyes seemed to withdraw.

"I can't tell you that," she stated flatly.

REDPATH might have pushed the point, but there was no time. The yell came right then, a hoarse agonized male cry, followed by a thump. The investigator

raced out of the kitchen, conscious that the girl was at his heels.

"Kik, where are you!"

The answer was in the now-darkened living room. McConnell was on the floor face down by the big chair Redpath had occupied most of the evening.

"Where are those lights, Sheila!"

She flicked on the wall switch. There was no blood, but already a knob was forming on the back of Kik's head. But he began to come out of it almost as soon as Redpath rolled him over gently onto his back. He didn't look too surprised or hurt when he came to, his head cushioned tenderly in Sheila's lap.

"Get that pleased smirk off your face, Luther, and tell us what happened," Redpath snapped.

"Well, I was heading for Sheila's room to get her glasses and I noticed that somebody had put the lights out in here. Then I heard a noise like somebody tiptoeing in here. I ran in and just as I got to the chair, I bumped into somebody. Honest, it was so dark I couldn't see a thing. I tried to grab him and he slugged me with something."

Kik fingered his head ruefully. "This is a big day for the batters, isn't it, Boss? Then as I went down, I thought I heard someone running for the hall. What in blazes did anyone want in here?"

"Unless that someone was after one of us," Sheila answered somberly.

"You two run along downstairs," Redpath ordered. "Go to the movie and forget your troubles. A head like yours, Luther, ought to get over that bump pretty quickly!"

The lanky youngster hauled himself up. "I guess I can make it. Come on, Sheila, let's go." They went out, Sheila watching him anxiously.

Redpath headed for the house phone and called downstairs. McGuire answered.

"Is the little family all together?" Redpath asked sweetly.

"Shard and me's playin' some gin," McGuire replied. "Getting any big ideas upstairs, Shamus?"

Redpath hung up. It was useless of him to have suspected Shard. The crippled man couldn't possibly have gotten upstairs and down again in that time, anyway. Still, what about the others? There was something sus-

piciously familiar about the sergeant. If Redpath knew this district, the good sergeant might well have seen the inside of jails as well as the outside.

This building was built disconcertingly like a maze though, his thoughts went on. There were, he'd learned from the events and conversations of this evening, innumerable ways in and out of the theater auditorium and onto the upper floors.

Where was Trellis? The detective sat in his same chair by the flower urn and conjured up the unpleasant picture of Sid's face. The man was a killer, he knew, but how many of Big Ed Galliber's followers were just as bad?

HE RAN his fingers over the leather chair absently and his eyes by chance lighted on the side table next to the chair. The urn was old porcelain, its bottom probably porous. There was a wet stain on the mahogany table and suddenly Redpath thought of his earlier escapade. The wetness seeping through onto the table was from the coffee he'd dumped into the vase.

He grabbed the urn and ran into the kitchen, up-ending the vase in the sink. The brown liquid sloshed out, and with it something else. A sodden paper.

He put the urn down so hurriedly he almost cracked it and salvaged the paper quickly from the sink drain. It was torn and ink-blurred, and at the top was clipped a smaller square with a meaningless series of numbers and letters. The note was addressed, "Dear Ed;" the signature was "Your loving Mary."

It was very sentimental, very emotional, the kind of thing people should keep to themselves. But the first line said, "Here is the fifty thousand dollars. I'm glad to let you have it, but, darling, please don't leave me. I'll crawl to you on bended knees, but I love you so, Ed, I couldn't stand—"

The noise had been slight, but the detective looked up quickly. Coming towards him through the kitchen door was the peddler. The investigator's heart leaped with surprise and with anticipation. He recalled the earlier episode. As the deaf-mute came slowly toward him, his hands hanging at the sides of his shabby gray suit, the detective pawed at a kitchen drawer. Opened, it

revealed what he had hoped. Grocer order pads—and pencils. He selected one of each and shoved them at the peddler who'd sunk into a chair.

"Write," he said, almost unaware that he'd spoken.

But even as the peddler took the pencil, Redpath became aware of the other man's heavy breathing—and the frightening color of his face. The deaf-mute clutched the pencil, a spasm shook his body and he collapsed, falling face forward into the investigator's arms, the pencil dropping to the floor.

Only then did Redpath see the rent in the frayed coat back—and the claret stain that had spread through the cloth from shoulder to shoulder.

After satisfying himself that there was no longer even a flutter of pulsebeat, Redpath eased the dead man gently to the floor. The investigator put aside his pity for the peddler, and the surging disappointment that whatever the man had wanted to communicate would now never be known.

Instead, he forced himself to pick up the threads where he had dropped them when the beggar had intruded into the kitchen. The blurred note was still where he'd put it down. With an effort he forgot the pitiful, blood-stained body on the floor and concentrated on the note he'd been reading.

The writing went on in the same vein. Redpath felt a pang of sympathy for Mary Galliber. To be in love with someone like Big Ed! It was pitiful. It was tough for Mary, and it must have been tough for the girl, her sister Sheila, knowing what a heel Big Ed was and also realizing the futility of arguing with such an unreasoning and powerful emotion.

The investigator pushed the note into his pocket. The smaller piece of paper was in different handwriting. It said in pencil, almost obliterated by coffee soakings, "R-A." Underneath that was "7R" and the third line read "L16 in." Redpath glowered at it. He put it in his pocket beside Mary's note and carried the urn back into the living room. Obviously, the puzzle meant something to somebody, but so did the note.

He could see that Sheila would want her sister's note if she knew it had been written. Would desperately want it destroyed.

It was humiliating, but what significance could it have for anyone else? The cryptic code was something else again.

Redpath found his same comfortable chair and slumped into it. He locked his fingers together and waggled them. He told himself, now, I'm going to think. I'm going to put this thing together. It must have a beginning, a middle and an end. It's got to fit.

But nothing did fit. Nothing did happen. Until he saw something else in the room that either he hadn't noticed before or that hadn't been there. For the second time, coffee had done him a favor.

IT WAS the chair almost directly opposite his on the other side of the room. A thinner, more unsubstantial chair than his, with wicker sides and bottom protected by a faded slipcover. He could just make out a telltale brown stain beneath that chair. He was over in a flash and his eyes and fingers told him the rest.

Redpath's own idea of dumping the coffee had not been unique. Someone else had pulled the same trick. Now if he could think— Who had been occupying that chair when Sheila Bailey brought in the coffee tray? Who was in the chair finally when they took their cups from the tray? Suddenly he had it and the pieces began to fall in place.

It made him run for the corridor door and tumble down the stairs leading to the movie theater. Time was precious now, he knew, as the incredible conclusion toted up in his mind. He thundered down the flights and burst through the door into the movie house lobby. Brushing past several startled patrons, Redpath shouldered his way into the office marked "Manager" in gold letters.

Shard and McGuire looked up from their playing cards. Redpath panted against the door and said, "Lieutenant, I want to speak to you a minute."

"What's eating you, Shamus? I'm holding some cards for the first time. Not gonna quit now."

"I can crack this case, Frank, but you've got to help me."

McGuire looked startled despite himself. Shard leaned forward, and breathed, "Really, Redpath?"

"Where's Trellis?" the investigator asked.

The manager answered that question. "He must be somewhere around. I saw him going into the orchestra sometime back."

"What do you want me to do?" Honest Frank queried.

"You got some cops around the outside of this building?"

"Sure."

"Well, none of our little official family is to get out," Redpath ordered. "That includes me, you and the sergeant!"

McGuire guffawed at that. "I know. *We* did it!"

"Do what I tell you, McGuire, or you'll be sorry. We'll all be sorry!"

As he left the office, Redpath saw the policeman getting up reluctantly.

THERE'S nothing but blackness in a movie house when you first go in. You trip over the carpet, bump into people, sit down in a supposedly empty seat . . . and find you're on someone's lap.

Redpath walked the aisles up and down trying to spot the faces he had to find. It would have taken him several extra precious minutes if he hadn't bumped into Kik McConnell hurrying up the aisle.

"Mister Redpath!" said McConnell clutching his arm gratefully.

"Where's Sheila!" hissed the investigator.

"That's it," the red-head answered. "We were sitting together, and all of a sudden she spotted someone in front of us. Didn't say anything. Just squeezed my arm and hopped out of her seat. I started to follow her, but she waved her hand at me like No. But, Mister Redpath, this whoever it was she saw got up too 'cause there were two of them going through that side door over there. First *him* and then she followed!"

"Was it Trellis?" barked the investigator.

"Could've been."

"Come on, boy, we've got no time to lose! When did this happen?"

"Just a few minutes ago. I was going after them myself even though she didn't want me to."

"Be damned, of course she didn't!" the investigator expostulated. "Which door?"

McConnell's long stride led to a cross aisle in the center of the theater. At its end a small door opened into a fire passageway.

Their footsteps echoed hollowly from the steel sides as the fire tube beckoned them back and upward.

"Speed it up, Kik!"

Above their pounding feet, far in the distance, Redpath could hear the droning voice of the newsreel commentator, and then a more intimate and infinitely more horrible sound came to them. A scream, dreadful and heart-stopping as only a man's cry of mortal terror and agony can be.

It died into a gurgling moan until the echoes of even this were lost in the steel caverns. The two men were running now, tearing up steps past fire doors and exit signs. Another set of steps and then McConnell, whose lanky legs had carried him slightly ahead, turned to Redpath, his face ashen.

The detective shouldered past him and stared at the man lying on the floor. There was nothing to do, no pulse-taking or doctor-calling necessary. A mop to sponge up the blood—that would be all.

"Lord," breathed McConnell. "I thought *he* was the one who'd done all this killing, Mister Redpath." And then Kik's eyes, first obsessed by the gaping knife wound through the dead man's throat, fell to Sid Trellis' hand.

The fingers were clenched around the plastic handle of a multi-colored handbag. The initials in a deep red to rival the blood on the floor were "S. B."

IT WAS well after midnight. This time Redpath's eyes were accustomed to the theater gloom. He watched the film, "The Guns Roar Purple" absently as he slouched in his seat, knees up on the chair-back in front of him. It's a good way to fall asleep in a movie. Someone had said, someone who knew, that that was the way Galliber postured at a movie.

The investigator wondered if it had hurt Sid Trellis very much. A blade through the neck severing the jugular and the wind-pipe and some of the spinal cord at one thrust.

Things had broken up for Honest Frank McGuire since the discovery of Sid Trellis' body. He had a city and statewide alarm out for Sheila Bailey. It wasn't only the handbag. The blonde girl was nowhere to be found. Somehow, despite Redpath's pre-

cautions, she'd apparently sneaked out of the building past the uniformed police.

A search had been made of the theater earlier, and while a few night-owl patrons had chattered among themselves curiously, police had canvassed the entire auditorium. Sheila Bailey was not to be found. That was evident.

Shard, in his office, had said over and over, his thin face woeful, "I can't believe it. I can't believe that girl would do such things."

But Honest Frank had roared in triumph. He was off the hook now.

It was then that Redpath had taken out the square of paper with the numbers on it. He held it briefly between his fingers, and then as though embarrassed by McGuire's derisive snort, had put it hurriedly back in his pocket.

"It's some sort of code," the investigator had proclaimed. "I'm going to go into the movie and think about it."

That had all been some time ago. Minutes that could not be spared, because after all, life is a very precarious thing and the more precious if it's one's own.

This was the scene now that Redpath had counted on. The rattle of machine-gun fire and the blasting explosions of gang warfare. The deafening soundtrack seemed to shake the almost empty theater with its vibrations.

It was only because he'd been listening so desperately, so intently for it, that Redpath heard the sound from right behind him, the faint scraping noise of something metal being unscrewed very carefully. The sound stopped and there was a momentary lull in the cinema gang battle.

Redpath was staking his life now on his timing. He concentrated with every fiber on the movie and tensed his muscles. The film sequence progressed, and abruptly the sound behind him returned. As the picture's gangdom guns roared again, Redpath threw himself forward, turned his head sideways with lightning speed as he did so.

In the reflected light from the screen, he saw the blade protruding for six inches through the aperture between the seats. It had been aimed true for where his neck had been. Almost simultaneously, a figure two rows back rose up gigantically. The scuffle was short.

Max Shard without his sword-cane was a poor sniffing thing. They dragged him to the back of the theater into the rest room there, and Redpath took the manager's own blade and held it against his throat.

"I'm not your fictional hero type, Shard. I'd just as soon shove this through your windpipe as sneeze! Tell us where Sheila is and quick!"

Shard spilled it out without hesitation, but Redpath held him at knife-point while Kik McConnell raced upstairs to the film lockers. It was many minutes later when he returned carrying Sheila Bailey with the aid of an usher. The girl was weak from the blow on her head but still conscious. She managed a smile for Redpath, though.

An usher brought men from the District Attorney's office, and a cowed, obsequious Honest Frank McGuire. Shard was led away, an unprepossessing figure of a bent man, looking, as McConnell remarked afterward, no more dangerous than someone who'd tried to rifle the penny gum machine in the lobby.

"IF YOU'RE going to be a detective," Redpath said over a scotch-and-soda to Kik McConnell and Sheila in Louis' Bar and Grill opposite his office, "you've got to learn the trick of explaining things at the end. People always want to know. Some of the story, Sheila, you know; but poor Junior here . . ." he indicated Kik, ". . . well, it broke his heart when Sid Trellis turned up dead."

"Tell us, Mentor," quipped McConnell, "the way they do in the movies. We won't say a word."

"Well, as Honest Frank McGuire kept remarking profoundly, this case had too many suspects. I'm not even sure the police know that Max Shard didn't do the whole job, but he didn't.

"The picture starts with Assemblyman Big Ed Galliber. You folks don't know as much about this district as I do if you don't know that Big Ed loved to gamble. Because of that little hobby though, he threw a good deal of dough around. Sheila, it's not easy to say this, but you know the Assemblyman married your sister simply because she had a little jack."

The blonde girl lowered her eyes. "I know," she murmured.

Redpath explained, "Big Ed got most of it. In fact, all of it with that last fifty thousand, but the real pumpkin was he owed Trellis and owed him plenty. Trellis had been up there threatening around and Mrs. G. knew about it too. Big Ed appealed to her and got the money, but he was having it around that she was fed up with him and planning on getting a divorce. Of course in this country, if a wife divorces you, she doesn't pay you off.

"There'd been plenty of arguments between the two to substantiate Galliber's story. Certainly Sid Trellis didn't know like you did, Sheila, that Mrs. Galliber was nuts about Big Ed and would stick to him through a fifty-year prison term if necessary.

"Shard did know what the score was pretty much and he kept needling Trellis. Trellis was one of these weak-minded apes. Trigger-happy and strictly from jerk. He figured out a cute little stunt whereby he would knock off Mrs. Galliber with Big Ed's gun and plant it back on the Assembledlyman. You see, Big Ed had a monotonous little habit of slipping downstairs into the movie theater and then taking a snooze. Sid's angle was that he wanted to knock off Mrs. G. before any divorce came off. That was the only way he'd collect from Big Ed.

"Shard had let drop that Mary had a will naming her husband as sole beneficiary, and to Sid's fourth-grade mentality, the gunplay was the only solution. It was easy enough to get hold of Galliber's gun—after all, all the boys had access to the building—take care of Mrs. Galliber at such a time as Big Ed was in the movie house watching how the cinema toughies did it, or at least sleeping—that's what he usually did.

"I think Galliber was already dead when Trellis got to him but Sid wouldn't even have noticed. He put the gun, wiped clean of his own prints, in Galliber's pocket, and just for good luck took out a couple of papers he found there. When he got back upstairs and had a chance to examine the notes, he was more confused than ever. Then when the news broke that Galliber had been murdered, Sid didn't know which from what. The first thing was to dump that note "from Mary to Ed," and with it the little square of paper with the numbers

on it. He picked the flower urn, so there's one little matter explained for.

"Oh, but Shard was the smart one. Don't forget, these cookies were fighting for Big Ed's empire. Shard knew Trellis and he figured out just about what Sid would do. Max hated Galliber, because Ed was everything he wasn't, and knocking him off was a little extra pleasure, but a guy like that outsmarts himself. Keep in your minds, kiddies, Max's idea was simply to get rid of Number One, Ed Galliber, and Number Two, Sid Trellis, the big men in the district. That would leave Number Three as boss, and Number Three was none other than M. Shard.

"**N**OW Galliber was no fool. He realized he'd have to put that fifty thousand away against the proverbial rainy day. Everyone knows a man like that's affairs. Shard took care of a lot of Big Ed's finances, and when you're in Big Ed's position, you don't exactly trust anybody. So he conceived the neat idea of stashing the dough away in one of the theater seats. He used the razor blade to open the seat up, tucked the dough away where nobody but a termite would find it and drew himself a little diagram saying such-and-such a row, such-and-such a seat, etcetera.

"Now, we really get cute. The dawn begins to break, even for Trellis. After he's thought it over, he realizes he's been played for a sucker and that the fifty thousand that's owed him is cached away somewhere in the movie house. Shard, because he's just what he looks like, a professional sneak and door-listener with a softer tread than Trellis, knows there's fifty thousand somewhere in the deal, and is looking for it too.

"Mary Galliber's dope bottle stuck out in the kitchen was Max's idea. It was a long shot, but he alone knew how emotionally upset you were, Sheila. He knew by now that Big Ed had got that note from your sister, and he was smart enough to realize that that was the kind of thing you'd want to burn, get rid of. Well, like yours truly, when the coffee came out, he dumped it. The only thing was I guess I didn't act *my* part too well. My eyelids must have twitched, or something like that. Anyway, Shard slugged me to be on the safe side and searched all of us for the fifty grand.

"Of course the gum peddler was an innocent victim. He'd been in the movie—on one of those passes Big Ed gave him. He'd seen Shard do the knife work. After all, a handicapped person like that appreciates kindness, even from a crooked political boss like Galliber. The peddler's problem was to communicate with the law—the *real* law. Deaf-mute or not, he'd been around here long enough to know that everyone was a potential enemy. He tried to tip us off when we were all together upstairs, thinking that in that large a group there'd be somebody on the level. The punk got the scrap of paper he wrote before McGuire chased him. And maybe the youngster digested it. Shard couldn't take a chance on that or on the deaf-mute writing any more notes. He kept sinking deeper into the mire and he had to kill to keep his head out of the muck.

