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Short Stories

March 10th

Twice A Month

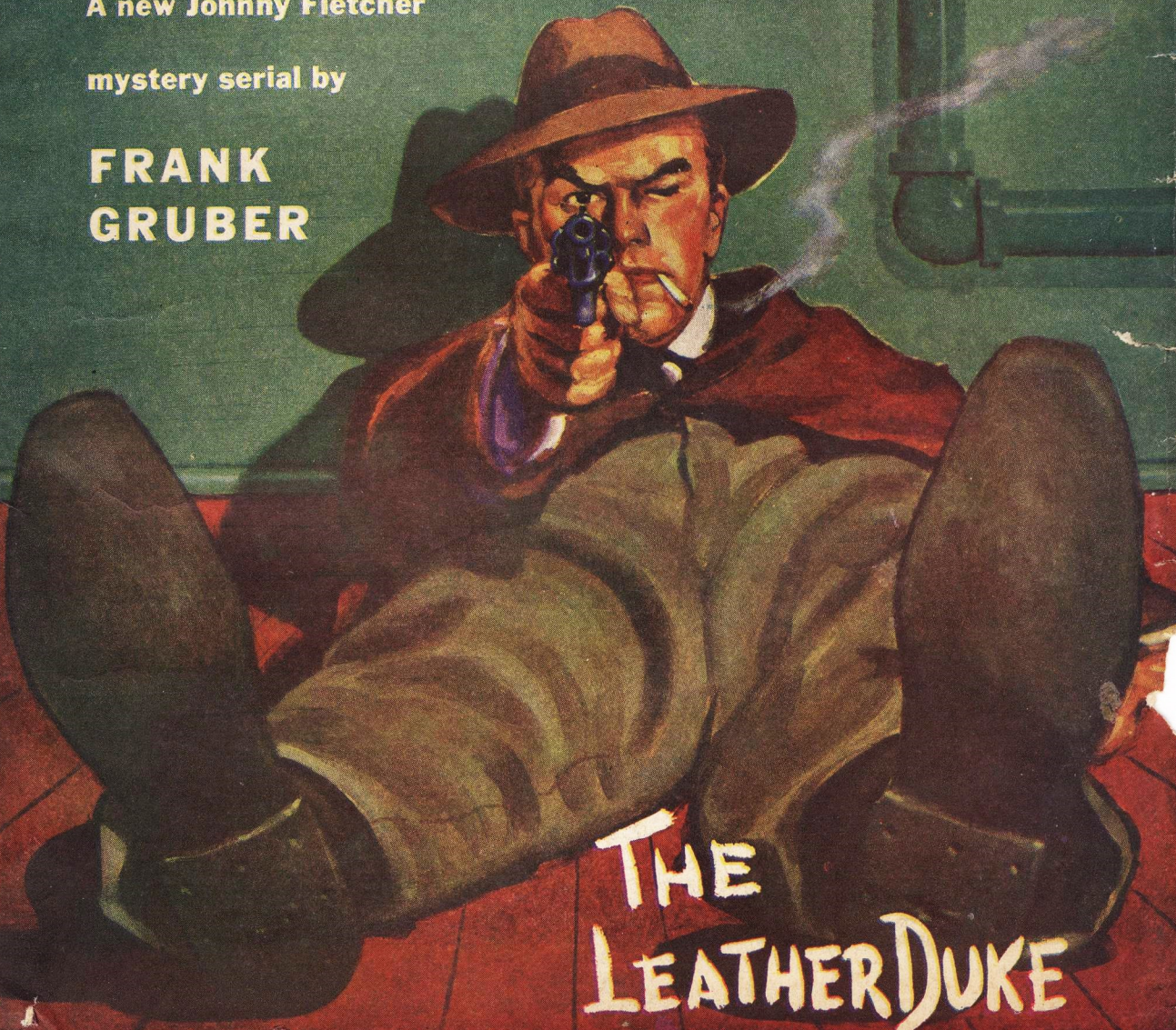
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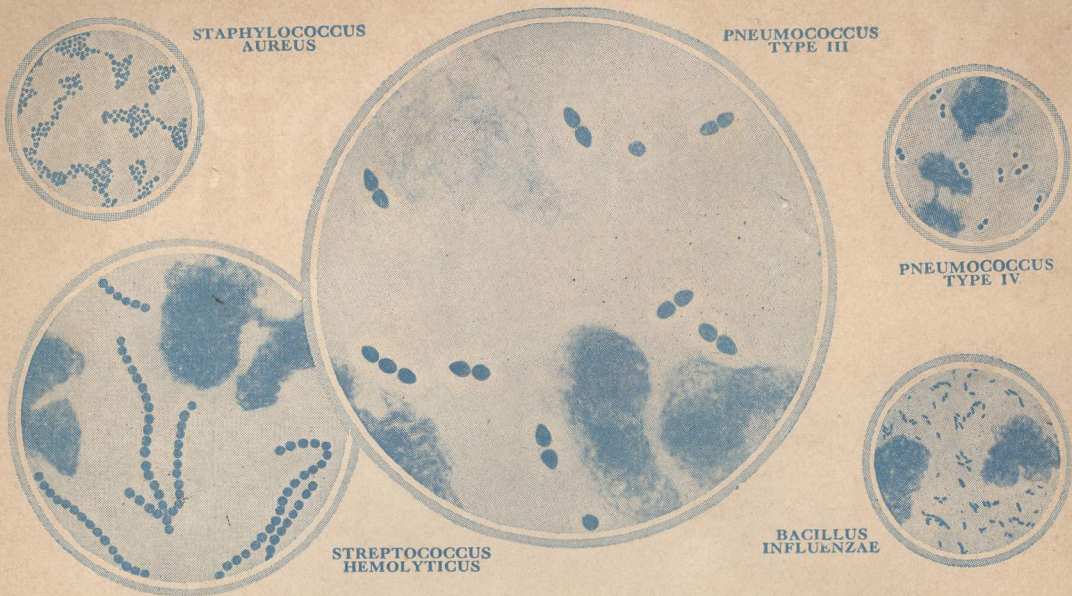
A new Johnny Fletcher

mystery serial by

**FRANK
GRUBER**



**THE
LEATHER DUKE**



STAPHYLOCOCCUS
AUREUS

PNEUMOCOCCUS
TYPE III

PNEUMOCOCCUS
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FRANK BONHAM



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ACTION

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(First Part of Four)

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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. March 10, 1949. Vol. CCVII, No. 5. Whole Number 1985.

EDITOR
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ASSOCIATE EDITOR
LAMONT BUCHANAN

March 10th, 1949

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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.

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EVERY
AUTHOR'S
FINEST
AND
LATEST
STORIES
NO
REPRINTS

*A Desperate State of Affairs—Johnny Fletcher and Sam Cragg
Have to Accept a Position, Take a Job—in Fact Go to Work.*



Part I

I

MORT MURRAY was the cause of it all. Mort Murray, publisher of Every Man a Samson, the book that had earned a livelihood for Johnny Fletcher and Sam Cragg for so many years. Mort Murray, that Rock of Gibraltar, that lighthouse on the rocky shore, that friend-in-need-is-a-friend indeed.

Mort Murray had let them down. In their hour of need, he had failed Johnny Fletcher and Sam Cragg. Yes, he had failed to pay his rent and the sheriff had put a padlock on his door. So he had been unable to send the books that Johnny had ordered by Western Union, collect.

And now Johnny and Sam were walking the streets of Chicago homeless and hungry. They had caught fitful snatches of sleep in the Northwestern and Union Depots, but you can't really get a good night's repose in those places. The benches are hard and there are always policemen and station attendants to annoy you.

Things were bad.

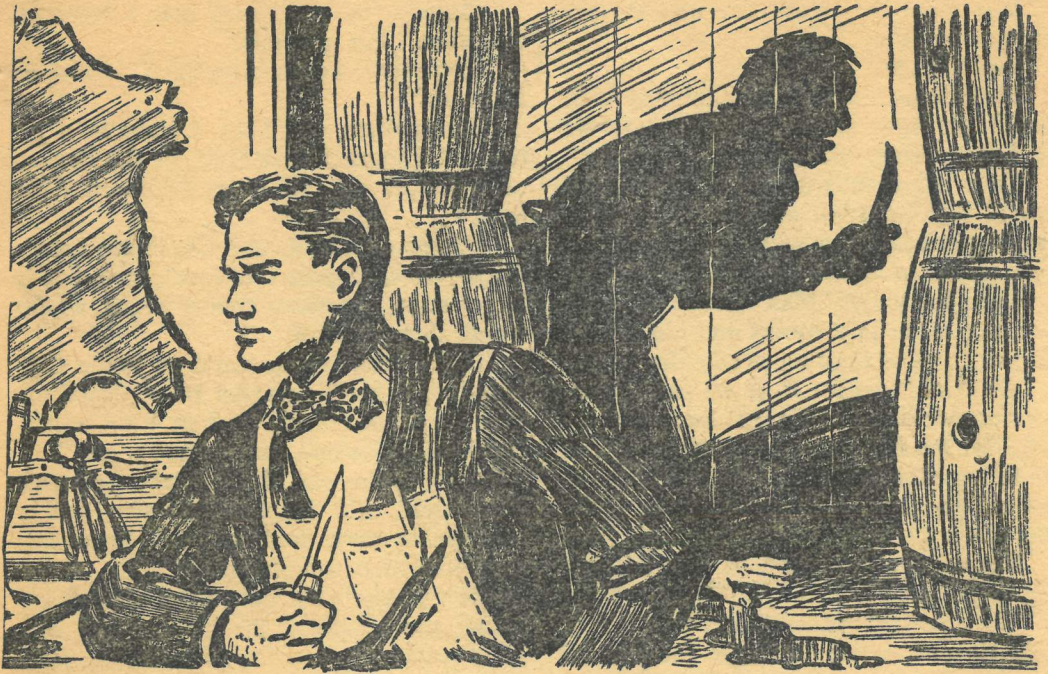
Silently, Johnny and Sam turned north on Larrabee Street and silently they walked past the dingy factory buildings of the near North Side. People were working in those buildings, lifting barrels, wrestling crates and cartons, and operating whirring machines. It rained and snowed; sometimes the wind howled and sometimes the sun shone brightly. But those people in the buildings were oblivious to it all. They came to work at eight o'clock in the morning, they toiled all day and at five o'clock they went home. They went to work in these factories as boys and girls, they fell in love and were married. They raised children and the children in their turn went to work in the same factories. There was no end to it. Oh, yes, they changed jobs sometimes, these workers. They quit one factory and went into another. The work was the same, more or less, the pay was the same, a little more or less, and the hours never changed.

"Sam," Johnny Fletcher said, as they walked along, "we've got to get a job."

"Sure," agreed Sam, then ten seconds

By FRANK GRUBER

*'Author of "The Jungle Shawl," and other Johnny Fletcher
Mystery Book and Radio Adventures*



later came to a complete halt. "What did you say, Johnny?"

"I said we've got to get a job. We're up against it. I've thought and I've thought and I can't see any way out of it. We've got to get a stake, and the only way is to get a job."

"But, Johnny!" cried Sam. "You've never done any work, you've never held a job in your whole life—"

Johnny exhaled heavily. "Oh, yes, I have. In my youth, I had two jobs—not one, two. I worked in a grocery store once, delivering orders and another time—for five weeks—I worked in a bowling alley, setting up pins. What about you—have you ever worked?"

"Me? Oh, sure, before I started wrestling I had a job for a year, driving a truck."

"What kind of a truck?"

"A sand and gravel truck. Sometimes I hauled a load of cement. That was easy, unloading those little pound sacks of cement."

"Then this job ought to be a cinch."

"Which job?"

Johnny pointed at a squat, five-story

building across the street. "Towner Leather Company," he read. "There's a sign next to the door, 'Man Wanted'."

A shudder ran through Sam's body. "No, Johnny, no," he whispered hoarsely. "Not a leather factory."

"What's wrong with leather? It's one of the most useful articles in the world. They make shoes with it. And the harness the farmers use on their horses is made of leather. Why, if it wasn't for leather, the farmers couldn't drive their horses and if they couldn't drive horses, they couldn't plow ground to raise potatoes and corn and wheat. No, Sam, we couldn't live without leather."

"Sure, Johnny, I admit it. Leather's important. I've got nothing against leather. It's just; well, work—We've been together a long time, Johnny. Twelve years. In all that time we ain't never had to work before. You always figured out something."

"I know, but I've been thinking lately—maybe I've been wrong. Maybe it isn't right not to work. Look at all these people in these buildings; they're not walking the streets. They've got homes, they get three

square meals a day. They save their money and when they get old they can quit working—”

“You mean they work like hell so they can quit working?”

“That’s right.”

“That shows how silly it is, Johnny. Why should we work all our lives, just so we can quit working? We’re not working now.”

“Your argument’s sound, Sam, but we haven’t had breakfast and we didn’t have dinner yesterday. Not to mention lunch. So we’re going in here and get a job.”

“Yeah, but it says ‘Man Wanted’, Johnny, *man*, not *men*. That means one, doesn’t it? Uh, which of us is going to take that job?”

“We could toss for it, if we had a coin, but since we haven’t, why not leave it to the gods? Or the foreman or whatever they call the fellow who hires men. We’ll both go in and ask for the job and whoever he picks, why that’s it. . . .”

“But don’t you think he’d pick the first one to go in?”

“We’ll go in together. We’ll play it fair, right down the line. If I get the job I’ll meet you out here at five o’clock with the money and if you get it, I’ll be waiting for you. That’s fair, isn’t it?”

“I suppose so,” conceded Sam, “but I’ve got an awful hunch that I’m going to be the sucker.”

He drew a deep breath, let it out slowly, then followed Johnny into the building of the Towner Leather Company.

INSIDE, a short flight of stairs, led to a glass panelled door. Johnny pushed open this second door and they found themselves in an office where thirty or forty office workers toiled at various desks.

Immediately in front of them a girl of twenty or so sat at a desk, which contained a small switchboard. She had taffy-colored hair, very nice features and plenty of what a girl ought to have. She looked inquiringly at Johnny and he brightened.

“Well, well,” he said, “this is a little better than I expected.”

“And what did you expect?” the girl asked coolly. “A two-headed octopus?”

“*Touché*,” exclaimed Johnny, “or as we say in Brooklyn, ‘touch. I’m making a survey of what lonely men in Chicago do. Lonely men, who are strangers in town.

Suppose this was Saturday night; where would such a man go for a little entertainment and, shall we say, fun?”

“Depends on the lonely man’s financial condition,” the girl said.

“Suppose we say the man has a—a couple of bucks?”

“Two dollars, eh? Then I guess he’d go to the Clybourn Dance Hall, or the Bucket of Blood as we call it on Clybourn Avenue.”

“Bucket of Blood, eh? Charming name. Mmm, well, suppose said lonely man had a larger stake, say about twenty bucks, where would they go then?”

“Oh, in that case he could go to the College Inn, or the Edgewater Beach Hotel, or even the Chez Hogan, on East Rush Street. Provided, of course, that he had a girl.”

“Ah yes, the girl. That’s important. But how could said lonely man who was a stranger in town find said girl to accompany him to said night spots?”

“Why, I guess he could stand on a street-corner and whistle at the girls who passed. He’d probably get a few slaps in the face, he’d likely wind up in jail, but he might, he might just possibly get a girl and it would serve him right if he did. Now, mister, are there any other questions you want to ask?”

“Yes, what do they call you around here?”

“They call me, ‘hey you’, on account of my name is Nancy Miller. Now, fun’s fun, but I’ve got work to do. Now, what are you selling and who is it you’d like to have say no?”

“Get ready for a surprise, Nancy. We’re selling—us.” Johnny beamed at the girl, who looked at him sharply. “There’s a little old sign outside the door. It says ‘Man Wanted.’”

“Oh, Mister!” cried Nancy Miller. “So you’re looking for a job!”

“He is,” chimed in Sam Cragg. “I’m not.”

Johnny ignored Sam. “Sure, Nancy, how else am I going to get that twenty dollars by Saturday?”

“You could get a loan on your Cadillac.”

“If I had a Cadillac. Ha-ha! No foolin’, Taffy, we need a job badly. How’s about giving us the lowdown on this one?”

“Oh, I don’t mind. I don’t mind at all. This is a working job. You actually do things with your hands. The pay is thirty-two dollars—!”

"Thirty-two bucks!" cried Johnny.

"For a forty-hour week. But as you actually work forty-four hours you get thirty-six-fifty a week."

"That isn't very much."

"No," exclaimed Sam. "It ain't. In fact, we couldn't work that cheap, so thanks just the same."

Johnny regarded him coldly. "How much are we making a week now?" He turned back to Nancy Miller. "A man's got to start somewhere. A big place like this I suppose there's a chance for advancement—"

"Oh, certainly. You stick to the job and work hard you can be making thirty-eight, forty dollars a week, in no time at all. Say, about six years."

Sam groaned, but Johnny nodded gloomily. "We'll take the job."

"What do you mean, we? There's only one job vacant. Which of you wants it? And I don't do the hiring. It's Mr. Johnson who has the opening. Do you want to see him?"

"We who are about to die, salute you!" Johnny quoted. "In short, yes, we'll see your Mr. Johnson and—" looking at Sam, "May the best man win."

The girl shook her head and made a connection on the switchboard. After a moment she said into the phone: "Mr. Johnson, there are a couple of men here asking about that job. Mmm, yes, all right. . . . Thank you, I'll tell them." She broke the connection. "He'll be right down."

"He asked if we looked okay, didn't he?" asked Johnny.

"There are some pretty awful looking characters come in here. Take up a lot of time—"

"All right," said Johnny, "if I'm the lucky one, I'll have twenty dollars on Saturday."

"Are you kidding?"

"Not at all, Nancy; you're just about my size."

"Stop right there, fella. I don't go out with factory hands."

"Women," said Johnny, bitterly. "You'd go out with me if I were unemployed, but just because my hands are stained from honest toil."

"Ixnay, ixnay," retorted Nancy Miller. "You were asking hypothetical questions and I was giving you hypothetical answers. I never said I'd go out with you, unemployed

or working. My fiance wouldn't like it. . . . These are the men, Mr. Johnson."

II

JOHNNY whirled. An elevator door nearby had opened and Johnson, the factory foreman, was coming toward them. He was a heavy-set graying man of about fifty. He wore a tan linen smock. He stopped a few feet from Johnny and Sam and sized them up before speaking. Then he asked: "Which one of you boys came in first?"

"We came in together," Johnny replied quickly.

"The girl tell you what this job pays?"

"Thirty-two dollars a week."

"That's right. Time and a half for overtime." He made a clucking sound with his mouth. "I dunno, help ain't what it used to be. You fellows need jobs badly?"

"We must, if we're willing to work for thirty-two dollars a week."

Johnson grunted. "That's just it. You want a job because you need it, but will you work a couple of weeks until something better comes along?"

Sam began to bob his head and Johnny himself almost fell into the trap. But he caught himself in time. "No, Mr. Johnson, we'd work right along. And we're not afraid of hard work. Sam used to be a wrestler one time. He can lift a barrel of leather with one hand. The job don't come too hard for Sam. Work all day and never get tired."

Judas, Sam's tortured eyes said to Johnny.

Johnson regarded Johnny steadily. "Sounds like you're trying to sell your friend for the job."

"No," Johnny replied. "I need the job as badly as Sam does, but we've been friends for years and we understand one another. Sometimes he gets the job, sometimes I do. There're things he can do better than I. If the job requires brawn and perseverance—"

"It doesn't," said Johnson. "You can sit all day long. It's sorting counters. Softest job in the place." He frowned. "As a matter of fact, the less imagination you've got the better you are for this job. That's why I think I'll take—" he looked suddenly at Sam Cragg—"you!"

Sam took a quick step back, the color draining from his face. "Me?"

"Yes. What's your name, besides Sam?"

"Cragg," Sam said, hoarsely. "Sam Cragg."

"Good. Well, Sam, you can start right away."

The girl at the switchboard suddenly called, "Mr. Johnson, Mr. Kessler wants to talk to you." She extended a telephone to Johnson.

Johnson took the telephone. "Yes, Karl, what is it? . . . What . . . ? All right, it's just as well. He's been nothing but a troublemaker, anyway." He slammed the receiver back on the hook, returned the phone to the girl, then whirled and stabbed a forefinger at Johnny.

"This is your lucky day, son! You and your friend don't have to split up, after all. One of my sorters just quit. That means there're two jobs open. I'm hiring you both. Come along!"