"He knew that young kid with the cannon in his pocket was one of Big Ed's bodyguards. It was a simple thing to give the kid some procaine hydrochloride, and when the rest of us came out of it, the kid's troubles were just beginning.

"Kik, it was Sid Trellis who slugged you. He was trying to get to the flower urn again. Shard, between card games with McGuire, did his best to keep his eye on Trellis, but he figured out a way, Sheila, to get you to take care of Trellis when you were still hot on the trail of that letter of Mary's. You'll remember, the back office opens into a stairwell and that leads up to the projection room. Shard cornered Trellis up there and let him have it. Then he slugged you, Sheila, when you came along following Sid. That was a little afterthought to put your handbag in Sid's hand. Then he took you and shut you up with the Fox Movietone News, or did you say 'Gone With The Wind.'

"**T**HIS looked dandy. McGuire finding Trellis and no Sheila Bailey immediately broadcast the alarm. All the rest of us were out from under the shadow. Shard could devote his entire time now to finding

that fifty thousand dollars and dispose of you later. But when I turned up in his office and flashed Galliber's piece of paper with the row and seat numbers, that bothered him plenty.

"How would I have gotten it if I didn't know something somewhere? With the cops out of the picture, it looked to me like a sure thing Max would come after me. Eliminating people had started to be a habit with him now.

"You'll remember, Kik, you and I made a great show of saying goodbye and good-night and you left. But not before I'd slipped you a note."

"That got me a little bit, Boss," McConnell put in. "Your note said, 'Find me in movie orchestra. Sit behind anyone sitting behind me and keep your eyes open.'"

Redpath took up the story again. "Then I went back into the orchestra. It had come over me all of a sudden that when Galliber was killed, the theater was a little fuller. Not that a third-run house like this is ever packed, but still Shard was smart enough not to want to have any noise.

"Well, I assure you any noise that Galliber would have made or your humble servant would have been drowned out by that gang fight sequence in 'The Guns Roar Purple.' That was what I was betting on, and I'm here now only because I rode the winner."

"It's wonderful," sighed Sheila.

"What do you mean, 'It,'" Redpath snapped, following the direction of her eyes and finding Kik at the other end. "Well, Luther, does this cure you of wanting to be a detective?"

"Cure me! You've just rehired your first assistant, Mister Redpath. Now about salary—"

"You might notice," the investigator interrupted hastily, "that out of all this night of toil and trouble, my good man, we made exactly nothing!"

"Well," reflected McConnell after a moment, "I can do without the pearl-handled revolver. It's just the kind of work I like!"

"Amen," sighed Redpath.



ROBBER'S GOLD

By CLIFF MAXWELL

WITH the weariness of seventy-three years, Jim arose from his frugal meal to give Jennie, the little burro that had been his constant, and only, companion for the past ten years, the biscuits he had left over. This done, he walked to the mountain stream that cut through the little clearing; washed his dishes, then returned to throw an armful of wood on the fire and to

sit on the bunk he had made by the great, cleft rock for an after-supper smoke.

For hours, he and Jennie had trudged over the nearly obliterated mountain trail that once had been the stage road leading into Scalplock, where he was now headed.

When Jim had lived, worked and gambled with the red-shirted miners in Scalplock fifty years ago, that little mining camp was humming with activity and held prom-

ise of becoming one of the richest bonanzas in California. Now, it was a forgotten ghost camp, its only population the creatures of the wild.

Jim had spent so many years prospecting in California that he could close his eyes and picture every pay-hole, ore vein or prospect in the Mother Lode country, Death Valley, the Panamints, the Funeral Range or the ghost camps in the High Sierras. He knew which of them had the most promising dumps and tailings, and the best facilities for working them.

Scalplock had unusually rich tailings and dumps and he would have continued onward for the remaining ten miles that separated him from it had he not been so tired—and this small clearing where he was camped so invitingly restful. Anyway, he was in no hurry. The little ghost camp would be there tomorrow, besides, when a man reaches seventy, he's never in a hurry.

The westering sun was tinting the mountain peaks an old rose-gold, and the lonesome sound of a woodpecker drilling a final hole in the top of a dead tree, merely accentuated the cathedral peace of the mountain solitude. The elfin whistle of a distant quail drifted in melancholy sweetness through the gathering dusk, and a mountain zephyr lazily through the haze-filled canyons whispered stories of a younger California through the needles of the great pines.

The wrinkled, weather-beaten, stoop-shouldered prospector sat on his bunk looking into the dancing flames. He was looking at the pictures they conjured up. Pictures of other days; other times. Pictures of desert wastes and whispering, shifting sands. Pictures of mountain solitudes brooding in timeless peace. Pictures of roistering, bustling mining camps, populated by boisterous miners, gamblers and riff-raff; and pictures of these same camps, now ghost towns, populated by Dame Nature's furred and feathered children. There were pictures of days after he'd made a rich strike; there were others of long periods of poverty, hunger, and hardships following his strikes—what a long, long time ago they had been—what a crazy-quilt pattern in his life had been!

Jennie contentedly cropped the lush grass of the clearing and, in the fast-gathering dusk, rabbits hopped here and there about her trim feet. As night folded the majestic

hills in black satin, a full moon peeped over a peak into the gloom of the canyon below. A bobcat, its eyes two balls of lambent, green flame, drifted, shadow-like across the clearing, and from his perch in the blackness of the surrounding pines, a big, horned owl sent his terrifying "WHOOO WHOOO" booming down the forest aisles—but the old man gazing into the flames was oblivious to it all. He was engrossed in the pictures he was watching.

They swirled and eddied in kaleidoscopic review. Poker games being played for fortunes in gold dust, nuggets and money. Dance halls and their girls; some so alluring that the glamor was as vivid in the flame-pictures as it had been in life, more than fifty years ago. Gun fights, killings, robberies and hold-ups—but, always in the background, the red-shirted, hard-drinking, hard-living, hard-fighting miners. Those were the days! Hard! Uncompromising! No place for weaklings! Each man his own law; each trigger-finger its arbitrator! Yes, *those* were the days!

THE flames cast weird shadows against the black night. The far-away scream of a panther was answered by a ventriloquistic coyote, shrilling its ancient lament to the cold stars. An impudent fox caught a luckless mouse almost at Jim's feet and, after a quizzical look into the weather-beaten face, the fox trotted out of the firelight and into the gloomy shadow, beyond. Old Jim heaved a tired sigh and made ready for bed.

Unstrapping his gun, he placed it in a fold of the coat he used for a pillow; laid several shiny cartridges near the head of his bunk, in case an animal came too close during the night and extra shells would be required, and a moment later, Jim was between the blankets.

For a long time he laid looking up at the stars, listening to the familiar night noises, and thinking of Scalplock and the incidents that had occurred there in the long ago. One in particular occupied his thoughts: the hold-up of the Scalplock stage on the very trail that he and Jennie had now been following.

Jim had been a passenger aboard the stage, which had a consignment of newly minted five-, ten- and twenty-dollar gold pieces aboard, when Long Jake, a notorious

stage robber of that period, and his gang held up the stage just outside of Scalplock and escaped with the gold.

It had been three days later that the Scalplock posse caught up with, and killed four of the robbers and mortally wounded their leader, Long Jake, in a mountain fastness, some miles from the very spot where Old Jim now had his camp.

As Jim lay in his bunk, reviewing the incident, he heard, again, the phantom voice of Long Jake in his mental ears replying to one of the posses's members to tell where he had cached the gold.

"I'll tell ye this," he had replied, glowering at the man who had asked the request, "ef ye ever fin' the gol' ye'll be a hull lot smarter'n I think ye air. Ye kin look fer it till hell freezes over—but—but ye won't—fi—fin' it," he had said, and died.

And, so far as old Jim knew, no one ever had found any trace of it, which, in view of the fact that it could have been cached anywhere within a two hundred square mile radius of Scalplock, was not at all strange. Thinking of it, Jim dropped off to sleep.

HE WAS awakened next morning by the raucous chatter of a blue jay, hopping from one side to the other on the foot of his bunk, scolding the sleeping Jim as he did so.

Jim opened his eyes, grinned at the impudent little fellow, yawned, stretched, and rolled out of his bunk to dress, while the jay continued his sass from the top of the great, cleft rock.

Putting on his shoes, Jim unfolded his coat, strapped on his gun, and reached for the cartridges that he'd placed near the head of his bunk before he'd turned in.

They were gone! He leaned over and looked closer, a bewildered expression on his face which deepened when he picked up a couple of earth-blackened disks that were on the ground where the shells had been. The

blue jay, waxing bolder and more impudent, flew to the ground near Jim, cocked his head saucily, and continued his vituperation.

Jim looked at them closely. Unquestionably, they were five-dollar gold pieces and their date corresponded to the year Long Jake had held up the Scalplock stage.

"Long Jake's loot!" Old Jim whispered. "But where in tarnation is it cached?" he asked himself, while the blue jay hopped around at his feet calling Jim every name in the blue jay language.

Jim looked a moment at the bird, then the bewildered expression left his face and he laughed. "Ye little thief," he said to the ruffled bird, "yore a-tryin' to make me think that *you* know somethin' about this, but ye don't know nothin' about it. I know that you, or yore cousin, th' crow'll steal anything bright thet ye kin carry away, like them cartridges were—but neither of ye stole them ca'tridges. A trade rat wuz th' critter who done it! A trade rat *always* leaves somethin' in trade fer what he takes—you don't, ye little rascal.

"Furthermore," Old Jim continued, "that's his nest right over yonder in th' cleft of that big rock. I'll tear it out an' I'll bet ye that I'll find not only my ca'tridges in it, but also Long Jake's cache."

Suiting action to words, Jim walked over to the nest that had been occupied by untold generations of trade rats; tore it out, and there on the ground under it were his "ca'tridges," and the rotting, buckskin and canvas sacks that held the loot Long Jake had cached there so long ago.

Gathering up what the little burro could carry, he called over to Jennie, enjoying her breakfast of the clearing's sweet grass. "We'll git underway right after breakfus, Jen—but we won't stop at Scalplock. We're a-goin' on in to Frisco'n see what we kin do about acquirin' a little home a-overlookin' th' Bay where we'll spend th' rest of our days."

A rip-roaring novel of the pearling islands

"The Return of Johnny-Be-Blowed"

WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

in our next issue

YOUR BONES IN THE BRUSH

By CADDO CAMERON

Conclusion

IV (continued)

AFTER the ponies were cared for, the Rangers tarried at the spring no longer than necessary to get the thorns out of themselves and bathe their wounds. Following animal trails, they made their way cautiously toward the eastern edge of the thicket. Although they encountered no one, upon several occasions they heard other riders in the brush and twice were forced to take cover while small bands rode past. From what they were able to catch, the reward-hunters were thoroughly disgusted with the way Ferris had handled this roundup. One of his men profanely declared that he was quitting just as soon as he could get back to the ranch and pick up his warbag and saddle his private horse. It was coming dark when the Rangers reached the prairie and from there they rode straight to *Hacienda de Sanchez* for a change of horses.

When at length Badger looked down the slope at ranch headquarters lights, he declared, "What I mean—I'm glad we're here. After the beatin' this little old coyote taken a-fightin' the brush, I've been ashamed to ride him. Felt like I'd ought to get off and walk and let him ride me. Shore want to straddle another pony for a while."

"Me, too," said Blizzard, "but we won't get another pony tonight."

"How come?"

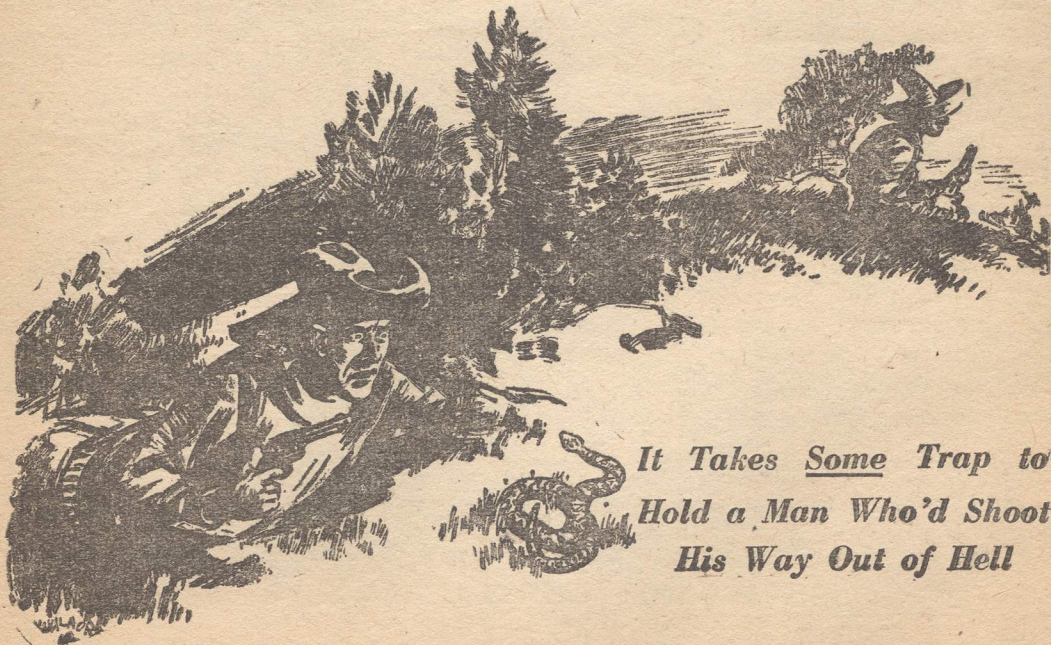
"We'll be forkin' Solomon and Belial."

"Hot damn!" exploded Badger. "D'you mean it?"

"Uh-huh," drawled Blizzard, "'cause we'll be needin' fast horses goin' into and comin' out of Laredo, if we come out."

"We'll come out, all right," prophesied Badger. "After comin' out of that infernal brush we can come out of anything."

After the Rangers had eaten a hasty supper, filled their canteens with coffee, fought off Grandma Sanchez and her remedies,



*It Takes Some Trap to
Hold a Man Who'd Shoot
His Way Out of Hell*

saddled up and were ready to leave, Felipe took them out to the horse trough for a little private talk.

The smiling *Tejano* began, "I'd like to know what all you did to Stony Smith, besides shooting his worst killer—Snake. He doesn't seem to be himself any more."

"Glad to hear that," said Blizzard. "What's Old Stony up to now?"

"You'll be surprised," answered the young *ranchero*. "He's organizing two more companies of Minute Men. I'm to be captain of one—all *Tejanos*. We are to guard the county jail, also the courthouse when court is in session. Stony says he's going to make a lot of arrests and he wants to be sure all of his prisoners get hung, or shot while trying to escape."

"Golly!" said Badger. "This ain't no place for us."

"It's commencin' to look thataway," drawled Blizzard. "But I betcha your sheriff hobbles Old Stony a-plenty before he makes the arrests he's a-fixin' to pull off. From what I heard, the sheriff of this here county is a right clever fella."

Felipe shook his head, smiling, "Our sheriff is going to resign. Stony Smith told him to, then a bunch of local men went and told him the same thing. I was one of them."

Badger snorted, and declared, "Now I *know* this is a damned poor place for us."

"And you ain't talkin'," said Blizzard cheerfully. "So long, Cap'n."

THE stars said it was after eleven o'clock when the Rangers slowed their high-headed horses to a walk and rode into Laredo. They halted under a tree on a dark side street, near its intersection with the main thoroughfare. The little old border town was wide awake tonight, its hitch-racks filled, its sidewalks overflowing, riders going and coming—mostly coming, for eleven o'clock was early. Sitting their saddles there, the Rangers saw and heard enough to warn them that they still were wanted men—more wanted than ever. Presently, they headed for The International. It took time and round-about riding, delayed by frequent halts, to reach the place without attracting attention, but they finally made it and pulled up behind a long shed in the rear.

The card room was lighted, curtains drawn. The Rangers went in through the hall, tried the door to the private room and found it bolted. Badger knocked sharply.

"Who is it?" asked Belle.

"Open up and you'll find out," answered the big sergeant with a chuckle. "Make 'aste!"

They didn't want to be seen here, counted the seconds and watched the hall into the main room until Foxy opened the card room door. . . . Border Belle, Eduardo Hernandez with his arm in a sling—the man who tried to knife Stony Smith, and Old Stony himself!

Without a moment's hesitation, Badger played his part. "Put 'em on the table, Stony, quick!" he barked. "Now keep 'em there!"

Scowling at Belle, he added, "What the devil is he doin' here?"

Belle was flustered. Foxy sheepishly sat down beside her. Stony Smith answered for himself, "Now, don't you go and get ringy. This here boy, Eduardo, caught me outside and said he wanted to talk private and I asked Belle and she said fetch him in here. He's done some talkin', too."

"What about?" snapped Blizzard. "We don't trust you for hell, Smith."

Eduardo Hernandez hastened to speak up. "It is all right, *Senor* Bleezard," he said in excited Spanish. "I would not think of doing a wrong to you who saved my life. I have been telling *Senor* Smeeth how Scott Ferris killed my cousins, Manuel and Benito Torres. They told me that they had met you, *senores*, and liked you very much. They are dead now."

"Yes, Eduardo, we know," said Blizzard kindly. "I saw them killed, Badger saw them buried. We were watching through my telescope."

"You *seen* it!" roared Stony. "Why didn't you do somethin' to stop him? Them Torres brothers was good boys, not more'n half bandit like the balance of us on the border."

Blizzard explained how he happened to witness the murders, going on to say, "If you don't arrest some witnesses from among Scott's hands so's you can hang him for the killin's, I'll say you're a hell of a deputy. Eduardo, here, must know 'em. He can tell you who to pick up."

"I'll just hold *you* as witnesses!" stormed the old man.

"Better not try it," said Blizzard. "We don't testify to hang no man, don't have no truck with the law nohow. We're a-huntin' Ferris. Is he in town tonight?"

Before anyone else had a chance to answer, Border Belle exclaimed, "I'll say he's in town! But, for God's sake, High Pockets, use your head! Stay under cover. Stay here!"

Foxy Reynard started where she left off, "What I mean—fellas, Belle is a-talkin' straight. Don't show yourselves in Laredo tonight. Go upstairs and pray that nobody catches sight of you. I'll take your horses to the livery stable and put 'em up."

And Stony Smith had his say, "I got a better idea. I'll arrest you and slap you in jail and me and my boys will guard you tonight. Got six of 'em with me."

Blizzard grinned down at the old cowman. "You can't do no arrestin' in Laredo. You ain't a deputy in this county."

"County lines don't mean nothin' to me!"

"That's what we heard," said Badger. "Foxy, d'you happen to know whereabouts a fella will be likely to run onto Scott Ferris before midnight?"

The little thief shrugged in a resigned manner. "All right, if you're bound and determined to be cold-jawed I'll tell you where to find him. He's at the Laredo Saloon, the joint you taken apart a while back. Reckon I might as well tip you damned fools off to what's goin' on. The town is chock full of men and a-runnin' over. They been a-driftin' in all day—heard about Scott's big roundup in the brush, knew this was the last chance he'd have to win his bets and make good on all the braggin' he's done. I'll say this, too. Seventy-five percent of the boys are on your side. When some of the reward hunters come a-crawlin' back this evenin' with their ears down and spread the word that you-all had raised the devil out yander in the thicket and got clean away, a whole slew of fellas bought drinks for everybody in sight."

Border Belle laughed. "You tell 'em, Foxy! I bought two rounds for the house before I noticed that we've got one of the biggest crowds we ever had in here. Cost me plenty."

Reynard went on, "We've already had a

lot of fist fights and such over this thing. In fact, Tom Blaney and Ferris would've swapped lead if Tom hadn't been stove up the way he is. Sarna had men in the brush with Ferris again today. When Scott rode into town tonight, Don Maximo was a-waitin' for him and they had one devil of a cuss-fight. Fella told me that it looked for a minute like there'd shore be some blood shed. Sarna went home as mad as a bull in a bog hole."

Foxy took a folded paper out of his pocket and handed it to Blizzard. "Mighty nigh forgot. Here's what you wanted me to find out about Don Maximo."

"What's that?" asked Stony.

"None of your damned business," replied Blizzard. "Go ahead, Foxy, unless that's all you've got to tell us."

"It ain't all," continued Reynard. "What I mean—we're due to have serious trouble over you jaspers. Ferris and the boys that bet against you are tryin' to hedge. Scott allows he'll pay off at midnight, providin' it is proved definite that you-all are alive and within fifty miles of Laredo. You'll recollect that was part of the bet. Ferris won't admit that you didn't get killed in the brush today and he claims that even if you didn't, you had the livers scared out of you and you're a-runnin' like hell now and you'll have plenty time to get more'n fifty mile from town before midnight. That's what Scott Ferris claims. Be-havin' that-away, he's riled a lot of men—some of 'em on his own payroll. I hear most of his hands have quit him cold."

Badger chuckled. "Sounds good."

Blizzard drawled dryly, "Well, folks, we shore don't want to be the cause of any trouble in Laredo. Reckon the only thing for us to do is to go and show ourselves to Scott and his boys and it's gettin' late. What time is it, Belle, please, ma'm?"

Belle's beautiful blond head bent over the watch pinned on her bosom. "Twenty till midnight. And, High Pockets, if you're determined to go, at ten after midnight I'll get tight and shed tears on your corpse."

"Maybe you feel thataway because we owe you money," he said. "How much for all that grub and stuff you sent us? . . . Be still! How much?"

"Twenty dollars, damn your eyes!"

He took out the money and gave it to her.

As they turned to leave, Stony Smith got up and put out his hand. "It won't surprise me much if you get away with this fool play, but the odds are ag'in you. Instead of seein' you get downed by Ferris and his bunch, I'd a heap rather see you get hung by me and my boys. So long and good luck, fellas."

Eduardo Hernandez stepped up to him and Badger. The slender Mexican's thin face showed genuine sorrow and there was a note of pleading in his voice, when he said in Spanish, "I'm only a very small and insignificant Mexican bandit, *Senores*, a nobody, and I have but one arm with which to fight for you, but you must let me go with you. *Please, Senores!*"

Badger laughed to hide his real feelings. He buried his big hand in Eduardo's wavy black hair and mussed it up. "Thanks, boy," he said in Spanish, "but you can do us a big favor by staying here and watching Belle and Foxy for us. We are afraid to turn our backs on them."

Blizzard didn't try to hide his feelings. He squeezed the Mexican's slim hand, and declared seriously, "You may be a bandit, Eduardo, but you are not a nobody. You are a man—a man who appreciates a kindness and tries to pay what he considers his debts. *Adios, Senor Hernandez.*"

The tall Ranger would never forget the look the Mexican gave him.

THEY got back to their horses without being seen, but the moon and stars were fighting for possession of the sky tonight which forced the two riders to hunt shadows on their way to the Laredo Saloon. Neither had much to say. As usual when moving into trouble Badger was keyed up and Blizzard had plenty to think about, since his was the responsibility for what they were about to undertake. He didn't question the wisdom of showing themselves in Laredo before midnight. That was necessary in order again to show the wolves in the pack that their leader was not as deadly as he pretended to be. Some had already deserted him, others were at the point of doing so. Was it, however, necessary to risk their lives by walking into the wolves' den and offering battle to the leader and the remnants of his pack? Blizzard had thought it was and now that the time had

come to do it, he could find no good reason to change his plans.

ALTHOUGH this would be a direct blow at Scott Ferris, if successful, the shock of it would be felt by Sarna and Blaney who had joined him in open war upon the Rangers. As Blizzard viewed the situation now, Tom Blaney had been knocked down and was still on the floor—so to speak, but he was a big man in this border underworld and might be expected to get back on his feet before long and another wallop might help to keep him down until the final roundup gathered him in. Though Sarna wasn't down, he had been hurt. As yet they hadn't gone to work on him in earnest, but the aristocratic *Tejano* had been held up to ridicule and as a consequence had lost much of the fine poise that had earned the fear and respect of lesser men. In proof of this, a common *vaquero* had defied him. The madam of a honkatonk had snapped her pretty fingers at his demands, then had him thrown into the street and made a spectacle of the performance with which to amuse the patrons of her dive.

No foolin', reflected Blizzard while riding along, *Don Maximo is a-straddle of a rough one now, and he has done lost a stirrup and his head is a-snappin'. We're a-swingin' good, so I reckon we'd better keep on a-bittin' harder and faster until somebody gets licked.*

The Laredo Saloon was situated at the end of a dark and narrow street. The Rangers rode in from the rear through scattered brush and trees, carefully taking stock of their surroundings with a view to a quick getaway, and tied their horses behind a clump of tall shrubbery not far from the back door. From the noise they judged the place to be crowded. Three drunks with arms around one another were weaving a difficult course from the outhouse toward the door—one singing incoherently, the others talking or trying to talk. Unseen, the Rangers moved close.

One drunk mumbled, "I . . . hick . . . Ish shore win a hunnerd on them rannies come . . . ugh! . . . midnight."

Another sang, "My Darlin' . . . YeowWW! . . . ClemenTINE!"

Watching the drunks and listening to them Blizzard caught sight of an oppor-

tunity and grabbed onto it. His plans for the moment underwent a complete change.

He spoke into Badger's ear, "Those drunks are crazy enough to do anything. Go and tell 'em that they win their bets on us 'cause we're shore alive and here. Tell 'em to go in and fetch Ferris out to see for himself."

Badger grinned, swaggered over and threw his long arms around all three of the hilarious cowhands. In his booming bass he roared a few bars of a song, laughed, and told them, "Damn it, fellas! You done got a head start on me, but I'll catch up with you before long. You know me, don't you? Shore, you know me! Come midnight my pardner and I will win money for you from Scott Ferris and I'll help you to drink her up. Go in and fetch Old Scott out here and show us to him. You gotta do that to make certain that you win. Go ahead, now!"

The singer broke off in the middle of a wavering note. The three of them looked owlishly at the big Ranger, meantime hanging onto him and one another and weaving on their feet. Pretty soon they recognized him and Blizzard, or pretended to, and the hand-shaking and back-slapping commenced. While it went around and around, Badger continued to remind them that it would soon be midnight and they'd have to go and get Ferris so as to win. At length the idea penetrated the alcoholic haze that engulfed them. Leaving the singer to entertain the Rangers, they went after Ferris.

BLIZZARD stood back where he could look through a rear window without being seen. Scott Ferris and four men were seated at a table about one-third of the way of the front of the saloon and the crowd was milling around them. Shunted here and there like driftwood in a rapids, the two drunks moved toward his table and eventually got there. An argument ensued. It looked as if Scott and his men would brush the drunks off, but they doggedly hung on. The Ranger had almost given up hope, then Ferris and his four companions arose and irritably elbowed their way toward the back door!

Blizzard pulled Badger away from the singer. "Ferris and four men comin'. Beef him cold. If the others make a fight we'll smoke 'em up."

"Hot damn!" growled Badger. "You shore can make a job sound easy."

The Rangers quickly took places close against the wall, one upon either side of the door, each with a six-shooter in his hand. Ten feet away, balanced upon wide-spread legs, the singing drunk howled at the moon. Blizzard blessed him for it. He'd be the first to catch Scott's eye. Small, wiry, quick in every movement, Ferris stepped through the door in the lead, his sharp and wolfish face thrust forward slightly in characteristic fashion. Badger launched a short, vicious blow with his left. Bottled-up rage and hatred exploded in the blow. He struck much harder than necessary to do the job. His huge fist crunched against the little man's jaw as if it aimed to tear his head off. Ferris was flung sprawling three yards away. Two men had blocked the door behind him. They were fast, but cramped for room. Each bobbed his draw. Blasts from the Rangers' six-shooters burned their clothing and hurled them backwards onto the two men behind them. Somebody slammed the door shut.

"Pick him up!" hissed Blizzard. "Run! I'll cover you!"

The burly sergeant handled Scott Ferris as if he were a fifty-pound sack of flour, threw him over a shoulder and ran for the horses. Blizzard backed slowly away, watching the rear door and window. The door remained closed, but a face appeared at the window. He snapped a bullet at the adobe near it and the face vanished in a cloud of dust. The tall Ranger ran to join Badger. A few moments later they sped away through the trees over a route previously decided upon, Scott Ferris' limp body hanging face-downward in front of Badger. Shots burst from the door and windows of the saloon. Bullets fired blindly into the deep shadows of the grove cut leaves and twigs and gnawed at limbs around them, and whined harmlessly away.

Nearing the edge of the timber, Badger laughed grimly and asked, "What'll we do with the cuss? Chunk him into the Rio Grande?"

Blizzard reined in. He listened for a moment. "Plenty talk, but nobody comin' after us. Won't be, either, without Ferris there to lead 'em. He ain't got many real friends left. What we've got to look out for here in town are reward hunters. Won't take long

for 'em to pass the word that we're here. No time to waste. Let's go."

"Where?"

"To The International."

"Damn!" exploded Badger. "Don't you never get enough?"

Realizing that every second counted, the Rangers moved fast now. Holding to dark streets as much as possible, but gambling their lives every inch of the way they rode back to Border Belle's honkatonk and came from the rear onto the vacant lot adjoining it. On the sidewalk a short distance ahead, four men saw them. One said something and made a grab for his holster. The others seized and held him.

"Much obliged, fellas!" boomed Badger. "We'll do as much for you some time."

He swung Belial close to an open window in the main room. Without dismounting, the husky sergeant pitched Scott Ferris feet-foremost into the dance hall!

Their big horses flung dust at Laredo as they hit the southbound trail at a speed which few could equal in a long race. As Blizzard had anticipated, there was no pursuit so far and he had no fear of one. It would be several hours before Ferris himself could take the lead and no one was likely to do it for him. Defeated time and again, ridiculed, he was now the sorely wounded leader of a wolf pack depleted by desertions—the remnant likely to turn upon him.

Badger grinned over at his lanky partner, and wanted to know, "If it's any of my business, where in hell are you takin' me?"

"Sarna's."

"Huh?"

"Yep, Don Maximo Sarna's."

"You *are* a hog for trouble!"

V

DAWN was cracking when Blizzard sighted the landmark toward which they were riding. They swung away from the river road through scrubby sagebrush on an animal trail that eventually took them to a tiny stream and, following it to its source, they discovered a spring near the head of a draw. There were trees and undergrowth for seclusion and good grass for the horses. Jose Terreros had directed them to this place and promised to get here

no later than tonight, so they slept by turns until the middle of the afternoon; then, having collected dry twigs, they chanced a small fire and did a little cooking. After eating, the Rangers sat in the shade of willows, drank hot coffee and talked.

"You don't never tell me nothin'," grumbled Badger, "and that's got to stop. Where are we and what are we doin' here?"

Blizzard fished a gnat from his cup with a finger, grinned, and answered, "We're on the north half of Rancho Sarna—ten thousand acres of Texas and that much more across the river in Mexico. If Jose gets here today, we're a-raidin' Sarna headquarters tonight."

"Suits me, but why?"

The lieutenant emptied his cup and went to rolling a smoke. "As I see it—Tom Blaney is licked. The general has got the stuff we lifted off'n Tom and I betcha there have been a heap of arrests around over the country, crooks that worked with Blaney and will squeal a-plenty when the time comes. Old Tom will go up for a long stretch if somebody doesn't wipe him out before he's tried. Far as Scott Ferris is concerned, we've got enough on him to hang him if our witnesses are rounded up proper and between Stony Smith and the Ranger Company down here, I think they will be. Of course, it ain't no ways likely that Ferris will live to be arrested. If somebody don't get him, somebody else will."

"Yeah, and I hope it's me. I don't like that man."

Blizzard's long, bony face went suddenly serious and a troubled light came into his deep-set eyes. He stroked his mustache thoughtfully, and continued, "Sarna is different, though. Comes right down to it, we ain't got a damned thing on him. He's a sight smarter than the others, too. Foxy Reynard says he's The Polite Bandit, but Foxy can't prove it and wouldn't if he could. Off and on Sarna has been payin' him to keep his mouth shut, but I betcha it didn't amount to much. If it had, Don Maximo would've got somebody to plant Foxy for him."

"Why wouldn't Don Maximo plant Little Foxy himself?"

"'Cause he'd have more sense than to try it," replied Blizzard, obviously thinking of something else. "The note Foxy slipped me

last night says that Sarna's *caporal* swears that Don Maximó stuck up a rich American travelin' in his private carriage from Monterrey to San Tonio, shot him and made off with the whole shebang. It happened last week, between Eagle Pass and Uvalde. The news ain't got around yet because nobody in the outfit got away to spread it. The American's name was John J. Mahoney and he had a big business of some kind in Mexico. Shore wish we could get enough to pin that on Sarna."

The tall Ranger fell silent, staring into space.

"What in hell's the matter with you?" asked Badger. "You look like you'd swallowed a santypeed whole without chawin', or got word that you're due to get hung slow and easy tomorrow mornin' early."

Blizzard gazed bleakly into the embers of their fire. "They say that when you're a-forkin' good luck you're a-ridin' double with bad luck behind you. So far on this job we ain't had nothin' but good luck. Now, I see dust up the trail ahead."

Try as he might, Badger couldn't get his somber partner to enlarge upon the subject and it left him depressed and irritable. That talk about luck was just talk. Blizzard wasn't half as superstitious as most men. He knew that they were riding into something mighty bad, or had good reason to suspect it. At length the big sergeant muttered an oath, stretched on the grass, put his hat over his face and went to sleep.

Awakened by the thud of hoofbeats, he sat up with a six-shooter in his hand. It was long after sundown, but from all appearances Blizzard hadn't moved.

"Somebody comin'," said Badger softly. "Are you sleepin' a-settin' up there with your eyes wide open?"

"I been thinkin' some," replied Blizzard. "That's Pepe and his Faquita mule. I saw him down the draw a piece."

As usual, beyond an exchange of greetings the Indian had nothing to say until after he had cared for his mule and eaten the food that Badger hastily prepared for him. Then, with a cigarette and coffee, he began in Spanish, "I have done everything you asked me to do, my lieutenant. Captain Williams is moving his Ranger Company north, those that are not already up here. They are traveling singly and by ones

and twos as you suggested, and filtering into Laredo and Nuevo Laredo without attracting attention. The captain has heard of you and Badger. He told me that he had no warrants for your arrest and would not attempt to capture you unless you interfered with the work he has to do."

"Bully!" said Badger with a chuckle. "I'd hate to have to shoot up a company of Rangers."

A smile brightened Jose's dark face. "This is a large company now, *Senores*. Fifteen extra men are serving under Captain Williams without pay, there being no money to pay them. He has had enough men to put three in Mexico. As you requested they captured Tony Ruiz and Ralph Brown, the two who were with Scott Ferris on the Diaz raid and afterwards were shot by him in a quarrel over a division of the loot. Unknown to Mexican authorities, the prisoners were brought across the Rio Grande and are now in a Texas jail. The captain said that each had promised to testify against Ferris."

"Fine!" exclaimed Blizzard. "Mighty fine. That Cap'n Williams is a damned good man. Go ahead, Pepe."

The Indian's thin features hardened, his piercing eyes turned toward the south as if they were looking back upon an unpleasant scene. "As you ordered, my lieutenant, I scouted *Hacienda de Sarna* headquarters. What I learned is not good. Day and night guards are posted within half a mile of the house on four sides and six armed men are held at headquarters all the time. A number of Sarna's *vaqueros* have quit and taken their families away from the *hacienda*, but he has brought others from Mexico to replace them and hired a few American outlaws. It will be most dangerous to raid the place, *Senores*, and I shall be greatly disappointed if you do not take me with you when you do it."