JOHNNY reeled as if he had been struck by an invisible fist, but a happy, rejuvenated Sam caught his elbow and helped him into the nearby elevator. Johnson followed them into the cubicle, closed the door and pulled a rope. The elevator shuddered, wheezed and began to groan its way slowly upwards.

Johnson surveyed his new employees. "Drifters," he said, "that's all working men are today. Go from job to job. Do as little work as possible. Always looking for an easier job and more pay. Social security, bah!

"Worst thing that ever hit this country. Me, I've never had but one job in my life. I started here when I was thirteen years old. Thirty-nine years and I've been a foreman since I was twenty-six. I've worked hard all my life and the company's treated me fine. I get two weeks vacation every year—with pay!"

The elevator stopped at the fifth floor and Johnson opened the corrugated iron door. "Well, here we are. I boss this whole floor. Ninety-two men—I mean, I mean sixty-four men and twenty-eight girls and women. Right through this row of barrels—"

Wooden barrels, one on top of the other to the height of four and almost reaching the concrete ceiling, were straight ahead of the elevator. Johnny was about to start between two rows, when a man entered at the far side and Johnny stood aside for him to

come through, as the aisle wasn't wide enough for two people to pass.

The man was a hulking, beetle-browed man of about thirty. He carried a small package under his arm and wore a coat and hat. His face was set in a heavy scowl.

He came through the aisle, saw Johnson and spat on the floor. "The hell with you, Johnson, the hell with you and your job."

"All right, Carmella," Johnson said, calmly. "Pick up your pay, down in the office. I'm glad to get rid of you."

"And don't think I ain't glad to get the hell outta here," snarled Carmella, stepping into the elevator. He started to close the door, but held it open a few inches to deliver a parting shot. "And the hell with the Dook, too." He slammed the door shut.

Johnson shook his head. "Bad man. Shouldn't ever hired him in the first place."

"Is that the fellow whose job I'm taking?" Johnny asked.

"Yes. And no matter how bad a worker you are, you couldn't be any worse than him. That's a relief, anyway." He drew a deep breath and started into the aisle between the barrels. Johnny and Sam followed.

The fifth floor of the leather factory was a vast place, approximately two hundred by two hundred feet. It contained several hundred machines of various kinds, rows of long work benches, thousands of barrels containing leather findings and huge leather drying racks. Machines stamped and pounded, screamed and whined. It was a place of vast confusion—and wonderful efficiency.

Leather came here, raw from the tanneries, huge, wrinkled, irregular sheets. Machines stamped out heels, counters, shank-pieces, outer and inner soles. Other machines split the leather, trimmed and shaped it. Huge vats of glue soaked the leather, made it hard and tough, waterproof. Machines molded and shaped the pieces and at last they went into boxes and barrels and crates and were shipped to shoe factories all over the world.

No shoes were manufactured here, but all the parts were made and sold to shoe factories who merely assembled the various pieces, sewed and nailed and merchandised the finished product as shoes. A leather counter went out at six or seven cents, a heel the same, a sole twelve or thirteen cents—all the parts necessary for a pair of

shoes brought less than two dollars. But when assembled by the shoe manufacturer and placed in a store cost the consumer \$9.95.

Johnson led Johnny and Sam to the rear of the great floor where a bench, fully a hundred feet long was set up against the wall. The bench was divided into sections nine or ten feet long and before each section a man sat on a high stool, sorting leather counters, those U-shaped pieces of leather that brace up the heels of shoes. Behind the benches, and suspended from the ceiling, were wire drying racks, each containing three or four hundred pairs of counters, molded wet from glue and wax the previous day by tremendous molding machines.

When the counters were sufficiently dry, they were dumped on the sorters' benches. It was the duty of each man to sort the counters for heavy, medium or light grades, trim off imperfections with sharp leather knives and finally bunch the counters for packing. Four counters were nestled together, then inverted and pushed into another nest of four counters. These bunches were piled up on the bench, and finally put into used sugar and apple barrels, which held ten or twelve hundred pairs each. The barrels were finally covered with burlap, stencilled as to their contents, then either put into "stock" or shipped to a shoe factory.

At the head of this long sorting bench, Johnson turned Johnny and Sam over to Karl Kessler, the assistant foreman, a middle-aged Austrian, who spoke with an accent.

"A couple of new men for you, Karl," Johnson said. He looked down the long bench. "Don't put them next to each other. They're pals and they'll gab all day long." "Sure," agreed Kessler, "I see they don't talk."

Johnson walked off and Kessler looked brightly at Johnny and Sam. "All right, fellas, now we get to work, huh?" He stepped to a nearby section of bench that was unoccupied. Johnny and Sam followed.

He picked up a leather counter. "Know what these are?"

"Hunks of leather," Sam returned.

"Sure, that's right, they're counters, the things that hold up the backs of the heels.

This bunch is 2 MOXO, that means Grade 2, Men's Oxford, Size 0. They're seven iron—"

"Iron?" asked Johnny.

"Leather thickness is measured by irons; forty-eight irons to an inch. Now, here's what you do. You sort these for heavy and medium, like this—" He smacked the counter into his left hand, squeezed it. "This is a heavy." He picked up another counter. "This one, too."

"If they're all seven iron," Johnny asked, "why aren't they all heavies?"

"Because no two pieces of leather are the same. Counters are cut from all around the hide; here's one from the shoulder, this one's a headpiece and here—here's the best of all, from the bend."

"Bend?"

"That's a strip about a foot wide, over the back. Usually the soles are cut from there. Shoulder stock is next best. Worst is head stock; spotty, hard one piece, soft another. Ain't nothing' wasted on a cow, it's all used for somethin'."

"What about the moo?" Johnny asked.

Kessler looked blankly at him. "The moo? What's that?"

"The moo from a cow." Johnny mused.

KESSLER laughed uproariously. "Ha-ha, that's funny. Ha-ha—" Then he broke off and grabbed up a counter. He slapped it into his left hand, caught up a knife and began trimming the flange on the counter. Johnny looking over his shoulder, saw a man bearing down on them, a tall heavy-set man in a blue serge, with real old-style piping around the edging of the vest.

"Morning, Karl, 'morning," the big man greeted Kessler, cheerfully, as he approached.

Kessler looked up and pretended to see the man for the first time. He bobbed his head, actually bowed from the waist. "Good morning, Mr. Towner. Thank you, Mr. Towner."

Mr. Towner stopped. "How's Elliott doing?"

"Fine, Mr. Towner, fine. Best counter sorter we've ever had."

"Glad to hear it. Don't favor him. Treat him just like anybody else."

"Sure, Mr. Towner, sure. Thank you, Mr. Towner."

Mr. Towner smiled pleasantly and walked off. Kessler grabbed up a counter and fumbled it, from sheer nervousness. "That's Mr. Towner," he whispered. "The big boss."

"The guy who owns the works? Democratic, ain't he?"

"No, Republican—"

Johnny, looking down the line, saw Mr. Towner stopping at one of the benches.

"That's his son, Elliott," Kessler whispered hoarsely. "Don't look at them."

Johnny picked up a leather counter, squeezed it. "You mean the old boy owns the joint and he makes his son work here?"

"Sure, Mr. Towner did that himself when he was learning the business. Old Harry Towner started the company. When this Mr. Towner—Young Harry—graduated from college, the old man put him here in the factory—a week in every department, to learn how each piece of leather was made. Then he sent him out on the road as a salesman. Now Elliott's learning the business. We got him this week, next week he goes into the heel department. In three-four weeks he knows the whole business and starts selling."

Johnny shot a furtive glance down the line of benches. Young Elliott, a handsome man in his middle twenties, was wearing overalls, a tan work shirt and wore a cotton apron like the other counter sorters. His father, "Young" Harry, was conversing jovially with him.

Johnny exhaled heavily. "Is he really the best counter sorter here?"

Karl Kessler gave him a quick look. "Are you kidding?"

Johnny chuckled. "Oh, like that, huh?"

"Comes in at ten o'clock, takes two hours for lunch. Goes to the club down on Michigan Avenue."

"In that outfit?"

Kessler grunted. "Takes a half hour to wash and change his clothes. Young Harry wasn't like that. We used to work eleven hours a day in those days and Harry came in at seven in the morning like everybody else."

"You were here then?" exclaimed Johnny.

"You kiddin'? I been here thirty-nine years."

"Johnson said he started to work here thirty-nine years—"

"Yeah, that's right. He came to work about six months after I did. Just a punk. I broke him in. Used to kick him in the pants."

"Still do it?"

"Huh? He's the foreman, now." Kessler risked a look off to the right, saw that Mr. Towner had left his son's bench and gone elsewhere. "All right," he said, to Johnny, "you can get to work here, now." He nodded to Sam Cragg. "You come with me."

He led Sam down the line to a vacant section of bench, adjoining that of Elliott Towner. Johnny shook his head and picked up a counter. He squeezed it as Karl Kessler had shown him, put it down and squeezed a second counter. Not that squeezing meant anything to him, but that seemed to be necessary.

III

A HISS at Johnny's left attracted his attention. He turned and saw a white-maned old man with a white walrus-mustache glaring at him.

"How you like the job?" the oldster whispered.

"Fine," Johnny replied, "just fine."

"Yah, I bet. No good, place like this, for young people."

"Oh I dunno," Johnny said, easily. "Sounds like a steady job to me. Johnson's been here thirty-nine years and Kessler says he came here before Johnson."

"Yah, and you know how much money Johnson gets?"

"Five hundred a week, I guess."

"He don't get five hundred a month. Sixty dollars a week he gets and Karl—t'irty-nine years he works here and you know what he makes, now? Forty-four dollars!"

Johnny whistled. "You make it sound pretty bad."

"No place for young man. Fella like you should start himself a business. That's where the money is. Lookit the Dook—"

"The Dook?"

"Harry Towner, that's what they call him, The Leather Dook."

"Oh, Duke!"

"Sure, Dook. One of the richest men in Chicago. Owns this place, four-five tanneries, stock in six-seven shoe companies, couple office buildings. His father died rich

and the Dook he double the money. Few years the young Dook get it all."

"The lad sortin' counters, down there?"

"Yah, young punk. Like have him on my ship for a voyage, I teach him few things. Don't know I'm old sea captain, huh? Yah, sailor all my life, until eight year old, when they take away my ticket. Now I work in leather factory. 'Nother year or two and they fire me. Maybe I go back to Copenhagen."