Badger scowled at his partner. "Is that why you've been mopin' around here with your ears down? And how in hell did you know that Sarna was ready for us?"

"Figured it out," said Blizzard grimly. "He knows how we work. He has seen how we raided Blaney and Ferris and calc'lated his turn was a-comin'. I knew that if he had a lick of sense he'd do exactly what he has done. Likewise, it stands to reason that

our luck can't hold much longer. Percentages are all against it. We're due to be caught in a big pot with a weak hand."

"Then what d'you aim to do about it?"

Blizzard grinned dryly, and drawled, "Bet 'em like we had 'em."

There followed a long discussion of Sarna's headquarters layout. Jose had been there several times, both before and after he went to work for Ferris, and as a matter of habit and training the observant Indian had overlooked nothing inside or out. He had spent three nights there and learned a lot about the habits of the household. At length the Rangers knew the place well enough to make their way around it in the dark if necessary and Blizzard outlined his plans for the raid in all the detail possible, making such provision as he could for the unexpected things that were bound to happen.

In conclusion, he told the Indian, "Better snare yourself forty winks, Pepe. Chances are that we won't get much sleep tonight."

Jose's white teeth flashed in a quick smile. "Oh, but *Senor*, you do not know my Faquita. She is as light as a feather and one sleeps beautifully while she guards him and carries him to his destination."

"Huh!" snorted Badger. "That there Fanny mule of your'n don't look like no feather bed to me."

RECALLING how late the moon came up last night, Blizzard so timed their departure from the spring as to enable them to finish this job or fail to do so by the light of the stars alone. Each of the Rangers had taken off chaps, spurs and boots and put on moccasins. They rode at an easy gait so as to save their mounts for a possible getaway under fire and, guided by the Indian, kept to cow paths and animal trails through sage that wasn't high or heavy enough to make cover for a man on a horse. Jose led them unerringly to the point northeast of headquarters where he had discovered a guard.

There he signalled to dismount, and said softly, "Some ears are sharp. We should ride no farther. He is hidden in sage on top of a little knoll off that way. I can find it easily. Wait here, *Senores*. With my knife I shall open a trail for us."

Both Badger and Blizzard objected. Said

the lieutenant, "Much obliged, Pepe, but that's a job for you and me. Hold the horses, Badger. You make more noise than a *ladino* bull in the brush."

Although the burly sergeant knew that to be true, he did some cussing on general principles before hunkering down to wait for them.

Stooping and moving rapidly with scarcely a sound, Jose circled south and back so as to approach the guard from the direction of headquarters. Blizzard followed as noiselessly as Jose. It wasn't long before they were able to skylight the knoll and from there they crawled on hands and knees until crawling was no longer safe, then inched their way up the slope like giant snakes. The peaked crown of a sombrero occasionally moved in a clump of sage on the crest of the knoll. The guard was obviously on the alert, but, as Jose had no doubt anticipated, he devoted least attention to the south—the direction in which his headquarters lay. When they were within fifty feet of the man Blizzard gripped the Indian's ankle, stopped him, moved around and ahead of him. The Ranger lay there a few moments resting so as to breathe slowly and silently while creeping closer to the guard.

A stiff breeze out of the south rustled the sage over and around the stalkers as if it were purposely hiding the little sounds they made, and a rabbit who bounced away did it so nonchalantly as not to arouse the suspicions of the man on the knoll.

Behind a bush twenty-five feet from the guard Blizzard halted again. He watched the man's head turn as his gaze slowly and methodically searched the surrounding country from southwest to southeast and back again, and about every third time around the fellow looked to the south behind him. Immediately after his last southward glance Blizzard wormed to within ten feet of him. This affair must be concluded with no noise, since a yell or a shot would undoubtedly warn those awake and on guard at headquarters and spoil everything. Slowly and with the utmost caution, the lean Ranger drew his long legs under him and gathered his muscles to spring at the man. From a bunch of grass beneath a bush, six feet distant came a sound that arose above the rustle of the sage, a sound from which

all others fled—a buzzing, the vicious threat of a rattlesnake!

Blizzard sprang. The guard turned. The tall Ranger's long arm snapped downward, but the Mexican dodged like a panther and the gun barrel missed its mark. A yell burst from his lips and went screeching through the night. He jerked his six-shooter at the instant he cried out. Blizzard knocked it from his hand, but the gun went off before he released it. The roar rolled down the slope and there was shouting and loud talk at headquarters!

All this happened in a matter of seconds. Jose was there with his knife when Blizzard struck again with his six-shooter. The blow went home to the guard's head. He sank without another sound.

"No, Pepe!" snapped the Ranger. "Put away your knife. No need to kill the pore cuss now. The damage is done. We're in for it!"

They had scarcely started away when Badger came tearing through the sage on Belial, leading Solomon and Fanny. "Maybe I make more noise than a bull," he growled, "but you make more racket than an army. What happened?"

Blizzard and Jose swung into their saddles. "Plenty happened," said the lieutenant. "They're comin'. Where's the nearest cover, Pepe?"

"Less than half a mile east there is a little draw that leads down to the Sarna horse pasture."

"Let's go there," said Blizzard. "They can't see us in this light. Hit a lope for a little ways, then a walk so they can't hear us."

"D'you figure to run?" asked Badger.

"Hell, no!" snapped Blizzard. "Our luck has done changed and we're a-settin' in a big jackpot with a busted flush, but we'll bet 'em like we had 'em!"

Presently, they reined down to a walk and listened to the crackle of sage and the pounding of hoofs as a band of horsemen raced up the slope to the knoll. Even Blizzard couldn't see them, though, and the Rangers reached the draw shortly afterwards. There they turned south and rode down to the Sarna pasture. Taking out a section of the rail fence, they struck a fast gait toward headquarters and kept it up until dangerously close to the long low

stable that tied onto a large circular pole corral. Blizzard halted to look the place over.

The various buildings were faintly visible in the darkness and Jose identified them. The line of timber south of the establishment marked an everlasting spring and the course of its branch, which meandered eastward into the horse pasture. A long bunkhouse crouched one hundred yards north of the timber. Its lighted windows made Badger think of hostile eyes that were watching him. He didn't like this waiting. North and west of the bunkhouse fifty yards was the owner's home—one-storied, U-shaped and large, enclosing a huge patio. No telling how many people lived in there. Jose didn't know, but he did know that Maximo Sarna had a suite of three rooms in the southwest corner and one of the *mozas* had told him that she and two others were the only people ever permitted to enter the *patron's* rooms unbidden. North of the house two hundred yards or so, twinkled the lights of *jacals* where *Tejano* and Mexican *vaqueros* lived with their families. The stable and corrals were situated on slightly lower ground east of the house three hundred feet.

Blizzard moved Solomon ahead at a walk. "Come on," he said quietly. "The other fella has seen our raise and called, so we've gotta show our hand."

"Where'll we hide the horses?" inquired Badger. "There's shore to be a million kids outdoors at this time of night and they're bound to spot 'em."

"Been thinkin' some about that," replied Blizzard. "If we can find three empty stalls, we'll take and put 'em in the stable."

"*Senor!*" exclaimed the Indian. "They say that you're a very cautious man. I do not believe it!"

"He's a plumb fool for trouble," rumbled Badger. "I reckon we'll give the nags a fork of Don Maximo's hay and a feed of his corn."

"Good idea."

NEARING headquarters they saw that the place was buzzing with activity. Sounds of children at play came from the Mexican quarter and small, dark figures darted here and there around the lighted *jacals*. Most of the windows in the big

house, also the patio were brightly lighted. Men moved hastily in and out of the place and twice Blizzard thought he recognized Don Maximo standing in the patio. Light from the open door of the bunkhouse fell upon a group of men outside, talking and gesticulating excitedly, while near at hand were horses under saddle with heads erect and ears alert. The tall lieutenant silently cursed the guard on the knoll.

Aloud, he said, "Sarna shore don't aim to get caught nappin'. If there's anything asleep on this place, it's dead."

Halting at the rear wall of the stable, the Rangers listened. All they heard inside was the grinding of horses' teeth. Blizzard got down and walked quickly to the corral gate near the northeast corner of the barn. He was pleased to find that the north end could not be seen from either house or bunkhouse, though it was in plain sight of the Mexican quarter. He went through the corral and into the stable at its end door, encountered no one and found plenty of vacancies. Returning, he got Solomon and motioned his companions to follow. They took three stalls near the large, double doors that faced the rear of the house—the open end of the patio.

Looking around the side of the door, it seemed to Badger that he could reach out and touch the man now walking purposely into the patio, a tall American with two guns tied down on his thighs, and he imagined the men at the bunkhouse were so near he could make out what they were saying. Sweat trickled over his ribs. He tried his six-shooters again to make certain that they were free and easy in their leather. And he cursed himself, thinking, *Damn Old Blizzard! Cold-blooded as a gar-fish. Wish to hell I was thataway.*

Meanwhile, the lieutenant made a quick examination of the stable. At the south end of the row of stalls a door opened into a feed bin and from there another door took him to a long storage, tool and wagon shed. He stepped quickly away from the starlight, deeper into the shadows and in so doing placed his hand on the dashboard of a carriage beside him. Though dry, the paint was new and somewhat tacky. A thought suddenly struck him. He looked the vehicle over as thoroughly as possible in the darkness. Obviously a custom-made carriage, it

was almost a duplicate of the stagecoaches that operated between San Antonio and Mexican cities, though smaller and much more luxuriously finished—a rich and expensive rig. Blizzard recalled that Sarna was riding in an ordinary ambulance when they held him up on the road. After a quick glance outside to make sure that no one was near, he got into the carriage and struck a match which he cautiously shielded with his hands. The plush of the rear seat and the rug on the floor were stained by dark splotches. The tall Ranger's rugged face hardened. He looked more closely. . . . A hole in the back cushion near its top. He probed with his little finger. Could be a bullet hole. Could be the bullet that killed John J. Mahoney!

Blizzard got out of the coach. He thoughtfully brushed his hand over the smooth surface of the new paint that had first aroused his suspicions. If this were the dead man's carriage a coat of paint would disguise it. Of course, a rig like this could be identified through the manufacturer and merchant who sold it and the Ranger wished that he had time to look for name plates and other things that might be useful as evidence. But the men who rode up the knoll might come back at any moment and catch them in the stable.

Hurrying back to Badger and Jose, he asked, "Any excitement?"

"Nope?" answered Badger, "but a ganglin' cuss with all the earmarks of a gunsharp just went into the house through the patio."

"I, too, saw him, *Senor*," said Jose. "He is Henry Sanders, one of the American outlaws that Sarna hired a few days ago. The door he entered leads to Don Maximo's rooms."

"What door was that?" asked Blizzard.

"The one in the southwest corner of the patio. It opens into a short hall."

The tall Ranger frowned over the situation for a moment, then spoke rapidly in Spanish, "Take your rifle and plenty of ammunition, Pepe, leave through the north door and go into the timber on the spring branch south of here. Get where you can see anyone going from the bunkhouse to the house. If you hear a shot or any other excitement at the house, fire through the windows of the bunkhouse and shoot at all who try to leave it. Keep moving for your

own safety and to make them think that more than one man is in the timber. If we are able to finish our work and get back to the stable, we will bring your Faquita and meet you in the timber. Does that sound good?"

"It is good for me, my lieutenant," answered Jose, "but bad for you, very bad. I go now. *Adios, Senores!*"

Badger thought Jose's "Goodbye!" sounded like he meant goodbye. Again the big fellow tried his guns in their holsters.

Standing beside the door with hat low over his forehead and bandanna pulled to his eyes to hide his face, Blizzard watched the house and calculated the odds against them. Two men came from Sarna's door, walked briskly through the patio and down to the bunkhouse. They spoke briefly to the group there, then three mounted and galloped north on the main road which ran in front of the house—off to join the hunt, no doubt. The four men remaining at the bunkhouse went inside and closed the door. A woman crossed the patio. An old man shuffled along under its north porch. A barefooted *Tejano* boy raced between house and stable with four in pursuit. Laughter boomed through the open bunkhouse windows. A ghostly owl floated past the stable door on silent wings.

Blizzard pulled his bandanna down, picked up his rifle and cradled it in the crook of his left arm. He grinned at Badger, and drawled, "Strikes me, boy, that it's time we done a little work to earn our wages. Let's go in and make talk with Don Maximo."

This meant an end to waiting, the beginning of trouble. The big sergeant's muscular face showed a smile that wasn't forced.

He shoved his old hat onto one side of his black and curly head, hitched up his belts, and said, "Let's us go someplace and do somethin' to somebody—don't make no difference where, what or who."

They stepped from the shadowed protection of the stable into the starlight. Walking neither slowly nor rapidly, like men who had business in the house but were not excited about it, the Rangers moved across open ground in plain sight of anyone who cared to look at them. The barefooted boy ran past with the posse on his trail. An old

dog, scarred and stiffened by working stock in the brush, limped over and sniffed at their heels and wagged its tail when Badger spoke to it. Soon the ornamental lanterns in the patio cast yellow light at them. It highlighted the bones in Blizzard's face, deepened the hollows in his cheeks, and it caught the glint of battle in Badger's nimble eyes. The Rangers walked into the patio as if they belonged there. Their moccasins made no sound on the flagstones and as they moved under the south porch, the lanterns tried vainly to reach their faces. Talk and laughter came through open windows near at hand on their left and from across the patio, and more than one face turned their way with no sign of recognition.

NOTWITHSTANDING the stress of the moment, Badger couldn't help thinking of what Blizzard often said, "*In poker or a fight a fool play is likely to pay off, providin' it's foolish enough.*"

This one *ought* to be foolish enough!

Six feet ahead a door swung open. A face suddenly appeared there—bright-eyed, mischievous, powdered, painted and old, surmounted by silky white hair piled high and supporting a massive comb—Dona Sofia, the coquettish lady of the stick-up!

Badger's mind worked so fast he seemed to act by instinct. Sweeping off his hat he bowed low, and said in soft and intimate Spanish, "Dona Sofia, more beautiful than ever! Don Maximo sent for us and cautioned us to come secretly. You will not betray us—no?"

Her large eyes opened wide, and they rolled. "*El Bandido hermoso!*" (The beautiful or handsome bandit). "Never will I betray you! Never! Go to him secretly and return to me secretly—no?"

"Yes, Dona, yes!"

She disappeared, slyly blowing him a kiss as the door closed softly.

A few more steps and the Rangers were at Sarna's door, Badger in the lead. He glanced up at Blizzard, grinned, lifted the hand-wrought iron latch and swung the door open. A short, dark hall lay ahead of them. Light showed beneath the door at its far end. The burly sergeant drew his right-hand Colt. Blizzard cocked his Winchester. A few moments later Badger flung the

second door open and literally sprang across its threshold, Blizzard a yard behind him.

"Stick 'em up!" growled the sergeant. "Reach!"

Seated at a rosewood desk on the left, Maximo Sarna looked into the muzzle of Blizzard's rifle, shocked, amazed, then lifted his aristocratic hands. Across the desk, Henry Sanders' lean and vicious face tightened for an instant, his hard eyes measured Badger, his right hand came up slowly as if with an effort—he drew and fired with his left!

Never a killer by preference, Badger took plenty of time as time is reckoned in such encounters. He shot high and to the left. Sanders slammed back with a smashed shoulder and the shock of a slug that left him numb in his chair. His bullet buried in the floor.

Badger quickly went and took the outlaw's guns and dropped them in a far corner. Afterwards, he removed a short-barreled six-shooter from beneath the blue satin sash that encircled Sarna's waist and a long, thin knife from a scabbard under his shirt. Meanwhile nothing was said. Silence in the large room was broken only by the heavy breathing of the wounded man and sounds coming in through three open windows, each covered by heavy velvet drapes. Blizzard knew that the windows were open, left them that way. He wanted to hear—*had* to hear what was going on outside. Although it might be difficult to locate precisely, the burst of gunfire in here must have been heard all over the place and real trouble was likely to start at any moment.

"Bolt both doors," he told Badger, then to Sarna, "Take 'em down and put 'em on the desk if you're a mind to, but keep 'em in sight."

Don Maximo's face was ashen, his lean body taut as if he were about to spring upon his enemies barehanded. He looked Blizzard up and down scornfully, and said in a brittle voice, "I knew you were a damned, ignorant fool. Now you have proved it to the satisfaction of everyone. Listen!"

Somewhere a door slammed. Men called out, wanting to know who did the shooting and where it came from.

"My men!" snarled Sarna. "You'll never get away from here!"

"Maybe not," said Blizzard coldly, "but we'll hang you while we're here. Badger, hand me that there rope!"

One of the wall decorations was a *reda* of braided black and white horsehair, coiled and hanging from a hook. Badger took it down, shook out a small loop.

"This hanging stuff is just a threat and I know it," said Sarna, "but what d'you want?"

"Go ahead and think it's a bluff," said Blizzard quietly. He cut off a yard of the rope. "Put your hands behind your back. If you holler or make a fight you'll get hurt. I'll beat in your pretty face with the barrel of a six-shooter and hang you anyhow. Then you'll be a hell of a lookin' corpse. Better die pretty. Gimme your hands!"

Somewhere down the spring branch a rifle cracked. Near the house a man cried out!

Badger folded his arms, chuckled, and said, "That rifle was one of *our* men and that squawk was one of *your* men. You didn't think we'd be crazy enough to tackle this here job without plenty help, did you?"

Don Maximo Sarna had courage—no doubt about it, but the shot and the cry of a wounded man hit him mighty hard. Desperately, he jerked his arms while Blizzard was binding his wrists. In a flash the barrel of the tall Ranger's six-shooter whipped out before his eyes to strike. He caught his breath audibly, staggered back away from the steel. A remarkably handsome man, his fear of disfigurement was a natural one, as the crafty Ranger had surmised.

A little more of this and he'll cave in, reflected Blizzard, *if we have time to give him a little more of it.*

Down in the timber Jose's rifle cracked rapidly three times, answered by rifles and six-shooters from the bunkhouse. Sarna's eyes darted helplessly around the room, stopped at Henry Sanders. The outlaw's face was colorless, his lips blue and he was obviously holding himself erect in his chair with an effort, but he smiled scornfully at the rich *Tejano's* fright. Badger saw this. It occurred to him that Sanders knew he had spared his life—shot to wound when it would've been easier and safer to shoot to kill. Maybe the man appreciated it.

"Henry," said the sergeant, "you're a

mess and need a doc bad. Sorry we ain't got one, but throw your good arm across my shoulders and I'll walk you into Dona Sofia's room. She'll take care of you, I betcha."

Blizzard was about to object, then caught himself. Badger was taking one hell of a chance, but using his head. No doubt he'd pass the word through the house that the shooting scrape was between him and Sanders and that Don Maximo was not mixed up in it.

"Good idea," said Blizzard. "Just take care that some fool don't throw down on you when you show yourself out there."

The tall outlaw almost collapsed when he went to stand up. Badger caught him. He grinned painfully, and said, "You're . . . a white man . . . Badger Coe. Sorry I—"

"Forget it," said Badger. "I'm strong for any man with the guts to make a fight when I've got the drop. Take it sorta easy now, fella."

Rifle fire from the timber and bunkhouse continued. Jose was evidently shooting fast enough to deceive the men inside, otherwise they would not permit one man to pin them down that way.

Blizzard finished tying Sarna's hands. Without a word, he dropped the loop over the bandit's head and drew the hair rope snug against the bare skin of his neck. He flinched, turned a shade paler.

"What do you want?" he gasped. "Answer me!"

The tall Ranger ignored the question for a moment, behaved as if he hadn't heard. Standing where Sarna could watch him, he ran his eyes along the rough-hewn ceiling beams, looking for a crack between the planks above them through which he could slip the rope. Notwithstanding the rattle of gunfire outside he appeared to be taking his time, though actually in a desperate hurry. The riders who had gone to hunt for them were bound to hear the shooting and come a-boilin' back to get into the fight. Meanwhile, sweat leaked from every pore in Maximo Sarna's face and neck.

Blizzard found an opening between the planks, slipped the rope end through, pulled it across the beam and took up the slack. Muscles rolled and knotted in Sarna's jaws, leaders and veins in his neck stood out

against the loop that threatened to strangle him. The Ranger's cold, gray eyes were fixed upon him. There wasn't a spark of mercy in them, or a trace of human sympathy in the bony face that harbored them.

Blizzard's voice was low, level and utterly without feeling. "I'll tell you what I want. I want to hang you. I want to hang you slow and watch you kick. I want to get square with you for killin' one of the best friends I ever had. The Polite Bandit shot him in a stickup. I'd never think of tippin' you off to the law, but I'll hang you and hope that Old Billy Carter is where he can watch you kick."

Blizzard had named a man who was killed while riding shotgun on a stage that The Polite Bandit held up a while back, a man he didn't know. Maximo Sarna's eyes again darted furtively about the room. He swallowed once, tried it again, failed.

"I—Listen!" he blurted hoarsely. "Hanging me won't help that dead guard. Revenge can be damned expensive. I hate like hell to do it and I'm ashamed to do it, but I'll buy my life from you. How much?"

Blizzard pretended to think, meanwhile thinking of something else. He scowled down at the man, though his ears were tuned to what was going on outside. He listened to the sporadic bursts of gunfire, wished that Badger would come. Worried about Badger. Lots of things could have happened to the young hellbender. Shouldn't have let him go alone thataway.

Presently, he said harshly, "Maybe you're right. I can't fetch Old Billy back by hanging you. I need money. You done us out of some. We figured to stick up Mahoney. Gimme what you taken off'n him, every last cent of it!"

Sarna's thin face showed a flash of surprise, quickly disguised. "Mahoney? I don't remember a Mahoney. What makes you think that I—"

"I ain't a-thinkin'," rasped Blizzard. "I know. Don't argy!"

The handsome *Tejano's* eyes fixed upon the hair rope close to his face, followed it up and across the beam and down to Blizzard's hands. He lifted and dropped his shoulders in a gesture of surrender.

"Very well, since my man failed me I'm helpless," he said. "Go into the next room. Near the foot of the bed you will see a

leather bag. It was Mahoney's and contains everything I took from him. Let that bag be a lesson to you, my ignorant bandit. An intelligent person hides things by leaving them within reach of everyone."

Blizzard said nothing, had no time to waste on talk. After knotting the rope around the beam he went into the other room. It was lighted. He found the bag, opened it, discovered a bundle of papers and many packages of gold coins. A hasty glance at the papers showed that they belonged to John J. Mahoney. They'd help the law to tie a hangman's knot for Maximo Sarna, provided Blizzard could get away from here alive. He and Badger never uncovered themselves by going into court to testify, consequently this evidence would have to be found in Sarna's possession by known Rangers. Blizzard's searching glance swept the room. On a nearby table stood a bronze bust of a man in armor, perhaps one of Don Maximo's Spanish ancestors, and it proved to have a hollow inside large enough to accommodate the papers. The Ranger put them in there.

In the act of picking up the heavy bag, Blizzard jerked erect. Gunfire from somewhere north of the house! A second later Jose's rifle cracked its defiance from the timber. The riders had returned and opened fire at the flashes on the spring branch. Now, there were Sarna men shooting from out-buildings north of the house in addition to those in the bunkhouse on the south—a hell of a situation! And where was Badger? The tall Ranger strode quickly back to Sarna.

Though his hands were tied and a rope looped around his neck, the proud *Tejano* sat at his desk as if he were a maker of circumstances and master of everything. His voice was savagely triumphant, "You heard what I heard! I see it in your face. You can't possibly escape from here. Since we are trafficking in lives tonight, you may now buy yours from me!"

Blizzard kept silent—listening, thinking. . . . Where was Badger? He'd go and find the big fella. He sat the bag down, picked up his rifle and turned to leave. The outside door in the hall slammed open!

"Git in there or I'll split your skull!"
Badger!

Blizzard jerked open the inner door.

There stood a bulky *Tejano* or Mexican with his hands up and the muzzle of Badger's six-shooter jabbing him in the small of the back.

"Howdy, pardner!" boomed the big Ranger. "Looky what I've got. Says his name is Gregorio Ruiz and claims he's *mayordomo*" (manager or foreman) "of *Hacienda de Sarna*. He led the riders that went out after us. They're back, holed up north of the house. He tried to slip into the patio. I laid for him. He talks mean. Gimme enough rope to hang him."

Blizzard grinned down at his burly young friend. Mighty glad to know that he was all right and, moreover, the presence of a second important captive gave him an idea.

"Any men in the house?" he asked.

"The place is chock full of women and one old man," replied Badger with a wide grin. "They know that everything is hunky-dory in here, 'cause I told 'em so."

SARNA and his manager had exchanged some eloquent glances, but never a word. Nor did they have anything to say when Blizzard cut off rope to bind Ruiz' wrists behind him and a piece to loop around his neck. The Rangers worked fast. Although Jose was still swapping lead with the men outside, one of their blind shots into the timber might find him at any moment, then—disaster. Badger picked up the heavy bag, took the *mayordomo's* neck rope.

Blizzard had things to say to the prisoners. "We're a-walkin' between you to the stable, one of you north and the other south of us. You'd better hope and pray that your men have got sense enough not to shoot at us. Fact is—you'd better holler at 'em not to. If Badger gets hit, I shoot the pair of you and if I'm hit, he does the same. Line out, Sarna!"

It was plain to see that, as far as Don Maximo was concerned, the disgrace of walking out before his own people with hands tied and a rope around his neck was almost as bad as getting hung in the privacy of his rooms. The tall aristocrat's shoulders slumped, his feet dragged as he walked through the patio under the south porch. Blizzard held onto the rope and moved close behind him, rifle in the crook of his left arm. Ruiz came next with Badger driving him in the same fashion. The shooting out-

side had sent the household to cover and all doors and windows were closed now, curtains drawn. Blizzard halted Sarna at the end of the patio.

"Move out there in the light where everybody can see you," he told Don Maximo. "Git along or I'll bat you with a rifle barrel!"

The proud *Tejano* tried to say something, but words wouldn't pass his tight throat. He shuffled from the porch into the open. Patio lights held him up to view. He stood with chin on his breast. Cries of amazement broke from the men on the north, then from those in the bunkhouse. Firing stopped abruptly.

Blizzard told Badger, "Herd your man out there by him. Hang onto the rope, but stand back here where they can't get a good shot at you. Holler at 'em. Tell 'em in Spanish that all we want is to get away from here. Tell 'em that we'll tie their bosses up in the stable and leave 'em there. Tell 'em that if they plug either one of us we'll kill these here fellas and run for it. Tell 'em that."

Badger told them in a rolling voice that carried far.

An American howled back from the north, "What say, Don Maximo? I can shoot their eyes out and never singe a hair on you or Gregorio."

Sarna shook his head, muttered hoarsely, "Let them go. They won't live long enough to boast about what they have done!"

Ruiz relayed Don Maximo's instruction in a big voice. Obviously he was anxious to have the order obeyed, for he shouted first to the north, then to the south and added his own demands that there be no shooting to endanger "the *patron*."

Blizzard figured that the Latins in the two groups would comply with Sarna's instructions, but that American up north—no! Evidently he was a rifleman proud of his skill with his favorite weapon and, like most men, always looking for a chance to show what he could do with it. He would not let this opportunity pass. He'd line his sights on the men who were making a fool out of his boss. If he got 'em he'd be a hero and get talked about. If he didn't—what the hell! Those things raced through the lieutenant's mind during the short time he hesitated there under cover, looking out

into the night so that his eyes would somewhat adjust themselves to darkness.

"You and Ruiz take the south side," he told Badger quietly. "The bunkhouse is in easy six-shooter range. If anybody down there shows his head, let him have it. If Ruiz don't behave, let *him* have it."

Lined up abreast—Sarna on the north, then Blizzard and Badger with Ruiz on his right—they left the patio. Don Maximo was tall, but Blizzard's head towered six inches above him. In an effort to avoid this danger the lieutenant allowed his body to sag and walked with head bent, nevertheless, where he could look past Sarna's face at the out-buildings near the Mexican quarter.

Starting off, he told Don Maximo, "If I have to shoot and you interfere, so help me—I'll mash your head in!"

A short distance north of the out-buildings where the Sarna men were hiding, hung a long line of washing that some woman had not taken in this evening. The three little houses were silhouetted like black blocks against the white of sheets and tablecloths. Their corners were sharply defined perpendicular lines. Should a man show head and shoulder there, he'd make a perfect target on a white background. While moving cautiously toward the stable Blizzard kept a vigilant eye on those silhouettes. Several times he saw heads appear there, none remaining long enough to aim a rifle. In this manner they covered half the distance to the barn—still too far away safely to make a run for it, though.

A head broke the corner line of the middle house. It paused there for a moment, moved out until a head and shoulder were silhouetted on white cloth. Blizzard saw this, but miscalculated the time required for that man to take aim. Also, he momentarily got careless about keeping Sarna between him and those buildings. Three things happened almost at once—a flash of orange fire up there, a bullet burned the top of his right shoulder, the crack of a rifle!

THE tall Ranger snapped his Winchester to his shoulder, aimed across in front of Sarna. Don Maximo jerked back, but made no move to interfere. Blizzard's sights were a blur in the darkness, but he had learned to aim more or less instinctively along the

octagon barrel of his rifle when shooting at night. He fired—again—again, as rapidly as he could. One answering shot blended with his. A bullet kicked up dust twenty feet short and ricocheted so close to Ruiz he ducked. The roar of Badger's six-shooter blanketed the sharp echoes of rifle fire. He had dropped the leather bag and emptied his gun into the three visible bunkhouse windows to keep them down in there.

"Run!" barked Blizzard.

Using their bound hands as an excuse, Sarna and Ruiz tried to hang back so as to expose the Rangers to the fire of their men. Badger growled a threat to stop and strangle the *mayordomo* and Blizzard jerked Don Maximo so hard he almost pitched forward onto his face. They reached the stable door unharmed.

"Here—tie 'em while I make shore that none of them fellas sneaks up on us," said Blizzard. "Get the nags out and tail Faquita to Belial, then come here with your rifle. The bunkhouse can't see the door into the corral, but the other bunch can. You build a fire under 'em while I take the horses out. Don't argy! Make 'aste!"

The big sergeant obeyed orders sullenly, for he knew that, as usual, his partner was taking on the most dangerous part of the job. Utterly subdued now, Sarna sagged against the stall stanchion to which he was anchored and maintained a morose silence. At a nearby stall, Gregorio Ruiz eased his feelings by muttering an occasional oath. Blizzard couldn't watch both bunkhouse and Mexican quarters at once, so he kept an eye on the former since the men up north would have no reason to change their position. . . . Something moved in grass west of the bunkhouse. He fired. A dog yelped. He cursed regretfully. A bunkhouse window exploded orange fire. A bullet gnawed at the adobe wall within a foot of his head and whined away. The sharp report of Jose's rifle came up from the timber, much closer now. A little clump of bushes between the bunkhouse and spring branch erupted fire, evidently a man who had escaped through a west window. The Indian's answering shot came almost instantly.

Durned fool, that Pepe, though Blizzard. Didn't take time to move.

But the bushes made no answer to Pepe.

Badger was at hand with his rifle. "Ready to go, but I don't see why in hell you won't let me take 'em out."

Blizzard grinned, and said dryly, "If they went to shootin' at you, I'm afraid you'd spook and run off with the horses and leave me afoot here." He added seriously, "Ain't no windows in those little houses and the doors face north, so they have to shoot from corners. Get to work now, a-knockin' dust in their faces. I'm on my way!"

Badger really went to work. Although not in a class with Blizzard, he was a better than average rifleman and three heads that were silhouetted at corners of outhouses at least got a dusting. From the side of his eye he saw Blizzard mount Solomon in the stable, pick up Belial's reins, lay flat along the offside of his horse and start for the door. After that, Badger saw nothing but the houses up there and their surroundings. Twice he fired at dark objects on the ground near them—thought he saw movement, imagination maybe; but he couldn't afford to take chances with Blizzard riding into the open that way, leading two so that he could not move fast to get under cover. A head and shoulders suddenly appeared up there. Badger fired four shots as fast as he could work the lever of his Winchester. A rifle blazed at one of the other houses. A bullet jerked the crown of the Ranger's hat, splintered the post above Sarna's head and slammed into the opposite wall. Nicked by a splinter, a horse went to squealing and kicking and others lashed about in their stalls. Badger glanced around . . . Hot damn! Blizzard had gone. Door into the corral was open.

The big Ranger turned to Sarna and Ruiz, and said, "So long, boys. Much obliged for all the fun we've had."

He picked up the heavy bag, shook it, and added, "I promise you, Don Maximo, I'll get tight on one of the twenties in here and wish you were there."

"You'll be drinking in hell before long," snarled Sarna. "From now on I have but one purpose in life. You can guess what that is."

Badger chuckled and ran for the door, lumbering like a bear. He paused there, looked around outside, saw nothing dangerous and sprang for the corral gate. The ripping reports of rifles tore through the

night! Bullets kicked dust at his feet, tugged at his clothing and one almost jerked the money bag from his hand. He realized that the bunch up there had been laying for him, figured what he'd do after covering his partner's escape. He didn't have far to run—a few jumps to the corral gate, turn right outside the fence, jump like hell for cover behind the barn. There sat Blizzard with the horses. Notwithstanding the heavy bag, Badger lit in Belial's saddle on the fly.

"Godamighty!" he gasped. "Longest run I ever made!"

"And the fastest," said Blizzard dryly. "Figure you've got the strength left to ride some?"

"Line out! I can ride you into the ground."

VI

THERE are spiders who weave an elaborate web to which is attached a tiny silken cable that they carry to a hideout beside the web. There they sit and wait, holding onto the cable, secure in the knowledge that when a victim is snared in the web its vibrations will be transmitted to them over the silken cord, rousing them if they are asleep or warning them if their eyes are poor, so that they may dart out and seize their prey. Blizzard had woven his web. He had chosen as a lookout a front corner room on the second floor of Hotel Rio from which he could see the entrance to The Border Cantina and the rear of The International, also the outside stairway leading to the honkatonk's upper floors. Like the spider, he had a cable to warn him. Jose was circulating through town this afternoon and they had arranged a system of signals by which he could communicate with the two Rangers, who were maintaining a constant watch at the windows of their room.

The threads of which the web was woven were many and widely spaced, but all led to a central spiral in which—if the spider had woven well—its victims would be ensnared. Sitting behind an open window and gazing somberly down at the street, Blizzard contemplated his weaving. He found it pretty good, but wished it were better.

Three men strode purposely down the opposite sidewalk: Ranger Captain Wil-

liams, tall, lean and hard; Old Stony Smith, alert, wiry and pugnacious; and Felipe Sanchez, broad, powerful and smiling. These men were foundation lines in the web that Blizzard had woven. The captain had filled Laredo with enlisted Rangers and men temporarily deputized, the latter including Stony Smith and the best of his vigilantes, also Felipe Sanchez and his Minute Men. Felipe was to guard the county jail if and when the Rangers took over. All this was good, reflected Blizzard, and he only hoped that it had been accomplished with the secrecy he had so urgently requested.

His thoughts seized upon Maximo Sarna, as they had so often done of late, for the aristocratic *Tejano* would be hard to snare in the web and hard to hold. Blizzard knew that the adjutant general was running down the men whose names appeared in the papers taken from Sarna in the stickup, also friends and relatives of those whose names carried the red entry, *Muerte*. This investigation should produce valuable evidence. A message would decoy Don Maximo into Laredo today and as soon as he was safely away from the ranch, a squad of Rangers would swoop down upon it to collect the Mahoney papers and carriage and arrest the *caporal* who was wanted elsewhere and might be forced to testify against his chief. Moreover, the attorney general of Texas was sending a special prosecutor who should be capable of blocking the legal trickery by which men like Sarna so often evaded the law. This looked like good weaving to Blizzard, but he couldn't help going over and over the web in search of weak spots.