Down the line, Sam Cragg had received his four or five minutes of instruction from Karl Kessler. The moment the assistant foreman left, Sam turned to Elliott Towner.

"What time do they bring the money around?" he demanded.

Elliott Towner looked at him pleasantly. "I don't think they bring any money around."

"The pay!"

"I'm sure, I don't know—"

"You mean you're not interested," Sam snapped belligerently. "You're the boss' son, you don't care about your pay. You get your spendin' money whether you work or not."

"Oh, I say," protested young Towner. "That's a little unfair, isn't it?"

"Unfair, me eye! I get thirty-two bucks a week; how much do you get?"

"Twenty dollars."

Sam blinked. "Huh? Who're you tryin' to kid?"

"That's all they're paying me. And that's all I'll get until I start out as a salesman. Then I get raised to thirty dollars a week. Plus a small commission."

"Twenty bucks a week," snorted Sam. "That wouldn't pay for your lunches. You eat at your plushy club, don't you?"

"Yes, I go down now and then. When I'm short of money. I'm allowed to sign the tab at the club."

"Oh, so it comes out. You don't have to pay for your lunches. How about your duds? The old man pays your tailor, huh?"

"Naturally."

"Natcherly!" jeered Sam. "And you claim you're livin' on twenty bucks a week."

Young Towner's face was pale. "Now, look here, I think I've had about enough of that—"

"Oh, you're going to fire me, eh?"

"Of course not!" snapped Towner. "I can't fire anybody. I'm not the foreman.

I'm a workman here, just like you. Not that I've seen you do any work—"

"A stool-pigeon, huh? Spyin' on the workers. Snitch to the old man and get me fired. Beat down the poor workin' man, keep him starved, then kick him out when he can't work any more."

"Is anybody *making* you work here?" flared Elliott Towner. "Did Johnson black-jack you on the street and *make* you take this job? You're a free man. You can quit any time you like."

SAM opened his mouth to blast Towner, but just then Johnson, the foreman, came into the aisle from between a couple of rows of stacked-up barrels.

"You, Cragg!" he snapped. "You're a strong man; I've got a nice job for you, back here."

Sam shot a quick glance up the row of benches, saw Johnny Fletcher glaring at him and meekly followed the foreman through the rows of barrels.

Johnson led him to where a heavy-set swarthy man was wrestling a packed barrel of counters onto the platform of a portable elevator. "Here, Joe," he said to the swarthy man, "I've brought you a new helper. Let him do the cranking. That'll keep him out of trouble." He glowered at Sam and stalked off.

"Gee," exclaimed Sam, "what is this— one of those sweat shops you hear about?"

The swarthy man looked furtively about, saw that no one else was within earshot, then said, "Take your time, small pay, small work." He picked up an iron crank. "Here, you crank her. But no hurry, lots of time."

Sam, scowling, sized up the elevator. It consisted of a platform just large enough to hold a barrel and a steel frame, some eight feet tall. A steel cable wound up on a drum raised and lowered the platform, but for the raising it was necessary to insert the crank and turn it, until the desired height was reached.

Having set the barrel upon the platform, Joe stepped on himself. "All right," he said, "turn her over."

Sam inserted the crank in the proper place, began turning. It wasn't very hard work—not for Sam Cragg. The barrel weighed only a couple of hundred pounds or so and Joe's weight brought the total up to

about four hundred pounds. Not too much, if you were as strong as Sam.

The elevator reached the height of three barrels. "Okay." Joe called down, "put on the brake."

"Yeah, sure," said Sam and pulled out the crank.

Only a quick leap backward saved him from a crushed foot, for the moment he pulled out the crank, the elevator platform dropped with a crash. Joe, fortunately, grabbed for the top of the elevator platform and now hung there, groaning and calling upon his saints in Italian.

"*Madre mio!*" he moaned. "He pulled out the crank before he put on the brake." He let go of his grip and dropped to the floor of the elevator. Sam, seeing that the man was not hurt, stepped forward again.

"Why didn't you say I had to put the brake on first?" he growled.

"Even a fool would know that," snarled the Italian. "Anybody who's ever been around machinery knows what goes up, comes down, if you don't use a brake."

"I've never been around machinery," snapped Sam.

"And you ask me, I'd just as soon not be around any now."

"Then why the hell don't you quit?"

"My pal won't let me. I didn't want to take the job in the first place, but he made me."

"There're plenty other jobs these days."

"I'd just as soon not work at all. I've never had to before, not since I was a kid."

"You're a rich man, huh?" sneered Joe.

"No," said Sam, "I ain't rich, but look —" He suddenly stooped, gripped the barrel that had crashed with the elevator and hoisted it easily over his head. Stepping forward, he deposited it on top of a stack of three barrels.

"Gawd!" cried Joe. "That barrel weighs over two hundred pounds."

"To me it ain't no more'n a bag of peanuts," boasted Sam. "I'm the strongest man in the world."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you were," conceded Joe in a tone of sudden respect.

"Let's stop foolin' around with this machine," Sam declared. "Just show me where you want the barrels piled and I'll pile 'em. I ain't had a good workout in a

long time and maybe liftin' these barrels for an hour'll do me some good."

A half hour later, Johnson the foreman came to Johnny Fletcher as he was clumsily trying to put bunches of counters into a barrel.

"That friend of yours," Johnson said grimly, "is he a circus strong man?"

"We did a few weeks in a circus once, yes. Why?"

"He's back there lifting barrels of counters five and six feet up in the air."

"They only weight a couple of hundred pounds, don't they?"

"Are you kidding?"

"No, Sam's the strongest man in the world."

"That's what he told me a few minutes ago. But—"

He broke off, for a sudden scream of horror suddenly rose above the noise of the thumping and pounding machines. It came from the directions of the stacks of barrels, where Sam was working. Johnny dropped a bunch of counters and rushed for the aisle leading to the rear of the barrels.

He hurtled through, reached a darkened area beyond. "Sam!" he cried. "Sam, are you all right?"

"Yeah, Johnny," came Sam's reply. "But come over here—"

Sam bounced out from behind a stack of barrels some twenty feet away. Johnny rushed to him and collided with a shaking, swarthy man, Joe, who was staggering out of the aisle.

"His—his throat's cut," babbled Joe.

Johnny shoved the man aside, stepped into the narrow aisle between two rows of barrels. Halfway down a stack of barrels had been removed and there in the narrow space, slumped down in a sitting posture, was a dead man.

IV

HIS EYES were wide and staring and his throat had been cut from ear to ear. Johnny took one quick look and backed away. Johnson, the foreman, standing at the end of the aisle, peering in, cried out hoarsely "Who is it?"

"How should I know?" snapped Johnny. He gestured. "You're the boss here. Take a look."

A shudder ran through Johnson's body, then he pulled himself together and crowded into the aisle past Johnny. He looked at the dead man's face and gasped:

"Al Piper!"

"One of your boys?" Johnny asked.

"He runs a skiving machine." Johnson swallowed hard. "He—he must have committed suicide."

"Because he runs a—a, what did you say?—skiver machine."

"Skiving. Uh, it isn't that, but Al, well, he just got back to work today."

"Vacation?"

"You might call it that. Al takes one every six months."

"That's very nice of the company, giving vacations twice a year."

"The company doesn't give them. Al takes—took—them." Johnson inhaled deeply. "Al's a periodic boozer. Goes along for six months, then goes on a binge; usually lasts for a week or ten days, then he's all right for another six months." Johnson turned, found the eyes of Karl Kessler. "How long was Al gone this time?"

"Twelve days."

"Little longer'n usual. How'd he look?"

"Not bad. Little shaky, but not so bad, considerin'."

Johnson shook his head. "Guess it just got too much for him. He wasn't a bad guy, when he was working. He ran that skiving machine—mmm, must be eighteen or twenty years."

"Maybe that's why he did it," suggested Johnny.

Johnson's sharp eyes fixed themselves upon Johnny. "The skiving machine's the easiest job on the floor, unless its sorting counters. He just sat there on a stool all day long, feeding flat counters into the skiver." He suddenly scowled. "What's the idea, all you people gawkin' around here? Get back to work."

The workers who had been blocking the aisle, scattered swiftly. Even Johnny wandered off, but Sam remained. "Me, too?" he asked. "I was just gonna pile some barrels there."

"They can wait. Get back to the sorting bench. I've got to report this to Mr. Towner."

He didn't think of the police; Mr. Towner was the highest authority in the leather

factory and when something happened, you reported to him. But Towner must have notified the police for they came within fifteen minutes; a round half dozen of them, headed by Lieutenant Lindstrom of Homicide.

They search among the stacks of barrels, set off a few flashlights bulbs, then began going through the counter floor, looking at machines, studying workers from concealed vantage spots and making them so nervous that a moulding machine operator caught his thumb in the machine and lost about a sixteenth of an inch of flesh.

After he went down to the first aid station, Lieutenant Lindstrom, escorted by Johnson, entered the counter sorting department.

They bore down upon Sam Cragg and began questioning him. Johnny, seeing his friend in difficulties, eased himself along the line of benches, carrying a couple of counters. As he came up, Lieutenant Lindstrom was just saying to Sam Cragg: "That's your story, but you can't prove that you never met Piper before today."

"I didn't really meet him today," Sam retorted. "He was already dead when I saw him."

"Good for you, Sam," cut in Johnny.

Lieutenant Lindstrom whirled on Johnny. "Who're you?"

"Fletcher's the name, Johnny Fletcher."

"He's a pal of this man," explained Johnson. "I hired them together."

"As a team?"

"No—no, I just happened to need two men." Then Johnson suddenly grimaced. "Say, I hired this one," indicating Johnny with his thumb, "to replace Carmella Vitali, who had just quit his job. Uh, Carmella and Piper had a fight about a month ago."

"About what?"

Johnson shrugged. "I wouldn't know, but Piper threw a handful of counters in Carmella's face and then Carmella beat up Piper."

"Beat him up, huh? And Carmella quit his job today when Piper came back after a vacation. Mmm," the lieutenant pursed up his lips. "I suppose you've got this Carmella's address?"

"Yeah, sure. I'll get it for you—"

"In a minute, Mr. Johnson." Lieutenant Lindstrom suddenly looked at Johnny. "Car-

mella told you he was quitting his job today, didn't he?"

Johnny grinned lazily. "You'll have to do better'n that to catch me, Inspector."

"Lieutenant!" snapped Lindstrom. His eyes glowed. "Sort of a wise guy, aren't you?"