A big man with his arm in a sling came out of The Border Cantina and walked away—Tom Blaney. One of four loungers in front of the saloon got up and ambled along behind him—no doubt a Ranger. Jose said that Captain Williams had received orders to arrest Blaney in the final roundup, the papers Blizzard had taken from Tom and sent to the adjutant general having resulted in other important arrests at various places in the Southwest. It looked as if Blaney's thieving organization was crumbling and he'd get caught in its collapse. Blizzard could find no fault with this part of the web that he had woven.

The redheaded Ranger tilted back in his chair, lifted his boots to the window sill and

shoved his old hat forward until it almost rested on the high bridge of his nose. He scowled under the hat, for his thoughts had turned to Scott Ferris. He knew that Captain Williams had spirited a couple of witnesses out of Mexico who agreed to tell the story of the Diaz raid and murders, and a little while ago Jose slipped into the room and told him that Old Stony had practically kidnaped three men who were present when the Torres brothers were shot and they would testify to the facts. These arrests were being kept strictly secret. Hanging evidence, plenty of it, if Ferris could be dragged into court. In addition to the other witnesses, Carmelita Castro had been enticed into Laredo today by a tip to the effect that she would find the Diaz jewelry in Border Belle's rooms on the second floor of The International, the stuff having been turned over to Belle for sale. Carmelita would be picked up, too, with the expectation that she'd talk to save her own neck. Scott Ferris was in town with a few men who had remained loyal to him and Captain Williams would arrest him this evening, or try to.

All arrests in Laredo were to be made simultaneously, or as nearly so as possible, otherwise the news would spread so quickly as to enable some of the wanted parties to escape. And so the web had been woven well, mused Blizzard, but was it strong enough to hold a man who'd shoot his way out of hell?

Over by another window, Badger was cleaning and oiling his six-shooters and saying nothing.

The back door of The International opened and Foxy Reynard came out. He looked quickly and slyly to right and left, then walked rapidly away. Blizzard's eyes narrowed, his lean jaw set, for he was thinking of Border Belle. It wasn't pleasant to think about Belle and the web he had woven, because personal charm made of her a likeable woman notwithstanding her sins; but Belle had let herself get tangled in border deviltry to the point where it would be impossible for her to get out if she wanted to, so she'd have to take her medicine.

Blizzard frowned down at the street while thinking how Belle had become snarled in the web. At his suggestion she had hired Bully Baker to put pressure on some voters

for her, and the lieutenant was more than half convinced that Bully was the undercover Ranger whom Captain Williams had sent into this country. Then, there was Stony Smith. Armed with the list that Blizzard gave him, Stony had used illegal but effective methods by which to extract confessions from three county officials, each of whom definitely involved Belle in bribery; also, the old deputy swore that he could pin at least two cases of blackmail onto her. Jose had brought this information to the Rangers at the hotel not long ago. So the weaving was good and Border Belle hopelessly snared in it, all because of Foxy Reynard!

No two ways about it, reflected Blizzard, the sly little man who pretended to be nothing more than a two-bit horsethief was really *the big man* in the border underworld—the master criminal of them all and, given a little more time, he would become a power to reckon with. Border Belle was fronting for him—*the little man with big ideas*.

BEFORE she tossed her blankets into Foxy's wagon, thought Blizzard, Border Belle was merely the madam of a honkatonk—a Harpy who wasn't above rolling a drunk or taking a cut from the small-time thieves and thugs she harbored. Then along came Foxy Reynard. She fell for him and his "ideas," one of which no doubt contemplated making her "Queen of The Border" or something, and when at length she awoke to her danger it was too late. Yes, Belle was awake now—had been for some time, perhaps. She proved it the night she sent Foxy out of the room and propositioned the Rangers to throw in with her—a scheme that, of course, would have involved getting shed of Reynard. While watching her struggle in the web he had woven, worldly wise and tolerant Blizzard Wilson could feel a shade of sympathy for Border Belle without half trying.

But the stern and often ruthless lawman, Lieutenant Wilson, felt no sympathy for Foxy Reynard. The little crook owned almost every quality that Blizzard detested in a man and lacked all the virtues that he admired, except one—courage. Foxy had *that*, regardless of his pretenses to the contrary. Anyone might get something on a dangerous person, but only a man of courage

would make use of it as Foxy had done in so many instances. How had the little thief managed to get away with this and go on living? In Blizzard's opinion there was but one answer to the question—Foxy Reynard himself was the most dangerous man of all and this was known, though never admitted by his victims. Strangely enough, the little thief evidently had no ambition to build a reputation as a killer. In his pursuit of wealth and power he chose smarter and more subtle methods, which enabled him to live more or less peaceably and safely in the masquerade of a harmless and most obliging little man. Badger and Blizzard had played his game in the way he wanted it played—at first unwittingly, afterwards with deliberate care for the purpose of weaving a web in which to entangle him; but today, as they sat in their room awaiting the signal for the final roundup, they couldn't prove a damned thing on Foxy Reynard!

Scowling down at the street, Blizzard cursed under his breath. Meanwhile, he was conscious that Badger now stood well back in the room performing the daily chore of a professional gunfighter—lawman or outlaw. The big Ranger was drawing with right and left hands impartially and snapping his six-shooters on empty shells, drawing from all positions, standing, sitting, whirling, lying on his back, lying on first one side, then the other and face downward, too—a period of the unceasing practice that his job demanded. Blizzard watched the performance for a moment, though he had seen it many times. . . . The big fella was good, all right, mighty good. . . . But just how good was Foxy Reynard? *Nobody knew!*

The latch rattled faintly as someone tried the door. It was bolted. Came a soft knock. Badger rapidly reloaded one of his six-shooters. Blizzard stepped quietly to the wall beside the door and drew his Colt.

He slipped the bolt back. "Come in."

Reynard slithered through as quickly and slyly as a fox, and walked right into the muzzle of Blizzard's six-shooter. His hands went up in a twinkling. "Jeeppers!" he gasped. "That thing might go off!"

"Yep, it might," drawled Blizzard. "You think fast, Foxy, powerful fast. Sorry I throwed down on you. Pull up a chair."

"No time to set!" exclaimed the little

man, his words tromping one another's heels. "Hell of a mess. Town chock full of Rangers and Stony Smith. Maybe they're after you. Maybe they're after Belle! *Maybe they're after me!* What'll we do about it?"

"Better ask yourself that question," said Blizzard dryly. "But I'll betcha a stack of blues that they ain't got nothin' on you."

Foxy brushed a nervous hand across his mouth. "Wel-l, no-o, unless it would be my horse business. But it don't look like they'd send a whole company of Rangers after a little old two-bit horse-trader like me, does it?"

"Huh!" grunted Badger. "They probably never heard of you."

The little thief brightened. "D'you *really* think that? But what about you fellas? Everybody has heard of you."

"Far's we know," replied Blizzard, "the Rangers ain't got no call to come after us. If they do, we'll fight 'em."

Foxy moistened his lips. "That's easy for you to say. You're salty. Wish I was that-away." Looking up from beneath the wide brim of the hat that rode so low on his head, Reynard's keen eyes probed the tall Ranger's face. Afterwards, he turned them on Badger. The big fellow grinned at him. "D'you know somethin'?" said Foxy slowly. "I ain't never been able to figure you jaspers and I'm still a-figurin'. Well, I gotta go. Want to get back to the place and keep Belle sober on account of the Rangers in town. So 'long."

With a hand on the door latch, he looked over his shoulder and added, "Rocky times on the border, boys. Take good care of yourselves."

After the little thief left the room Blizzard opened the door and glanced down the hall to make sure, then declared, "What I mean—yander goes the smartest and poisonest rattler we ever tangled with. I'm afraid of the cuss—just plain afraid of him."

"Me, too," said Badger, "and I ain't talkin'."

Blizzard went and sat by the window again. "Mighty glad to hear you say that. Maybe you won't take fool chances with him. He knows we're lawmen."

"No!"

"Yep, Foxy knows. I could see it in his face."

The big Ranger had stopped in the act

of reloading his left-hand Colt. "Then why does he come in here and just as good as say he's suspicious of us?"

"Because he's infernally smart," replied Blizzard. "He figured it would throw us off."

THE tall Ranger sat by the window while the sun moseyed down the sky trail as if it had all day to get home to the horizon. From time to time Jose passed on the far side of the street. Apparently the web was well designed and properly placed, for the victims were moving into it, the Indian having signalled that Tom Blaney had returned to The Border Cantina, that Scott Ferris was sitting in a poker game there while waiting for Sarna and that Don Maximo's ambulance was now coming into town. The arrests were scheduled to take place about thirty minutes after sundown.

Meanwhile, Badger lay on the bed and tried to sleep. Mostly, though, he gazed at the fly-specked ceiling and wondered how Foxy Reynard would behave behind a gun. Would he draw first with left or right? When drawing would he duck, whirl, stand, crab or crawfish? What was his "tell," the unconscious mannerism by which every gun-fighter signalled the start of his draw? There were lots of things that Badger would like to know about Foxy Reynard.

Shortly before sundown Blizzard saw a woman walk along the path to the rear of The International, stop at the foot of the outside stairway leading to the second floor and look quickly around her, then go cautiously up the steps. He paid no particular attention until a breeze tossed the black lace *mantilla* away from her face . . . Carmelita Castro!

Blizzard got to his feet, picked up his rifle. "Come on! That there Castro woman is a-sneakin' into Belle's stall. Betcha there'll be hell to pay and we need to know who pays it. She figures that Belle's is eatin' supper downstairs now more'n likely, so she's gone to frisk the place for the Diaz stuff."

The Rangers hurried so as to get off the street as quickly as possible. They soon mounted the steps to the second floor of the honkatonk and went into the long, thickly carpeted hall that ran to the door of Belle's rooms in the front part of the building.

When they were less than ten feet away, two muffled pistol shots sounded through the heavy door! Blizzard instantly thought of Carmelita's garter gun. Badger leaped ahead and flung the door open. The Rangers halted at the threshold.

In the middle of the lavishly furnished room stood Border Belle, a double-barreled derringer in her hand, gunsmoke swirling about her and caressing gently her silken blond hair. At her feet lay Carmelita Castro. One hand was flung out and clenched on a stiletto, the other clutched the *mantilla* that had fallen across her breast. A glance showed that the woman was dead. The Rangers went in. Badger closed and bolted the door.

Border Belle lifted her brows in polite surprise, then smiled at them. She captured a lock of hair on her cheek and gracefully restored it to its proper place. Her hand was steady. "The little devil," she said calmly. "The door wasn't bolted. I was standing at the mirror there on the wall beside it. I jumped her, we fought and I got this thing away from her. She pulled that dirk. I shot her. This is a damned good gun for a lady. I'll keep it. . . . Say! What in hell are *you* doing here?"

They didn't have a chance to answer. An anxious hand tried the door, shook it violently, then Foxy called out, "Belle! Oh, Belle! What's goin' on in there?"

Blizzard moved back against the wall, holding his rifle at waist level. Badger unbolted the door and swung it open with his left hand. In his right he held a six-shooter. He wasn't taking chances with Foxy Reynard!

When the door opened suddenly, the little thief didn't move. He stood outside the threshold, a gun in his left hand and hanging at his side. His eyes narrowed slightly, darted from Belle to the dead woman to Blizzard to Badger. Again he thought lightning fast. Up went his empty hand. "Hold 'er, boys!" he blurted. "I'm a-fixin' to holster my six-shooter. Don't drill me when I lift it."

"Go ahead, Foxy," drawled Blizzard. "We ain't never shot a man for puttin' his Colt in its stall."

He came in and Badger closed the door. Border Belle again explained what had happened, concluding, "I asked High

Pockets what they're doing here, but he hasn't answered yet."

Foxy spoke up quickly, "Far's I'm concerned, he don't need to answer. Glad they come, even if they did get here too late."

All-fired smart, thought Blizzard. Aloud, he said, "We saw her a-headin' this way. We knew she's bad, knew how she felt towards Belle, so we got here as quick as we could. That's all."

"And that's a-plenty," said Belle. "Thanks, boys."

Foxy looked hard at each of the Rangers. Blizzard saw momentary doubt flicker far back in the little thief's eyes as if, for an instant, he questioned the accuracy of his conclusions with respect to these men. But the doubt vanished quickly. "Much obliged, fellas," he said quietly. "If the Rangers come to get Belle, will you come to help her?"

"We'll be here, Foxy," answered Blizzard.

THE RANGERS returned to their room as soon as possible. Shortly after they got there, the sun glared back at the turbulent border country with an inflamed eye and hid its face below the Mexican horizon. Blizzard again sat by the window and stared gravely into the street. . . . Had he overlooked anything important? Would the web hold? . . . He had arranged for Jose to signal a few minutes before the final roundup started, a sign which would tell him that everything was clicking smoothly into place, then he and Badger were going to the Border Cantina where Sarna, Blaney and Ferris would be arrested, if there. Blizzard hoped not to take part in the roundup, but wanted to be on the ground if needed. The web *had* to hold. He intended to be there and see that it did.

Presently, the Indian walked leisurely down the far side of the street. Opposite Hotel Rio he lifted a hand to his lean jaw as if to brush away a mosquito. Blizzard got up, stretched and reached for his rifle. Badger arose quickly from a nearby chair. He flexed his big shoulders, took up a notch in his trousers belt and adjusted the holsters that were tied rather low on his thighs. His hands dropped naturally to his six-shooters, slipped them out and back into their leather again.

Afterwards, he reached down and made

a slight change in the way the holsters were tied.

"Ready to go, boy?" asked Blizzard.

"Shore am," answered Badger.

They left the hotel by its rear stairway and walked behind buildings fronting on the street until opposite The Border Cantina on the far side. Blizzard counted five men now sitting on their heels on the saloon's porch. They might or might not be Rangers. He had no way of knowing for certain, but suspected that they were because strong guards before and behind the place were strands in the web he had woven. In all probability Blaney, Ferris and Sarna would know that the law had moved into town, but that should make no particular difference since it was unlikely that any of the three men would attempt to escape or resist arrest. They'd expect to be released on bail immediately, as in the past. Failing this (a remote possibility in their opinions, no doubt), they'd just wait a little while and a bunch of their own kind would come and take them away from the law. What Blizzard devoutly hoped they *didn't* know, was the fact that there were enough lawmen in and near town to hold them in the local jail regardless of whether they were released on bail—hold them until the attorney general's man got here to handle legal twists and trickery.

Figuring that the three big crooks would be in the private room the Rangers quickly crossed the street to the front door of the saloon, which was open. It was much lighter outside than inside and although they could look through the door while approaching the place and see the long bar, they were unable to recognize the men standing there. They stepped onto the porch and walked into a surprise. Down the bar a little ways and looking straight at them, stood Tom Blaney and Maximo Sarna!

From the side of his mouth, Blizzard said, "Sarna is mine. Blaney is a cripple. Look out for Ferris!"

Never taking his eyes from the Rangers, Sarna turned his head slightly and spoke to someone out in the room. *Ferris*, thought Badger. Blizzard sprang to the far side of an open window recessed deep in the thick adobe wall on the right of the door. Two men scrambled out of his way. From there he could see the bar while himself hidden

from the rest of the room. Tall, slender and lithe as a cat, Sarna moved out clear of Blaney. His hand darted from beneath his coat with a six-shooter. Blizzard fired through the window. Sarna slammed back against the bar and his gun exploded into the floor at his feet.

Badger chose this moment of smoke and confusion to pull a six-shooter and leap through the door. His bootheel turned on a broken flagstone. His toe caught the threshold. He plunged headlong into the room! The burly gunfighter's years of incessant practice paid off then. He acted without thinking, for he didn't have time to think. Through swirling gunsmoke, his eyes caught the scene in a flash: an uncrowded room, a few men at the bar and scattered at tables against the walls—several holding guns on their nearest neighbors; and Scott Ferris at a table against the far wall with an overturned chair behind him, standing with feet spread in a partial crouch, black hat low over his eyes, head thrust forward at the end of his thin neck, face gray in the smoke—the wolf-pack leader making his fight.

Evidently Blizzard's shot through the window had caught Ferris by surprise, for he was looking that way when Badger first saw him. The big Ranger fired while falling. To the ear there was no noticeable lapse of time between their shots. The two six-shooters roared as one, but Badger's bullet went home the fractional part of a second before Ferris slipped his hammer. The shock of it may have caused him to over-shoot at a man falling prone to the floor. But Scott Ferris didn't go down. His wolfish face showed no sign of pain. His wiry body displayed the vitality of the *lobo* he resembled in character and appearance. He retreated a step, stumbled over the chair, staggered around it and toppled back against the wall. He stood that way, glaring savagely at the man who shot him. His gun-arm hung straight down at his side. Meanwhile, Badger got to his feet. For five seconds they faced each other across a room in which the bated breathing of men was the largest sound. Then muscles knotted in Scott Ferris' jaw, his lips clamped, he lifted his gun!

Two thoughts flashed into Badger's mind as if they had come to drive him to do the thing that should be done, *He slaughtered*

the Diaz family! He murdered the Torres boys!

Again the big Ranger fired a split second before his antagonist and he almost waited too long. A slug jerked at his vest on a level with his heart and only inches away. And again Scott Ferris didn't go down. His gun-hand dropped, the fingers of his other hand spread and clawed at the wall beside him, and his knees trembled. Again he lifted his six-shooter!

Badger emptied his Colt at the man, shifted to his other and peered through blinding smoke at him. Scott Ferris seemed to be hanging to the wall now as if bullets had nailed him there. He hung that way for a moment, then slowly wilted where he stood.

"God . . . damn . . . you!" he choked out before he fell with his face buried on an arm.

BADGER backed to the door holding a six-shooter on the room. There he paused to take a quick look around. Bully Baker was behind the bar, ostensibly to learn the ropes before taking over for Foxy and Belle, no doubt, but he was now covering Tom Blaney with a sawed-off shotgun.

"Shore thing, Tom," Bully was saying, "I'm a Ranger and you're under arrest a-plenty. Behave yourself and you'll live to get hung."

Tall Captain Williams strode rapidly in from the rear. He grasped the situation in a moment, and said, "Good work, boys, even if somebody did spring the trap sooner than we figured on." He glanced down at Maximo Sarna, sitting on the floor and slumped back against the bar. "What happened to him?"

"He stopped lead, Cap'n!" replied Bully. "Old High Pockets done it with his rifle."

"Get me to a doctor," muttered Don Maximo.

The captain helped him to his feet, opened his shirt and looked at the wound. "You're under arrest, Sarna. I'll get you to a doctor quick. We want you to live to pay the penalty for murder and highway robbery and a lot of other things. We won't let The Polite Bandit die on a saloon floor."

Williams looked across the room at the dead man. "Ain't that Ferris?"

"Shore is, Cap'n," answered Bully. "You

won't have to arrest *him*. Badger Coe done it with his six-shooter."

The tall captain looked at Badger and Badger's gun in the eye. "Much obliged, mister," he said. "You saved us a lot of trouble. Now I'm a-hopin' that you don't cause us none."

"We won't," growled Badger, "if you leave us be."

"I ain't got nothin' against you, big fella. On your way!"

Turning to the others, he called out, "Line 'em up, boys, and comb 'em clean. The Laredo jail is due to have plenty company tonight."

BADGER and Blizzard got away from there in a hurry. They had another job of work to do, the most important of all, and they hated it. The law would take care of Border Belle, but to have Foxy Reynard arrested would be a dumb play. The law couldn't pin anything on him. If tried he'd walk out of court a free man, a bigger little man than ever before in the eyes of the underworld. Blizzard had racked his brain in attempts to weave a web for Foxy and could think of nothing that would hold him. At length he concluded that the only thing to do was to try to run him out of the country. If the little man wouldn't run—well, *he'd have to stay*.

The Rangers walked rapidly, hoping to beat the news to The International. They entered through its back door and stopped near the far end of the passage into the main room. Though too early for the night's activities to commence, the dancehall was brightly lighted and several of the girls were seated at tables with men of all descriptions—some of whom were Rangers, no doubt. Belle and Foxy were standing midway of the long bar, talking with the two bartenders, and watching The Duke at the square grand piano on a slightly elevated platform in the rear of the room. Badger and Blizzard remained where they were, unnoticed for the moment.

Though he rarely got that way, The Duke was half tight and getting tighter. In honor of this, one of his occasional sprees, and in defiance of the heat he wore a black broadcloth cutaway suit fashioned in London, no doubt, a shirt of Irish linen and a cravat from Paris, perhaps. He was just conclud-

ing a classical selection which this audience could not be expected to recognize as music. Border Belle's face was transformed by a tenderness that Badger wouldn't have thought she possessed, her eyes were moist, one beautiful hand knotted into a tight fist on the bar. On the far side of the room a dark-haired girl from Chile touched a handkerchief to her eyes, and applauded vigorously. Tall, slender and distinguished looking, The Duke arose uncertainly to his feet and bowed first to Belle, then to the girl as if these women were royalty and this border dive an Old World concert hall. Afterwards, he brushed back his long yellow hair, sat down at the piano and drank a tumbler of whiskey straight.

A young cowhand galloped into the front door, wide-eyed and breathless. "Listen, folks!" he sang out. "Hell's a-poppin' in Laredo! Badger Coe killed Scott Ferris! Blizzard Wilson shot Sarna! The Rangers are roundin' up everybody—Blaney and Sarna and everybody!"

Excited talk burst out, then The Duke's strong white fingers dead-marched over the keys and a dirge filled the room.

Badger and Blizzard walked into the light. Belle saw them, said something. Foxy whirled to face them. The two bartenders faced them, each with one hand out of sight. Girls and men in the room stopped talking and looked at them. Glasses and cigarettes halted in midair. But The Duke's fingers continued their dead-march over the keys.

The Rangers went straight to Foxy and Belle. Badger wasn't his normal self now. The taste of gunsmoke lingered in his mouth, its acrid smell in his nostrils, and he had just watched a man die at the muzzle of his own six-shooter. In appearance now, he came as close to looking the part of a killer as he ever did. His big face was rock hard and marked by lines that made it years older. His dark eyes had lost their habitual mirth and were shot with the fire of battle. As he walked his large hands brushed his holsters and when he halted he hooked his thumbs in his belt. Blizzard was his usual self, stern and watchful.

Foxy moved out six feet from the bar and Badger stopped facing him. Border Belle remained where she was. Rifle in the crook of his left arm, Blizzard halted facing

her and the two bartenders across the bar abreast of her. The four exchanged greetings that were somewhat cold. While this was going on the tall Ranger casually took out his six-shooter as if it were a handkerchief, lifted his gun-hand onto the bar and let it lie carelessly there. The bartenders were looking into the muzzle of his Colt! Undoubtedly a fast move would have touched off a fight, for the barmen evidently had their orders from Reynard, but the leisurely way in which Blizzard pulled the trick caught them flat-footed. The silence of the room was now broken only by The Duke's funeral music.

Looking Reynard in the eye, Badger said harshly, "We done made up our minds to throw in with Belle. There ain't room for four in this outfit, Foxy. When we come in, you go out!"

Border Belle's hand leaped to her throat, sank to her bosom.

"Careful, Belle!" warned Blizzard. "Just leave that little gun be, wherever it is."

Her hand dropped to her side. She breathed an oath at him.

Foxy Reynard now showed the real stuff of which he was made. No longer the sly and timid fox that he had been, the little man's sharp face evidenced neither fear nor desperation and in no other respect did he have the look of a man with his back to the wall. He folded his arms and regarded the Rangers for a moment, alert, confident and thoughtful. If the man realized that he now faced Eternity, he didn't let on. Instead, he behaved as if he were master of the situation and all persons and things related to it.

With apparent contempt for the danger confronting him, he turned his head and arrogantly barked at The Duke, "Hey, you damned bar-fly! Stop that infernal graveyard music or I'll—!"

The room quaked beneath the blast of gunfire!

Badger and Reynard were engulfed by smoke.

No one could have seen them draw. They moved too fast. The little man was hurled backwards. Smoke clung to him—clung

to his hair and clothing, and gave to his thin face an ashen look. He dropped his six-shooter. He died on his feet and fell there.

The Duke's fingers danced over the keys in a rollicking hoedown, *The Devil's Dream*.

Badger glanced curiously down at a hole in the leg of his bullhide chaps—a clean miss, but mighty close. The two bartenders had their hands in sight now.

Border Belle gracefully waved a handkerchief before her face to blow the smoke away. She looked down at Foxy Reynard, coughed, and said, "You damned idiot! That trick you tried to pull on Badger was just *another* idea gone wrong."

Turning quickly to Blizzard, she smiled and put out her hand. "You win, Ranger! Let's go!"

"Belle, you ain't figured us right," said Blizzard quickly and loud enough to be heard distinctly. "It ain't our job to—"

"You're right, stranger," said a man at a nearby table. He got up, remarking, "That's *my* job, Belle. I'm Sergeant Robertson of the Texas Rangers and you're under arrest."

The music stopped. The Duke arose and stood very tall and straight with one hand resting on the piano. "Oh, I say, Officer!" he called. "Take me along when you leave, will you?"

The sergeant looked at him. "What in hell do I want with you?"

The Duke glanced down, then proudly lifted his head and declared in a clear voice, "At one time I had the honor to be that lady's husband. She left me. I searched the world and found her here. I want to go with her now."

The Rangers went back to the hotel. Neither had a word to say until they got to their room.

There, Badger took off his gun-belts and threw them onto the bed. "Ain't this one hell of a country?"

"Yes, it is," agreed Blizzard, "but today you've done a lot to make it a better country."

*Some People Are Content to Work Two Days a Week
and Live the Other Five*



THE BIG ROSE PEARL

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

N EWS of a big pearl was whispered down the Upper Mississippi, up the Ohio, and down over the Jumping Off Place below the Forks. No two of the rumors were alike. The first I knew about it, Store-boat Young asked me about it. He claimed he'd heard customers talking about it up opposite Cave-in-the-Rock. He didn't

pay any attention to it, because the word was the pearl came down the Tennessee, and every one knows the Big Bend river pearls are all cloudy, not much account, and the shells were not worth tonging up. Little chaps shoot marble taws as big as musket balls up those shoals.

Young was junking copper up the Ohio, and when he took on a jag up the Cumber-

land, the men selling asked him if it was true about a big pearl shape that came down from Caney Fork. They didn't know the color, but it was said to be clear and deep. Some one had said he heard it was a ball shape. Of course, river people were all interested.

Two women dropping out of the Illinois river heard the rumor up near the Fox river. I got the word about them from Whiskey Williams.

He stopped in at my boat, with a gallon, one of the women, Kid Carousel, said the pearl was rose color, but she didn't know if it was as large as some claimed it was. Kid said a scouter in a trunk-cabin gasoline cruiser knew all about it, but he clammed up if any one asked him questions.

Of course, lots of stories about big pearls rumor up and down the rivers. Every one who heard the word thought maybe luck would give him a whack at it. Sensible people knew better than to expect a whack at a genuine pearl of price, spending any time on it. The rose pearl was famous before any one actually saw it, except where it was fished up. The story it was big as a hickory nut was ridiculous. That would be five times as big as any pearls actually are.

This pearl story began to pester me. Fishermen, post lightkeepers, basket weavers, and even whiskey-runners talked about "that big rose pearl." A man gets sick of hearing all that aggravating talk. Take me, for example. I was contented, working two days a week and living five days, being comfortable. I'm specializing; I play the prime seasons; fishing, frogging, medicinal roots, herbs and saps; I know I could get \$1,000 if I'd fish all the year; I catch \$500 work in two months, and let the other fellow work his fool head off getting \$500 in ten months. My system is to work when working pays most.

The way I managed I made better than \$1,500 a year; and that was my poorest season; \$500 was all I spent, living. The surpluses I laid aside. Thataway I had a good stake—I never bothered to count it; I just knowed I had plenty laid away.

Then the word was that Maiden Lane, Broadway, The Loop, Hollywood and all those places was trying to find this rose pearl, as is. Nobody believed the \$100,000

the first time it was told around. But presently, it was declared positively that this rose pearl was a hundred thousand dollar proposition. That would be \$1,000 a grain—a hundred grains!

That pearl made my regular living look puny—sickly—kind of starvation pickings. Everybody was talking big money—a hundred grand—and the word got around that the pearl had been seen. It sounded like a lie. At the same time, it was disgusting, thinking of anybody having a pearl worth \$100,000 just to decorate his woman, wife or sweetheart! Well, I knew a girl that would make a pearl like that look reasonable.

I GOT to thinking how Lor-Bet would look, wearing that rose pearl, and the smile on her face, looking at me for giving her that pretty. I wasn't serious; I reckoned the rumor was just talk, but I knew it could be true. I was provoked because a pearl of that price made my ornery shantyboat living look cheap.

Anyone in his senses would know that talk would die down after a while and it'd be remembered only like a red moon, a bad wind, or a mean murder. Instead, the talk continued. Somebody had found a whopping big pearl; the darned fool had talked, shown it; his name was Durham Ringo, from Texas he claimed, by way of Arizona. Texas men are good to leave alone, but somebody hit this Ringo on the head and found that big pearl in a small brass cap box.

Whoever did the meanness lit out. He stole a pot-bellied outboard skiff; the skiff belonged to Skip Culland. I knew Skip, personally. I knew Skip's temper; it was bad. He lit out after that skiff and sent word ahead describing it. I got a card from him, myself—the skiff was 16 foot long, 48 inches wide, made out of one strip of plywood, moulded up and straight-sided, almost a canoe model. It had brass cleats, cane-pole staples for a tarp-hood, and Skip's name on the underside of the stern thwart—a lot of triflings like that.

I was looking out, but when the skiff got down to me it had changed hands three times—the last time into the possession of a real innocent, nervy girl the name of Jennie Murrell. She'd caught the boat above Buf-

falo Island. It had a dead man in it—he wasn't the one who had the pearl, but he was mistook for the skiff thief. Miss Murrell notified the coroner along there, and they gave her the boat as a reward for public spirit.

So I got Skip's boat back for him, trading it in for a clinker built boat I'd drifted. Skip was coming down looking, and I had his skiff for him. Skip had seen the pearl; Ringo had showed it to him confidentially; for once, talking rumors hadn't exaggerated.

"You know, Hendrick, I was worried for fear I'd knock Ringo over myself!" Skip told me. "Course, now, I'd kill that pirate in a minute, if I'd the luck to locate him."

Skip paid me the price of the skiff I'd given Miss Murrell. I thought the fellow killed in the boat might have had the pearl; the dead man had been thoroughly investigated, and come to find out the pirate had traded Skip's skiff for a rag-shack 20-foot planed board scow. The newspapers printed that news and everybody along the rivers watched for the rag-shack, but nobody saw it, though a perfectly innocent river rat had been shot and taken up the bank by some ignorant trippers who heard there was ten thousand dollars reward out for whoever got the rag-shack pearl killer. The wounded river rat was doctored and the two captors went up for six months, for careless attempted homicide.

The way that pearl stirred things was real comical. Down at Mendova, two shanty-boaters at the Mud Bar got to arguing what they'd do if they had the luck to get that pearl thief. They disputed about whether they should whack up even on the pearl or go one-third and two-thirds. So they had a fight and one was killed and the other farmed out in the prison camp.

SOME of us had a pretty good idea how the pearl-killer looked and who he was. The shelling and pearling was up in a swamp creek and pond, through what river people call the Four-Way waters. In the spring overflows fishermen made big money up the Four-Ways. But the mosquitoes got awful bad summers, and nobody had ever thought to drag the bottom to see if there were any shellbeds. Then two real shellers went back in there, being acclimated as re-

gards gallinippers, and shipped a hundred tons of shells which was sure money, the way shells for buttons were.

The shellbuyer notified some other shellers and there was an excitement. The beds were scraped, tonged, drug and forked clean. And then Durham Ringo just happened to rake up a big cripple shell that growed close to a sunk snag where everybody else had missed it. And about the last of the excitement was Ringo getting killed for a 100-grain rose pearl.

IF NOBODY had seen it; if Ringo hadn't talked; the killer might have got away with that pearl of price. As it was, he had to worry because every buyer, sheller, river rat was looking for him. Some just wanted to buy that pearl, or kill him for it. I don't reckon a man could tote around anything more dangerous than a big, pure, perfect pearl, unless it would be cash-money.

The big rose pearl had a bad name by this time. Any one who handled it was likely to get took for receiving stolen property. If a man had the pearl, too, he'd have to make up a good alibi to prove he hadn't knocked off Durham Ringo. Many a man down Old Mississip' has been picked up for something he didn't do by people who get a notion and kill somebody by mistake, or hoping they got the right one.

Of course, the pearl belonged, now, to anyone who could get hold of it. Hard luck followed it down the line. It was all a man's life was worth to be suspected of having come into possession of the slug. It was "Button-button, who's got the button!" the way things were. The word was that different ones had the reputation of getting hold of the big rose. I heard, myself, that Buck Soug, Hank the Drifter, Jug Podlum, a fellow from Kentucky and two or three different women probably had that biggest pearl since the Green Sachem was picked up.

All those stories made me nervous, because it just showed if his luck ran that way anyone might get that pearl. The first stories located the pearl above the Jump-Off, through the Four-Way waters country where it had been first reported. Then rumors came closer down to the Lower River and one day the junk boat *Copper Chief* went by. This boat had the name of never handling

anything but copper, brass and fancy metals. Burd Kelton was the junker, though he was called Brass, kind of a nickname. He stopped in by me at Helena Bar, where he talked about buried treasure in back on Crowley's Ridge.

I didn't know he was suspected of having the Big Rose, as it was named, but word came up by a night-runner from Arkansas Our Mouth, that somebody killed Brass, for luck. A funny thing; Brass didn't have the pearl, but whoever done the meanness was reported to have found two 25-pound fine-shot bags full of gold that the junker had found cached along down, and profits he'd made, handling busted up stilleries and heavy brass, such things.

Sure did give me a funny feeling, hearing that there I'd had fifty pounds of gold right in the same eddy with me and nothing but a little old scoundrel, puny and getting real old, having it. I made up my mind then I'd keep better tabs and watch on these old trippers, drifters, traders and such characters that have so much more than any one would think.

Fellows like that drop dead, or fall overboard, and have such fatal accidents. Then what they got belongs to the first one finding it. There was Old Dr. Patti, root, herbs and medicine man—they say he not only had money cached all over his boat, but he owned five or ten houses in river towns up the bank. And no relations!

I WAS keeping a close watch of whoever I dropped down. It stood to reason that if an ornery river man had a pearl as valuable as the Big Rose, no matter how he hid it, he'd look like he had \$100,000 or however much that pearl was worth. About every so often somebody would roll up on a sandbar in a falling river or float into an eddy, around and around, and come to find out if they had fallen in and drowned or got thrown in, or killed up, the rumor was spread all over that they'd been killed for that plaguey pearl!

Why, it goes so that lots of people tripping down or living between the levees here and there just hoped they'd never see that pearl or have anything to do with it. In the first place, even if it was worth \$100,000, it couldn't be sold outside of Chicago or

RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured," and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write:

Cluthe Sons, Dept. 39, Bloomfield, New Jersey



DO YOU WANT TO

STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redcmer. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men. Caution: Use only as directed.