"I get by. There was a sign outside the building, MAN WANTED. Sam and I saw it and came in. Sam got hired, then Mr. Johnson heard that this Carmella chap had just quit his job and decided to hire me, too. That's all I know about Carmella. Not one bit more, not one bit less. I never saw Al Piper, I never saw this factory before this morning." Johnny shot his cuffs back. "I've got nothing up my sleeves. Nor has Sam. You're wasting your time on us."

Lieutenant Lindstrom bared his teeth. "Get back to work."

But Johnny didn't have to get back to his work, just then. A tremendously loud bell rang on the counter floor and every man at the counter benches rushed for the aisles leading to the lockers beyond. Johnny, looking at a huge clock on the wall, saw that both hands had met under the figure twelve. It was lunch time.

The workmen returned to the benches in a moment or two carrying lunches, wrapped in newspapers. Lieutenant Lindstrom walked off with Johnson leaving Johnny and Sam alone.

JOHNNY, his tongue in his cheek, stepped up to young Elliott Towner, who was taking off work apron. "How about joining us for lunch?"

"I was only going to run across the street to the lunchroom and have a sandwich," replied Elliott.

"A sandwich is okay with us."

Elliott looked at Sam, frowning. "Well, all right," he said, after a moment's hesitation.

"I worked up a nice appetite," said Sam, as they headed for the elevator. "Rassling them barrels. I think I'll have maybe two sandwiches and a glass of beer."

They rode down in the slow freight elevator. As they passed the office Johnny looked for Nancy Miller but failed to see her. He shook his head and followed Elliott Towner. Outside, they crossed the street and entered a grimy, smelly lunchroom.

There were no stools at the counter, but it was lined with standing factory workers. The menu was a slate on the wall.

"Corned beef sandwich and a glass of milk," Elliott Towner ordered.

"Two corned beef sandwiches for me," said Johnny, "and a glass of beer."

"Same for me, on'y two beers," chimed in Sam.

The sandwiches were quickly prepared and Johnny and Sam began to wolf their food. They finished their double portions before Elliott Towner got through with his one sandwich.

"Piece of pie," Sam ordered then.

Johnny nodded. "Me, too. How about you, Elliott?"

"No, this will do me."

The waiter punched three checks, put them on the counter. Elliott sorted them out, picked up his own. A sudden chill ran through Johnny. One-dollar ten was punched on his check, the same on Sam's.

"Uh, Mr. Towner," he said, "I believe I'm a little short, on account of just starting work, you know. I wonder if you'd—"

Elliott Towner frowned at him. "Look here, you didn't come out to lunch with me, just to—"

"Oh no, not at all. Only we *are* short and—"

"How much are you short?"

"Well, my check's a dollar ten and Sam's is, too. Two-twenty."

"That's the full amount. You've got *some* money."

"Not a red cent. Uh, you could take it out of our pay."

Young Towner exploded. "I tried to make clear to your friend here that I didn't own the Towner Leather Company. I'm an employee like you. I get twenty dollars a week and I have to live on it."

"With a little help from the old man," Johnny said sarcastically, "and the chauffer to bring you down to work."

"I've had about all I'm going to take from you two," Elliott said angrily. He started for the door, but Johnny gave a quick signal to Sam Cragg and the latter blocked his exit.

"Just a minute, buddy," Sam said truculently and put up a hand to stop Elliott. Elliott tried to knock the hand aside, was unable.

"Now, Elliott," Johnny said, smoothly, "Look at it this way, we've got a tab here for two-twenty; we can't pay it. Are you going to let it get out that two employees of Towner & Company were unable to pay a restaurant bill and had to wash dishes all afternoon while they were supposed to be sorting counters across the street?"

"You're not my responsibility," cried Elliott.

"Oh yes, we are," Johnny said, cheerfully. "Your name's Towner."

"All right," snarled Elliott, "I'll pay your damn checks!" He grabbed them from Johnny's hand and stepped up to the cashier's desk. Johnny and Sam waited for him at the door.

As they left the restaurant, Johnny said, "No hard feelings."

Elliott gave him a glare and rushed across the street.

Sam Cragg exclaimed in disgust, "Never saw a guy like that. He's got a gold spoon in his mouth and he wouldn't even give you a sniff of it."

"Of course," said Johnny, "our act was pretty crude. I wouldn't have pulled it on him if I hadn't been so hungry."

"I'm still hungry," Sam complained. "I've got a lot of eating to catch up on." He screwed up his mouth. "What're we gonna do about supper?"

"We'll face supper when we come to it. In the meantime we've got a couple of jobs on our hands."

"And a murder," Sam declared darkly. "For all you know, we may be spending the night in jail."

"Uh-uh," said Johnny. "Uh-uh."

V

THEY entered the leather factory and rode up to the fifth floor in the elevator. Wending their way back to the counter department, they discovered Lieutenant Lindstrom awaiting them at Johnny Fletcher's bench.

"Have a good lunch?" the lieutenant asked.

"It was all right," Johnny said, "not as good as we're used to, of course, but it was all right."

"Then you're all set for a nice afternoon's work."

Johnny looked sharply at the lieutenant. "You the foreman here now?"

"No, I just wanted to see you work."

"This is our lunch time."

Hardly had he spoken the words, than the bell rang and the counter sorters began streaming back to their benches. Johnny Fletcher picked up a counter, squeezed it and looked at the lieutenant.

"All right, I'm working."

"Go right ahead."

Johnny picked up a second counter, found that it was slightly imperfect and reached for the leather knife. It wasn't there.

"Looking for something?" asked the lieutenant.

"My knife."

"Isn't it around?"

"Cute," said Johnny, "You knew all the time it wasn't here; that's why you were hanging around. Well, it was here, when I went to lunch."

"It was here at twelve o'clock? But it isn't here now?"

"Al Piper was killed with a leather knife," Johnny said, "you think it's my knife. It isn't. Al was found a little after eleven. I was using my knife here until twelve o'clock. I can prove it." He turned to the old Dane, at the adjoining bench.

"Say, Pop, you saw me using my knife."

The old man scowled fiercely. "I didn't see nuttin'. I mind my own business. I don't know nuttin' 'bout nobody or nuttin'."

Lieutenant Lindstorm smiled wolfishly, but Johnny wheeled to the man at his right, a faded, sandy-haired man of about forty.

"Neighbor, you saw me using my knife just before lunch?"

The sandy-haired counter sorter shrugged. "I was busy before lunch."

"Sure, sorting counters. But you don't keep your eyes on them all the time. You couldn't help but look over here now and then. I looked at you enough times."

"So I was thinkin'."

"I think, too," retorted Johnny.

"But I see what people are doing around me."

"If you gotta know," the counter sorter said, coldly. "I was running down the horses in the sixth at Arlington. That takes concentration. Try it some time; past performances, post position, jockey, weight, condition of track. Do that sometime without a

Racing Form in front of you and you'll know what I mean about concentration."

"All right," said Johnny, "who's going to win the sixth?"

"Fighting Frank. He can do it in 1:10 if he has to—"

"Not with a hundred and twenty-six pounds," cried Lieutenant Lindstrom.

"He's done it before and he can do it again," insisted the counter sorter. "I got money says he can."

"Yeah? Well, I've got five on Greek Warrior in the same race."

"Greek Warrior's a seven-furlong runner; this race is only six furlongs. Ain't a horse at Arlington can beat Fighting Frank at six."

"What about Spy Song?"

"Phooey. An in and outer. All right when she was a two-year old, but hasn't done a thing since."

"Goodbye, now," Johnny Fletcher said, walking back to his bench.

Lieutenant Lindstrom winced and followed Johnny. "We didn't settle the knife business."

"No, but you settled the horse business. You're interested in that, aren't you?"

"A wise guy. We get you downtown you won't be so smart."

"You take me down to the station you'd better have the answers," retorted Johnny.

"You talk pretty big for a factory hand," sneered Lindstrom.

"I haven't always been a factory hand," snapped Johnny. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got some counters to sort."

Lieutenant Lindstrom gave him a wicked look, hesitated, then whirled on his heel and strode off. Johnny gave his attention to the counters on his bench. He picked them up, squeezed them, trimmed one now and then and piled them up in bunches.

FROM time to time Johnny sent a look off to the right where Sam Cragg was at his bench, squeezing and bunching up counters. There was a big scowl of concentration on Sam's face, which did not lessen as the afternoon wore on. Sam was unhappy at his work.

Shortly after three Karl Kessler stopped at Johnny's bench.

"How you coming along?" he asked.

"It's a tough job," Johnny said, "all these decisions."

"Huh?"

"Every time I pick up a counter I've got to make a decision—is it heavy, medium or reject? Keeps your brain working."

Kessler looked at him suspiciously. "Some fellas c'n do this in their sleep." He picked up one of Johnny's bunches of counters, opened it and tested each counter. "These are all right, for heavies."

"Heavies?" exclaimed Johnny. "Those are the mediums."

"Mediums? Where are the heavies?"

"The little pile in back."

Karl Kessler scooped up a bunch of counters from the rear of the bench, tested them individually and scowled. "How do you figure these are different from the mediums?"

"They're harder."

"Ah-h," grunted the assistant foreman in disgust. "These are all supposed to be heavies. They're seven iron, don't come much heavier. You shouldn't find more'n one medium out of twenty or thirty counters. Yours are running the other way." He hesitated. "Better sort 'em all over. Here, I show you." He scooped back an armful of Johnny's "mediums," began resorting them. "Don't squeeze 'em too hard, you bread down the glue. This is a heavy—and this—and this—"

"Guess I'm a little upset," Johnny said, lamely. "I don't usually run into a murder my first day on the job. That happen around here very often?"

Kessler shot a startled look at Johnny. "You kiddin'? Nothin' like that never happened around here."

"This Piper worked here a long time, didn't he?"

"Not so long, sixteen-seventeen years. Can't figure it out, he wasn't a bad guy, drank a little too much, bet on the horses, but outside of that, he was a good family man."

"He was married?"

"Oh sure, got three kids. I hear Mrs. Piper took it bad."

"Women usually do take it pretty bad when their husbands are murdered." Johnny paused. "Who's your choice for who did it?"

Kessler looked carefully around and

dropped his voice to a whisper. "He had a fight with the fellow that quit, didn't he?"

"Carmella?"

"Yeah, sure. You know some of those fellows belong to the Black Hand."

"The Black Hand! I haven't heard of them in twenty years."