30 Years in Business
THE NEWELL COMPANY
 600 Clayton, Sta., St. Louis 5, Mo.

FREE BOOK


DRUNKENNESS



Ruins health, happiness and prosperity. Treat it in your home with ALCONOX—helps bring relief quickly, easily, inexpensively—in a few days—with or without drinker's knowledge! Treatment does not interfere with the social or working life of the drinker. **NO BOOKS TO READ.** ALCONOX is a **READY-TO-USE, PREPARED FORMULA**, and is the only low-priced method sold under a **MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE**. Doctors indorse the treatment and find it very efficient. **ONE HAPPY USER WRITES:** "Please SEND ME ANOTHER WONDERFUL TREATMENT AT ONCE FOR A FRIEND WHO IS A VERY HEAVY DRINKER. I BOUGHT FROM YOU BEFORE AND HAD WONDERFUL RESULTS ON ALL WHOM I BOUGHT FOR." SEND NO MONEY—JUST YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS—then pay postman \$5.00 plus a few cents C.O.D. charges. (If you want to save C.O.D. charges send \$5.00 with your order.) Treatment and instructions sent in plain wrapper.

HEALTH-AIDS RESEARCH

P. O. Box 724, Dept. P-1 CHICAGO 90, ILLINOIS
 You Will Bless the Day You Answered This Advertisement



RHEUMATISM

ARTHRITIS-NEURITIS-SCIATICA
 If you suffer the agonizing pains of these diseases when the usual remedies have failed, learn about a new trustworthy, modern, non-surgical treatment method. This marvelous treatment is completely explained in the Ball Clinic's FREE Book. Write today. No obligation.
BALL CLINIC Dept. 66 Excelsior Springs, Mo.

ACCOUNTANT

BECOME AN EXPERT

Executive Accountants and C. P. A.'s earn \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. We train you thoroly at home in spare time for C. P. A.'s examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C. P. A.'s. Placement counsel and help. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays."
LASALLE Extension University, 417 So. Dearborn St.
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 475-N Chicago 5, Ill.

HOME-STUDY BRINGS BIGGER PAY

Don't be caught napping when Opportunity knocks. Prepare for advancement and more money by training *now* for the job ahead. *Free 48-Page Books Tell How.* Write for the book on the business field you like—or mail us this ad with your name and address in the margin. *Now*, please.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Accountancy | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Law—Degree of LL.B. | <input type="checkbox"/> Expert Bookkeeping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> C.P.A. Coaching |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stenotypy (Machine Shorthand) | |

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
A Correspondence Institution
Dept. 475-R, 417 So. Dearborn St. Chicago 5, Ill.

REFRIGERATION and AIR CONDITIONING

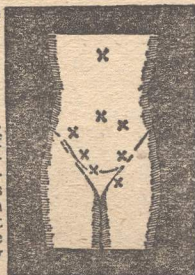
REFRIGERATION
TRAINING
Since 1927



MECHANICAL units everywhere need servicing. Soon new units will require installation service. You can be ready with reliable pay-knowledge of this big income field. Unique home study-plus actual practice plan prepares you to enter servicing or installing field or get into business of your own. Great opportunities now and later. Get facts FREE. Write today!

UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE
Dept. E-11, 2525 Sheffield Ave., Chicago 14, Ill.

Is Your Rupture HERE?



Why continue to suffer with an uncomfortable truss if we can help you? Relief GUARANTEED or it costs you nothing. Send for the facts about my perfected truss invention—the Brooks Appliance for reducible rupture—with the patented AIR-CUSHION support that works silently with Nature to give protection. Thousands bought by doctors.

Sent on Trial—Made-to-measure, individual fitting for man, woman or child. Low-priced, sanitary, durable. No obnoxious springs or hard pads; no metal girde to rust. Light weight, neat and comfortable. Not sold through stores or agents—beware of imitations. Write today for full information sent free in plain sealed envelope.

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO. 152 State St. Marshall, Mich.

BUY MORE SAVINGS BONDS

New York for anything but a low-down fence price. Pearl buyers would be leary of it. A lot of hocus-pocus would have to be done to make it respectable.

Rumors of the big pearl reached the ears of waterfront reporters and pieces were printed in the papers in river news items, but of course nobody actually believed up the bank there was any such pearl. Skip Culland, when he got his plywood canoe-model skiff back, went hunting up and down, hoping he'd find that fellow who had the pearl, and trusting to himself being able to get a whack out of the selling of it.

That skiff had kind of a splash deck over the bow, and a seat thwart with a back frame to lean against it. Skip got an outboard, one of them air cooled so it wouldn't clog up with river water mud. When he come by my boat, where I was frogging and turtling, he'd take me up or down to the nearest whiskey-boat and we'd have a taste and get a jug, friendly and happy as could be.

One night we was coming back to my boat from a dance we'd had on the *Belle of the Bends*, feeling real cherrupy and probably the most perfectly contented, friendly river men below Ft. Benton, St. Paul and Pittsburgh. The only thing we had on our minds, that darned pearl, was practically eliminated for the time being. We was bucking the down-current and I let Skip run his outboard while I stretched out lengthwise on the bow thwart, reaching around.

And it was after daybreak when I saw something up under that bow deck—a yellow, shiny look. I reached and pulled loose a brass round old-fashioned cartridge cap box and I worked on the cover which stuck, some, being corroded or something. I sat up and started to whack the cover on the gunwale, and then Skip saw it.

Skip was terrible tempered, quick witted and impulsive. He knew what I'd found and that probably I'd claimed findings is keepings! And anyhow, there we were in the middle of the Mississippi, so he pulled his gun. As I said, Old Mississipp' is queer, mean and despicable. Skip's a good shot, usually, using either hand.

Now he was nervy, the outboard was

shaking us up, and we was both of us trembly, after dancing and drinking all night.

Skip intended to get rid of me and have that pearl all for himself, but when he shot, he lined up with that brass box, hitting it plumb center, the way I was holding it, in my thumb and finger.

The hole in the box leaked a pulverized reddish-white dust—and it had been packed in silk-weed pod. Skip was all ready to shoot again, but he seen what he had done and it made him positively sick. I got the cover off that box, and there was the layer-scales off that pearl, like onion peels, and one complete ring around, the way the bullet had pulverized the inside, but left the outside in a circle.

Skip and me looked at each other. We had about made up our minds somebody had took that pearl off the river. Instead, whoever killed Ringo and stole Skip's plywood skiff in the first place had hid the Big Rose up under the deck. All those stories about the pearl changing hands, all the killings, all the bragging and hunting had been just talk. But it ruined me; I'd never be contented again; Skip, too.

All I had to know about the pearl was now just dust and the scales. Skip shook his head. All he had was the memory—and what he'd done to it! We made up our minds never to say nothing about it, till one or the other was dead. That was another comicality.

Skip was shot down the river in that same plywood skiff. He floated into Crow's Roost or one of them islands. He was dead. His pockets were inside out—and whoever done that meanness had sawed out that bow deck, and there was the wire-frame that had held the brass cap box.

Now didn't that show somebody suspicioned where that pearl was cached? Personally, all I know is what I've told—now that Skip is dead. But I don't suppose the search for the Big Rose Pearl will ever stop, there've been so many lies told about it.

Free for Asthma During Winter

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restless 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

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO.
785-B Frontier Bldg., 463 Niagara Street
Buffalo 1, New York

Stop Getting Up Nights TRY THIS FREE

If you get up many times at night due to Irritation of Bladder or Urinary Tract, and have never used PALMO TABLETS we want you to try them at our risk. We will send you a full-size package from which you are to use 20 tablets FREE. If not delighted at the palliative relief received, return the package and you owe us nothing. We mean it. Send No Money. No C.O.D. to pay. Write today and we will send your PALMO TABLETS by return mail postpaid. Address: H. D. POWERS CO., Dept. 415-M, Box 135, Battle Creek, Mich.

LAW

STUDY AT HOME for Personal Success and Larger Earnings. 39 years expert instruction—over 108,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All text material furnished. Easy payment plan. G. I. approved. Send for FREE BOOK—"Law and Executive Guidance."

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 88-N, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

INVENTORS

Patent laws encourage the development of inventions. Our firm is registered to practice before the U. S. Patent Office. Write for further particulars as to patent protection and procedure and "Invention Record" form at once. No obligation.

McMORROW, BERMAN & DAVIDSON

Registered Patent Attorneys

129-G Victor Building

Washington 1, D. C.

LOOSE DENTAL PLATES RELINED AND TIGHTENED AT HOME \$1.00



NEWLY IMPROVED DENDEX RELINER, a plastic, builds up (refits) loose upper and lower dentures. Really makes them fit as they should without using powder. Easily applied. No heating required. Brush it on and wear your plates while it sets. It adheres to the plates only and makes a comfortable, smooth and durable surface that can be washed and scrubbed. Each application lasts for months. Not a powder or wax. Contains no rubber or gum. Neutral pink color. Sold on MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE. Not sold in stores. Mail \$1 for generous supply, brush and directions and we pay postage. Charges extra on C.O.D. orders. Proved by 10 years of Consumer Use

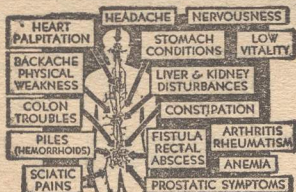
DENDEX COMPANY, Dept. N-5
2024 West 6th Street • Los Angeles 5, Calif.

LAW...

STUDY AT HOME Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL.B. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send NOW. **LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, 417 South Dearborn Street, A Correspondence Institution Dept. 475-L, Chicago 5, Ill.**

Piles May Lead to Chronic Ailments

FREE BOOK—Explains the Causes and Effects



No obligation. Write to Thornton & Minor Clinic, Suite C-402, 926 McGehee St., Kansas City, Mo.



Relieve Itchy Misery of ITCH

Relieve itching caused by eczema, athlete's foot, pimples—other itching troubles. Use cooling, medicated, D.D.D. Prescription. Greaseless, stainless. Quiets itching fast. 35c trial bottle proves it—or money back. Ask your druggist for D.D.D. Prescription.

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diplomas. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and acqially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

American School, Dept. H-439, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

"REDUCE" A DOCTOR'S 14 DAY PLAN

Here is the 14 day Reducing Plan of Dr. Edward Parrish, M.D., well-known doctor. For lunch, take 8 Dr. PARRISH'S TABLETS with glass of juice or any beverage. Take nothing else for lunch, except coffee, if desired. For breakfast and dinner, DON'T CUT OUT FOODS YOU LIKE — just cut down on them. This plan cuts down your caloric intake, and you lose weight naturally. NO HARMFUL DRUGS — NO EXERCISE — NO COMPLICATED DIETS — TRY THIS PLAN AT LEAST 14 DAYS. RESULTS MAY AMAZE YOU.

DR. PARRISH'S NEW TASTY TABLETS are not yet sold at stores. Send \$2.00 for \$2.25 size or order C.O.D. First box must satisfy or money back.

Hood Products Corporation, Hood Building, 686 Broadway, N. Y. 12. N. Y. Dept. 855-D

The Story Tellers' Circle

(Continued from page 4)

man, and at night he relaxes—with some fiction story about private detectives . . . and with a deep sigh of envy at the glamorous escapades of his make-believe counterparts!"

A. V. Harding

Two Kinds of Training

WITH another spring season here and the return of baseball, Bill Heuman appropriately winds up and lets go a high hard one called the "Return of Lefty."

Concerning which a few paragraphs by Mr. Heuman follow, but first we're struck by the Florida address on Bill's latest communique. Now Heuman is ordinarily a Long Islander, but apparently writers, like ball players, get to go South when the winds blow cold up here.

Say, how about something like that for poor readers and editors?

"The Lefty in my story," writes Bill Heuman, "is based on the old idol of Flatbush—Lefty O'Doul, the original 'man in the green suit.' Lefty, incidentally, started to wear a green suit after he'd had a particularly good day at bat. Along with most ball players, Lefty is on the superstitious side, and he kept wearing a green suit every day to bring him luck.

"In the story Lefty is a natural batsman—a rare phenomenon in the baseball world. There have been a number of natural batsmen—players who could hit a baseball from the cradle on, and who never received instruction of any kind.

"They have said that 'Shoeless Joe' Jackson was a hitter of this type—a natural batter. He swung where the ball was, no matter how the pitcher put it up, and he connected more solidly, and more regularly than other batters.

"Men like O'Doul and Jackson, and recently Ted Williams, didn't have to learn how to hit. The exquisite sense of timing and the fabulous eyesight were gifts. Something a man got from the gods. Any kid who has it today is in line for a small fortune—considering the salary Williams is supposedly getting.

"It is well that this is a rare gift, something which cannot be bought or sold or acquired. If it were less rare there would be too many great hitters and, therefore, the truly great would not stand out, providing the thrills for the crowd."

Bill Heuman

I WILL SEND YOU BOTH FREE

NEW 64 PAGE BOOK

64-page illustrated book describes many fascinating jobs Radio, Television, Electronics offer, shows big kits of Radio parts I send you, tells how I give you *practical* experience building real Radio circuits at home in spare time, how you make *extra* money fixing Radios while still learning; contains letters from many men I trained, telling what they are doing, earning.

FREE. Mail Coupon below!

SAMPLE RADIO LESSON

I will also send you my Lesson, "Getting Acquainted With Receiver Servicing," **FREE**, to show you how practical it is to learn Radio at home in spare time. It's a valuable Lesson. Study it—keep it—use it—without obligation! Tells how "Superbet" Circuits work, gives hints on Receiver Servicing, Locating Defects, Repair of Loudspeaker, I.F. Transformer, etc. 31 illustrations. Mail Coupon below!



SEE FOR YOURSELF HOW I TRAIN YOU AT HOME TO BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

Do you want a good-pay job in the fast-growing Radio Industry—or your own Radio Shop? Mail the Coupon for a Sample Lesson and my 64-page book, "How to be a Success in Radio—Television, Electronics," both **FREE**. See how I will train you at home—how you get practical Radio experience building, testing Radio circuits with **BIG KITS OF PARTS** I send!

Many Beginners Soon Make Extra Money in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending **EXTRA MONEY** manuals that show how to make **EXTRA** money fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time while still learning! It's probably easier to get started now than ever before, because the Radio Repair Business is

booming. Trained Radio Technicians also find profitable opportunities in Police, Aviation, Marine Radio, Broadcasting, Radio Manufacturing, Public Address work. Think of even *greater* opportunities as public demand for Television, FM and Electronic devices continues to grow! Send for **FREE** books now!

Find Out What NRI Can Do for You

Mail Coupon for Sample Lesson and my **FREE** 64-page book. Read the details about my Course; letters from men I trained; see how quickly, easily you can get started. No obligation! Just **MAIL COUPON NOW** in envelope or paste on penny postal. J. E. Smith President, Dept. 8DM, National Radio Institute, Pioneer Home Study Radio School, Washington 9, D. C.

VETERANS

You can get this training right in your own home under G. I. Bill.

MAIL COUPON FOR FULL DETAILS

I TRAINED THESE MEN

AVERAGES BETTER THAN \$3,000 A YEAR

"I now have a shop and am doing fine. I average better than \$3,000 per year, and certainly give NRI much of the credit."—**RAYMOND F. DAVIS**, Ashburn, Georgia.



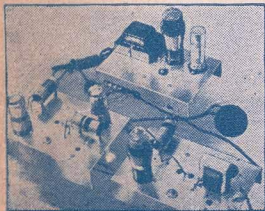
MADE \$612 IN 12 MONTHS, SPARE TIME

"Soon after I finished my experimental kits lessons I tackled my first Radio service job. The neighbors were very cooperative. I soon had all the repair jobs I could handle in spare time. I have made \$612 in the past 12 months in spare time."—**J. W. CLARK**, Wilmington, North Carolina.



Our 34th year of training men for success in radio.

Build Radio Circuits Like These With Kits I Send



Good for Both FREE

MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8DM
National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.

Mail me **FREE**, your sample lesson and 64-page book. (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name..... Age.....

Address.....

City..... Zone..... State.....

Approved for Training under GI Bill

These Men are Learning

ELECTRICITY

ON REAL EQUIPMENT

in the GREAT SHOPS of COYNE



**Why Spend Years Preparing for a Good Job?
Train Quickly at COYNE—Be Making Real
Money While Others are Still Puttering Along!**



B. W. COOKE

Yes, you can get ready for Good Pay—a Big Future in **ELECTRICITY**—by coming to **COYNE** in Chicago to train on actual equipment! Here you work on real motors, armatures, switchboards—do actual wiring and trouble-shooting—get the “all-around” training you need.

Not a “Home-Study” Course

We do not teach by mail. All training is given in our Great Shops, plus necessary theory. Expert instructors guide you. No advanced education or previous experience needed.

EARN WHILE LEARNING

If you need part-time work to help out with living expenses while at Coyne, we'll help you get it. Don't be held back by lack of money.

COYNE ELECTRICAL AND RADIO SCHOOL

B. W. COOKE, Pres.

500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 48-66, Chicago 12

This modern fireproof building is occupied entirely by **COYNE**. Located in Chicago, the Electrical Center of the World.

FOUNDED 1899



Electrical Refrigeration Included

Added training now included in great new field of Electric Refrigeration—Industrial Electronics also included. Both mean added opportunities.

GI Approved—Finance Plan for Non-Vets

COYNE is authorized to train men under the G.I. Bill. Non-veterans may enroll now, pay most of tuition after graduation. Whatever your problem, **COYNE** can help you! Mail the coupon now.

GET THE FACTS!

BIG FREE BOOK tells all about your future in Electricity and how you can get ready quickly at **COYNE**. Dozens of pictures. Rush coupon today!

PREPARE FOR PERMANENT JOBS LIKE THESE

- Light and Power Wiring
 - Power Plant Work
 - Armature Winding
 - Substation Operator
 - Maintenance Electrician
 - Electrical Testing
 - Signal Maintenance
 - Industrial Electronics
 - Electric Refrigeration
 - and many others
- Our Employment Bureau for graduates gives **FREE** Lifetime Job Service.

FREE BOOK



B. W. COOKE, Pres.
COYNE ELECTRICAL AND RADIO SCHOOL, Dept. 48-66
500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, 12, Ill.

Send me your big **FREE BOOK** on **ELECTRICITY** and tell all about your training offer. This does not obligate me in any way and **no salesman will call on me.**

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

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