"Yah! The Death Corner's only three-four blocks from here. Oak and Milton. They used to kill people there all the time."

"How long ago?"

"Not so long. Twenty, twenty-five years ago."

JOHNNY shook his head. The assistant foreman's idea of time was out of this world. A man who'd worked at the factory fifteen years was a virtual beginner.

Towner and Company was Karl Kessler's life. He had worked for the firm thirty-nine years. Two great wars had been fought in that time. The American way of life had changed.

Poor boys had become millionaires in that time. Children had grown up, married and become grandfathers.

Johnny said, "Is it your idea that the Black Hand's involved in this murder?"

"Who else? Carmella's a Blackhand and him and Al Piper had a fight."

"Carmella quit his job this morning; was that a result of the fight with Al Piper?"

Kessler frowned. "Well, maybe not exactly. Uh, he wasn't much good around here. Never sorted more'n fourteen hundred pairs a day and when I told him he'd have to hustle up—" He shrugged. "He got sore and quit."

"Fourteen hundred pairs a day," mused Johnny. "Seems like a lot of counters."

"Shucks, most of the fellas do two thousand pairs. Ain't nothin' for a man to do twenty-five, twenty-six hundred." Kessler gestured to Cliff Goff, the horse player. "How many pairs did you sort yesterday, Cliff?"

"Twenty-three hundred," replied Cliff Goff, "but it was a bad day. Hit some head leather seven and a half irons in the afternoon."

"That's bad?" Johnny asked.

"You'll see, head stock is spongy, uneven. You get a counter made of heavy head stock and it's like iron on one side and like mush on the other side. Here—" Kessler

thrust his hand at the pile of counters, "look at this piece. Beautiful piece of leather, ain't it? That's shoulder stock, smooth, even."

Johnson the foreman suddenly appeared from between two rows of barrels. He came up and halted between Johnny and Kessler. "How's he doing?" he asked the assistant.

"Pretty good for a beginner," replied Johnny.

"How many pairs have you sorted so far?" Johnson asked.

"About a thousand, I guess," Johnny said. "More or less."

"Less," suggested Kessler. "About six hundred less."

"That's not very many," Johnson said, "considering you've been at it since nine this morning."

"Don't forget we had a murder here."

"I'm not forgetting it," snapped Johnson. "But it'd be a good idea if *you* forgot it and thought more of your work. Remember, this is only your first day here."

He stalked off. Kessler hurried after him, talking and gesticulating with both hands. Johnny looked after them and began to wonder if his career at Towner and Company would be a very long one.

He slapped counters together, stood for awhile with feet planted far apart, climbed up on the high stool and took to standing again. His back ached from leaning over the bench and when he stood his feet hurt.

Four o'clock came and moved grudgingly to four-thirty. Sam Cragg deserted his bench and come over to Johnny. "We quit at five, Johnny," he said.

"Don't I know it? My neck's stiff from twisting it to look at the clock."

"Yeah, but what about some dough? We got to eat and get a place to sleep tonight. Don't you think we ought to get a— an advance on our pay?"

"You took the words right out of my mouth, Sam. Wait here."

Leaving Sam, Johnny headed out into the front part of the floor, where the row of moulding machines were banging and pounding. He caught sight of the foreman just beyond, near the glue tanks.

"Mr. Johnson," he shouted to be heard above the din. "How's about getting a small advance on my pay?"

"Sorry, Fletcher," Johnson replied. "That's against the company's rules."

"But Sam and I are flat broke. We don't even have money for supper."

"You wouldn't have had it, if I hadn't given you this job, would you?"

"No, but we'd have taken it easy all day. We wouldn't have been as hungry as we are now, after exerting ourselves all day."

"You've got a point there," conceded Johnson, "but it's a rule of the company. You can't make exceptions."

"No, I guess you can't," said Johnny in disgust. He started to turn away, but Johnson called to him.

"Here, Fletcher." He thrust a hand into his pocket and brought out a crumpled dollar bill. "Here's a buck for you, from me, personally."

"Thanks, Mr. Johnson, that's mighty white of you." Johnny cleared his throat. "Uh, you wouldn't have another dollar, would you? Sam Cragg's pretty hungry, too."

Johnson swore. "Damn you, Fletcher!" But he brought out another dollar and handed it to Johnny. "Now, keep away from me so I don't change my mind and fire you instead."

Johnny returned to the counter department and handed Sam one of the dollar bills. "Buck apiece was all I could promote," he said.

Sam was disappointed. "I had my heart set on a steak and French fry dinner."

"So did I. Where's Elliott?"

"He beat it a couple of minutes ago. He's the boss' son, he don't have to wait for the whistle."

"Damn," exclaimed Johnny.

"I was going to hook him for the steak dinners."

"After the way he acted this noon? I don't think even you could sell him on an encore."

"No? You underestimate me, Sam, when I'm desperate." His eyes suddenly narrowed. "Just a minute."

At the end of the line of counter benches was an old fashioned bookkeeper's desk, on which stood Johnson's telephone. Johnny strode to it and scooped the receiver off the hook.

"Nancy girl," he said into the mouth-piece. "This is me."

He heard her exclaim in astonishment. "Mr. Johnson."

"Uh-uh, not the foreman," Johnny chuckled. "Give me a couple of weeks, will you?"

"Fletcher!" she cried. "You want to get fired?"

"Not before I earn that twenty I need for Saturday. Look, Nancy, please do me a favor—"

"I'm doing you one, now. Get off that phone! The workers aren't allowed to use the phone."

"Sure, sure, the regular workers, maybe. But I'm not a regular worker. But to cut a long story short, has Elliott Towner breezed through?"

"Yes, now will you—?"

"Where does he live?"

"With his father—naturally."

"And where does the old man live?"

"Elmhurst."

Johnny winced. "That's way out in the country, isn't it?"

"About forty miles."

Johnny was about to hang up, but suddenly thought of something else. "What about Elliott's club?"

"The Lakeside Athletic on Michigan Avenue."

"That's it, Baby. Thanks a million. Remember Saturday—"

He hung up, started back toward Sam, but before he reached him the five o'clock bell rang and there was a mad rush for the sinks and lockers behind the rows of barrels. Johnny and Sam joined the stampede and had to wait in line to wash up.

"Do a good job, Sam," Johnny advised his friend.

VI

AT TEN minutes after five they left the leather factory and made their way to a nearby street corner. They clambered aboard a crowded street car and fifteen minutes later alighted at Madison and Wells.

Johnny started to cross the street and Sam caught his arm. "Hey, you're going east."

"Certainly."

"Yeah, but we want to go west."

"West? That's where all the flophouses are."

"Ain't that what we're looking for?"

Johnny shook his head. "Sam, you've got ninety cents and I've got ninety cents. On West Madison we can find a joint where we can get a steak for that, but where'll we sleep—and what about breakfast in the morning?"

"I hadn't thought about that," admitted Sam. "But east of here, everything's more expensive."

"We're all washed up," Johnny said. "A little dust on our suits, but we don't look too bad." He cleared his throat. "I thought maybe we might have dinner at the Lakeside Athletic Club."

"Huh?" Sam blinked, then reacted. "Not Elliott Towner—"

"Why not?"

"The way he acted this noon—"

"That was crude. I've had time to think now."

"All right, Johnny, he can't get any madder'n he is already."

"That's what I thought."

They walked swiftly down Madison and a few minutes later turned South on Michigan. The fourteen story building housing the Lakeside Athletic Club was just ahead.

Johnny turned into the club door, Sam crowding at his heels. A uniformed doorman looked inquiringly at them.

"Yes?"

"We're going in to join Mr. Towner," Johnny said, easily and would have gone through the inner door, except that the doorman moved a few inches and blocked his path.

"He's expecting you?"

"I rather think so."

The doorman reached to a high, narrow desk and scooped up a handful of slips of paper. He shuffled quickly through them. "There's no pass here."

"He probably forgot to leave one."

"I'll have to get an okay from him," the doorman said, picking up a phone. "Who shall I say is calling?"

"Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Cragg," gritted Johnny through his teeth.

"Michigan door, for Mr. Towner," the doorman said into the phone. "I believe he's in the steam room, now." He nodded, looked at Johnny and Sam. "Club rules, gentlemen. Hope you don't mind."

"Oh, we don't mind," said Johnny, pretending not to see Sam's warning signal.

The doorman turned back to his telephone. "Yes, Mr. Towner, Arthur, at the Michigan door. There's a Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Cragg here, say you're expecting them. No—? Just a moment, please." He covered the mouthpiece with a big hand. "Mr. Towner says he doesn't know anyone named Fletcher and Cragg."

"We're from the plant," Johnny said. "Tell him that. It's important that we see him. Extremely important."

The doorman spoke into the phone. "They say it's an extremely urgent matter, Mr. Towner. Very well, sir." He handed the phone to Johnny.

Drawing a quick, deep breath, Johnny said, "Mr. Towner, this is Johnny Fletcher."

"And who the devil is Johnny Fletcher?" boomed the deep voice of Harry Towner.

"I'm from the factory," Johnny said, in desperation, "I—I have something very important to tell you about that—regarding what happened at the plant this morning."

There was a moment's pause, then Harry Towner grunted, "All right, give me Arthur."

Johnny handed the phone back to the doorman.

"Yes, Mr. Towner?" said the doorman. He bobbed his head. "Very well, sir. Thank you."

He hung up the phone, scribbled quickly on a slip of paper and banged his palm on a bell on the desk. "Front!" he called.

A BELLBOY appeared from the lobby behind the little reception room. The doorman handed the slip to him. "Take these gentlemen to Mr. Towner in the steam room."

"This way," said the bellboy.

Johnny and Sam followed him into a large lobby, fitted out much like a hotel lobby. The bellboy headed swiftly for the elevators.

"Watch my cues," Johnny whispered to Sam Cragg as they followed the bellboy. "I asked for Towner and got the old Duke, instead of Elliott."

"Holy cats!" exclaimed Sam.

"They can't do more'n throw us out."

They stepped into the elevator and were whisked up to the fourth floor where the bellboy led Johnny and Sam along a corridor and finally into a huge room, containing

a fifty foot swimming pool and numerous steam rooms and cubicles where masseurs and attendants gave club members treatments.

The bellboy stopped a moment, looked around and located Harry Towner. The Leather Duke was wearing a towel about his waist and nothing else. The bellboy headed for him.

"Mr. Towner, these are the gentlemen to see you," he said and went off.

Harry Towner searched the faces of Johnny and Sam, then shook his head. "You say you're from the plant? I don't place either of you."

"The counter department," Johnny said.

"That's Hal Johnson's floor."

"Our boss."

"You mean you're—you're *laborers*?"

Johnny pushed out his lips in a great pout, looked down at his hands, then suddenly looked up and beamed at The Leather Duke. "Shall we say we're working as *laborers*?"

Towner scowled. "What do you mean?"

"There was a murder at your plant today, wasn't there?"

Towner stabbed a nicely manicured forefinger at Johnny. "Now, don't tell me you're police undercover men?"

Johnny closed one eye. You couldn't exactly call it a wink, because he kept the lid down for a long moment. "Mr. Towner, there are some things I can't tell you—not at this moment. Shall we just say that—that we're working as *laborers* at your plant and that we, ah, have important information pertaining to what happened there this morning."

"Now, wa-ait a minute," cried the leather man. "That plant happens to be my personal property. If there are any shenanigans going on there, I have a right to know."

"Exactly, sir. And that's why we're here."

"Well, spill it, don't just stand there throwing *hints* at me."

"It'll take a little while to tell. Were you, ah, about to take a plunge?"

"I just had a steam and a rubdown. I intend to have my dinner and then—say, you can tell me this over dinner. I'll be dressed in just a minute. You've got the time?"

"We've got the time," said Johnny.

Harry Towner hurried off to a cubicle

and Johnny and Sam exchanged significant glances. The ghost of a smile played over Johnny's lips.

"Dinner, Sam."

"Can you bull him through to the desert, Johnny?" Sam asked, eagerly. "It must be two years since I've had any."

"The desserts at the Lakeside are the finest in Chicago," Johnny said. "I hope."

Harry Towner came out of the little cubicle in a few minutes. "All right, gentlemen," he said, "we'll just run down to the grill room."

"How's the grub?" Sam asked.

Towner looked at him sharply. "I beg your pardon?"

"The food, Mr. Towner," Johnny said, quickly. "Mr. Cragg is a bit of a gourmet."

"Yeah, you might say," said Sam Cragg.

"I like good food myself," Towner rumbled. "That's the only fault I find with the cuisine here—you can't get a good steak."

"You can't?" cried Sam.

Towner shook his head sadly. "They don't know enough to buy meat ahead. A steak's got to hang for a couple of months or it's no good."

"You're absolutely right, Mr. Towner," enthused Johnny. "There's a little spot in Los Angeles, that is, in Santa Monica, down by the beach, where they really know how to cook a steak. They hang them in a cellar for three months, then scrape off the whiskers and put them on the fire—"

By this time the trio had descended a broad flight of stairs and entered a grill room that occupied about half of the entire third floor. Soft lights lit up each table and white-jacketed waiters moved smoothly in and out among the tables. A headwaiter led them to a table on a balcony raised a few feet above the main floor and brought them large menus.

Harry Towner looked at the card and shook his head. "You've given me an appetite for a steak, Mr. Fletcher," he said, sadly, "but they're simply impossible here. I believe I'll just have a water-cress salad and a glass of skim-milk."

"Oh, no!" groaned Sam.

Johnny said, "I'm a glutton for punishment, Mr. Towner. I've said over and over, just how bad can a steak be? And I've said to myself, never again, but—" He smiled brightly. "I'll try once more." He

looked up at the waiter. "I'll have a filet mignon and tell the chef to do his worst. Mr. Cragg, will you have he same?"

"With French fries," cried Sam, "and smothered in onions. And a big piece of apple pie—naw, make that apple pie alamo. And all the trimmings with the dinner. I'm hungry."

"Why, Sam," Johnny chided, "you *are* hungry!" He laughed merrily. "So am I, for that matter. Do you know, Mr. Towner, we actually *worked* today. Gives you a terrible appetite when you're not used to it."

"Yes, I imagine so," conceded Towner. He placed his forearms upon the table and leaned forward. "And now, sir, if you'll tell me what's going on in my leather factory—"

"Ah yes," said Johnny.

"Yeah, Johnny," agreed Sam, "go ahead, tell him."

"Go right ahead Mr. Fletcher. I'm not one of these men who can't talk business while eating. You just tell me the whole story."

"Very well, sir, a horrible crime was committed in your factory today. A murder."

"Yes, yes, I know that. Go on, Fletcher."

"Let's just take a look back. A quick look. The *Mafia* originated on the Island of Sicily, about the same time that its counterpart, the *Camorra*, was being born on the mainland in Southern Italy. The *Mafia* was an outgrowth of the Napoleonic Wars. The large landowners could not operate their farms, so they turned the work over to groups of ruffians, who by intimidations, threats and often violence, cowed other groups of ruffians, made them work the large estates. But soon the first group took things into their own hands.

"They rebelled against the landowners, put the squeeze on them and were soon the masters themselves. This was fine for the *Mafia*, but soon they were quarreling among themselves, one band of the *Mafia* against another. Many large bands were formed and all were at war with each other. They had only one law, in common to all of them, that was never to take their quarrels to the authorities. They were their own law, an eye for any eye, a tooth for a tooth. Abso-

lute secrecy was enforced upon all members. Terrible reprisals were executed against those who talked. As the years went by the *Mafia* became powerful in all classes. Politicians feared them, joined them. The *Mafia* spread into Italy proper, into other countries. They became powerful in the United States in the Nineties and in the early part of this century they ruled the Italian colonies in all the cities of this great country. Your factory happens to be located in what is definitely an Italian section of the city, Sicilian, I should say."

"It's called Little Italy, I know that."

"And you employ Italians."

"They make good factory hands, work reasonable and take orders. Much better than Germans or Irish, or even Bohemians."

"But the *Mafia*, Mr. Towner, confines itself to its own kind—Italians."

"The *Mafia*," exclaimed The Leather Duke, "is extinct. It was smashed during the twenties, at the same time that its power was broken in Italy—yes, by Mussolini. That was the one good thing the man did."

"The *Mafia* has been extinct before," Johnny said, sombrely. "It was destroyed in 1830, or so the Sicilian authorities believed. It was wiped out in the 1860's and again around 1892, but always it came back. More furtive, more secret, more terrible."

Harry Towner banged his fist upon the dinner table. "Are you trying to tell me, Fletcher, that the *Mafia* had a hand in the—the thing that happened today?"

"Mr. Towner," Johnny said, slowly, "I am not prepared to tell you that. It would be presumptuous of me to do so, at this stage. I'm merely telling you a little of the history of the organization, that's all, to show it has always sprung up when it was least expected to do so. The *Mafia*, or Black Hand, as it is commonly called—"

He stopped. Two waiters were bearing down upon the table with huge trays of food. Harry Towner glowered at Johnny, then at Sam. He leaned back in his chair and watched while the servitors spread the plates around the table, the little plate containing his water-cress salad and the large and numerous plates containing the viands ordered by Johnny and Sam.

Carrying Passengers Was a New Business; Why, Every Eye in the Front Office Might Be Breathing Down Your Neck by Television



Passengers ain't SHIPMATES

By
**RICHARD HOWELLS
WATKINS**

YOUNG Red Price, who usually kept at least one eye on Big Bill Guffey, was around the corner of the lower bridge with the rest of the washdown gang.

That gave Big Bill a chance to stick his oversize skull in the porthole. He let the hose in his hands go on sluicing down the deck while his sun faded blue eyes glowed happily at a camera on the berth inside. He grinned like a gargoyle and licked his lips.

This was on the *H. V. Strong*, a converted C-2 cargo ship, one day out of New York on her way down the coast through gray autumn seas to call at Norfolk. According to old Mr. Duval, the purser, who reads books, Big Bill Guffey is amoral.

"Come again, Mr. Duval," Red Price said when the purser sprang that one. "Bill is a big ape, not—what was that?"

"Amoral," Duval said, crinkling up his withered eyelids, "Moral—with the Latin 'a' or 'ab', meaning 'from' ahead of it. Guffey is from morals, Red—a long way from morals. He wasn't there when they were handed out."

"He was if you figure that morals is standing by a shipmate till a mortician takes over," Red Price said. "There was a time off Land's End when a green sea swept me

clean over the shelter deck rail. With that long arm of his he held on until—”

“Oh, yes, he has a certain loyalty to his gang.”

“Certain?” Red Price said. “Dead certain!” And he went back to wrestling with celestial navigation, being bent on getting an officer’s ticket some day.

Anyhow, there were no morals showing when Bill hooked his eyes on that camera. Bill dropped the hose in the waterway and ducked through the thwartship door.

You see, it was a passenger’s camera and to Bill passengers aren’t shipmates. Not them. Time was when a seagoing guy could get a little privacy. You signed on a freight-house and when she heaved in her lines off the dock you were clear away with nobody around except your shipmates.

But since the war they’ve run many a good freighter alongside somewheres, taken aboard an interior decorator, an advertising man and a gang of carpenters, packed the hands in tighter quarters below the two upper decks and zip! you’ve got ten to twenty passengers in your hair. No privacy. Pedestrians and bystanders all over your neck.

Also questions.

From where Bill Guffey stood, finding a camera on a passenger’s bunk was just like finding it on a rock somewheres. In his world there were shipmates and there were sons of swabs. No others. He went in there and picked up the picture box and while browsing he also found some magazines with pictures in them, a cute radio set the size of his fist and two decks of cards.

“The boys’ll be glad to have this stuff,” he told himself, splitting that God-awful pan of his with a proud grin.

But before he’d got the loot stowed under his pea jacket he heard the passenger coming. Being peaceable, Bill stood behind the door and when this big bollard-chested buck stepped in Bill belted him one behind the ear. The passenger went down without any fuss and Bill Guffey stepped out. Very pleased with himself, he was.

HE SLID down to the main deck, where he bunked, hid the stuff under some junk in the bottom of the steward’s broom closet and hustled back to his hose. The washdown gang was all there, by then,

leaning on their handles watching the hose run down the scuppers.

“Isn’t there enough water in that ocean yet, Bill?” Red Price asked. Bill Guffey grinned and went back to work.

Talking about water in the ocean, by the size of the roar that passenger put out when he come to, he had enough influence to have the sea dried up by Tuesday.

“Ted Handley, the president of this steamship line, is a classmate of mine!” he roared in Captain Brown’s ear. “That’s why I came on your tub, captain. Mr. Handley will not be pleased!”

He wanted blood, lots of blood and also his camera and stuff back. A middle-aged, sandy-haired walrus by the name of Horace Chester, that passenger. He started swelling below the third chin and didn’t come in again much above his knees, especially when letting go this howl. He made Bill’s sock sound like both world wars had been merged and landed on him. Of course he had something there; Big Bill Guffey didn’t know his own strength.

The Old Man was worried. This carrying passengers was a new stunt for the line and he felt like every eye in the front office was breathing down his back by television. He apologized and promised Chester he’d hang the criminal unless he guillotined him first. He got Chester out of his office. Then he closed the door.

“That’ll be Bill Guffey, blast his thick-skulled soul, sir,” said Mr. Gunnensen, the mate, solving Bill’s perfect crime in one bat of an eye. He knew his crew, the mate did. A camera, some magazines, a radio, two decks of playing cards and an almighty tough sock added up fast.

The Old Man tightened his jaw and wrinkles ran like lightning across his face.

Mr. Gunnensen hustled down to the fore-castles. They still call ’em fore-castles though they’re just crew rooms up and down the maindeck alleyways amidships. With a tongue like a bullwhip Mr. Gunnensen lit into Bill Guffey.

Bill was bewildered. The mate just didn’t seem to get this at all. The owner was a passenger, not a shipmate. What was the big fuss about? Hadn’t he heard all hands explaining to each other about passengers? He hadn’t killed the guy, had he? What more did the mate want?

When the world got too complicated for big Bill Guffey he had one out. He dumfied up. So now he stood there in front of the mate, a head and a half taller, though Mr. Gunnensen was no midget. His thick shoulders were slumped in on his chest like a dark angel's wings put on forward and his eyes fixed on one foot, which he was curling sideways on the deck. His mouth was shut tight as if it had been dogged down.

And there beside him was Red Price, A.B. who would have been small bones on the ooze of the bottom three thousand miles to eastward if Bill Guffey hadn't reached out an arm overside—and his neck with it—when a big wicked sea had come booming in over the starboard bow and floated them both. It had looked like overboard for Bill Guffey, too, but his grip on Red had never faltered while the sea roared over his head.

Red knew Bill Guffey had done this camera job. He knew all about Bill Guffey. Bill was simple enough to know. Red knew that once Bill landed in a clink on the beach he'd be spending the rest of his bewildered life in and out of it, mostly in. Because it would be too complicated for Bill ashore. A cargo ship Bill could get through his skull but not a world, especially one like this.

Tough. But just because a guy has saved your life does it mean you've got to go to bat for him when he pulls robbery and assault? Especially when it may mean the finish of your yen to be an officer?

Red lined up all kinds of plain reason and common sense against Bill Guffey. But each time the answer that came out of him was, *Get going!*

Red Price had to be Red Price, whether he ever got to be anything else or not. And Red Price couldn't keep both hands on the rail with Bill Guffey going overboard, no more than Bill had.

Red started thinking. He found it hard going, as usual.

"Search this fo'c's'le!" said Mr. Gunnensen to the third mate.

Red Price glanced at Bill as the third started on the room. Bill didn't look scared. That meant the loot wasn't in here. Red edged out into the alleyway. He turned around slowly. Outside here was also home grounds to Bill.

The library locker was locked. Red drifted over to the steward's broom closet.

Next minute he had the stuff. Feeling foolish, he gave the things a quick rub to get the prints of Bill's hooks off them and stowed them here and there on him.

THEY bulged more on his skinny frame than they did on Bill Guffey but if any of the deck hands saw what he was doing you couldn't tell it. Bill Guffey, the men knew, would always be a handy guy to have working alongside you in a jam on deck or if she burned, collided, nudged a mine or got blown ashore. He had the strength and he'd be putting it out for you. Blind as bats, all those guys in the alleyway went. But it was only Red Price who was doing anything solid for Bill—or trying to. Red was a fast thinker.

He grabbed a bucket as an alibi and hustled up the ladders into the passengers' country. The two portholes of Horace Chester's big cabin were closed now. He took a quick squint inside. The room was empty and the door was hooked back.

He eased into the thwartship corridor and drifted down the passage. He slid into Chester's room. He had the camera out from under his coat when he felt eyes burning into the back of his neck. He turned around and there was the Old Man in the doorway, with Chester at his shoulder.

They came in.

"Put the things on the bed, Price," Captain Brown ordered crisply.

Red Price obeyed. His brain was paralyzed. He backed into a corner.

Horace Chester laid a hand on the side of his neck, where Bill Guffey had landed. He looked down at Red Price, a little puzzled at his size.

"This man did it and then lost his nerve," the passenger said slowly. "Or else your first officer picked the right man, captain. In that case this confederate, here, returns my property so I won't prosecute this Guffey."

"Your second theory seems more likely," the Old Man said.

Chester scowled at Red Price. "Your scheme won't work. I'll jail that crook Guffey and you, too, my man. You can be sure that Mr. Handley, the line's president, who happens to be a classmate of mine, will join me in seeing justice done."

He looked sourly at Captain Brown.

"Aren't you going to iron this fellow, captain?"

Red Price badly wanted time to think. And he was in too deep to be fussy about how he got it. He shoved off from the locker behind him, ducked his red head and shot out of the room between the clutching hands of Captain Brown and Horace Chester.

"Stop!" shouted the Old Man. Chester's heavy feet chased Red Price down the passage for a way. But Red was making knots. Half of him cussed the other half, telling him that running on a ship was nuts. But the other half hung onto the notion that he had to have some time to think.

Red pounded forward and clattered down a ladder. Then, running lighter, he doubled aft and climbed to the passenger deck again. He jerked open a locker for deck gear on the port side and dived in under a bridge dodger and some canvas awnings. It wouldn't last long as a hiding place if Mr. Gunnerson carried out a thorough search but what place would?

Red put his knuckles to his temples and tried to line things up a little. He had botched this job but maybe he could still get Big Bill clear.

THE ship was off the Maryland coast and would soon have Cape Charles abeam and start crossing the broad mouth of the Chesapeake for Norfolk. Plenty of small craft in those waters. The ocean would be pretty cold.

If he could swing quietly overside with a life jacket and last a while there'd be a good chance he'd be picked up.

Desertion in that mess meant good-bye to his prospects of ever getting an officer's ticket and maybe good-bye to the sea altogether. But Red Price could get by on the beach. And with him out of the way after being caught with the things on him they'd never be able to hang anything on Bill Guffey—unless Bill talked.

That last thought turned on a sudden chill. Dummying up was sort of instinctive with Bill Guffey. But if they worked it right they would crack him, easy. They could start him talking by pounding it into him that his shipmate Red was taking the rap for him.

Red Price dug his knuckles harder into his head. Right here was the place where a

man who had the crust to shoot at an officer's ticket ought to be able to use his brain. He tried to break up the jam into little pieces so he could get a grip on something.

"Chester," he muttered, "That fat swab's the key to this mess, him being a classmate and buddy of the big boss."

If it wasn't for Horace Chester, of course, the Old Man and the mate, who knew their sailormen, would settle with Bill in their own way. They wouldn't end the big goof's usefulness on a deck by shooting him off to a Federal pen. They wouldn't waste a man who could steer, stand an honest lookout and splice wire. They'd ride his neck plenty till he'd never again lay even an eye on a passenger or his gear.

Red lifted his head. Some men were coming along the deck. They were tramping very heavy and not making much time. They went past.

Horace Chester. If there was some way of softening him up, of getting to him. Something made him tick. Something was big to him. It could be religion, fair play, family, flattery, money—something you could reach him through and call him off Guffey. What?

Red thought a lot more but he couldn't get into Horace Chester.

"Since I've scrambled things up I could come out, confess to Chester I'd pinched his stuff and then break away," he figured. "Maybe I could hide again till she's closer in."

By now the Old Man would be up on the bridge. The mate would probably be searching the ship with that gang.

Chester could be anywhere. His room was a likely place to locate him. It was risky. There was this about his room; Chester was more apt to be alone there than anywhere else on the ship. If Red could slip into his hanging locker—

It wasn't much of a plan but it was better than crouching there in the dark among the deck gear. Red eased open the door and stepped out onto the deck. An A.B. going up to relieve the wheel suddenly popped his head up the ladder. He shut his eyes as if Red Price was a cinder, and kept on going.

Most of the passengers, Red made out, were bunched forward on the lower bridge, watching the Bay open up ahead. Nothing

in the line of small craft around yet. But she was slowly closing the land.

He drifted in through the passage door, went ahead ten steps and then stopped dead. Leaning against the bulkhead with his eyes on the passage to Chester's stateroom was the young third mate. He was keeping a good watch.

Red backed out of that on his toes. He went aft around the house, came up the starboard side and risked a peek through Chester's porthole. The room was empty. Red stuck his head in the port and had a long look around.

A little desk stood right opposite the porthole. Red's grin was twisted as he saw that now nothing valuable was lying around loose.

His eyes came back to the desk. There was a mounted photograph on it, a picture of a group. It was too far away to make out any faces but it was of about thirty men dressed in Mexican get-ups with sashes. Red narrowed his eyes.

"TWENTY-FIFTH REUNION CLASS OF 1923," it said. One of those college things. Probably this Handley, the big boss of the line, was one of those classmates and Chester another. That was why he'd brought it. Being on the chase for learning himself and making rough weather of it, Red couldn't help being a little sour at these guys who'd had learning handed to them at a college.

Twenty-five years out and they were still making a roar about their college and class! Too bad he couldn't claim Bill Guffey was an old college buddy of Chester.

He pulled his head out of the port and backed away. He started sneaking down to the main deck to try for a chance to warn Bill Guffey to stay dummed up, regardless. If the mate had locked Bill in his forecabin and was away, combing the ship, there was a chance of reaching the big fellow.

HE DUCKED into a room on the main deck as he heard somebody come along. It was a messman, a first voyage Puerto Rican, and he was carrying a pair of handcuffs. He went into Guffey's room with them. Cuffs meant Mr. Gunnerson had to get tough with Bill. That would be because Horace Chester had a yen for Bill to be

ironed and the front office was too strong for the Old Man. Or maybe Bill was acting up.

Red listened. He could hear the mate's voice inside the room, still asking questions. No answers. Red wiped sweat off his face with his coat sleeve, walked around an O.S. who began staring at the bulkhead as if it was a movie screen and got out of there. He felt like a ghost.

It looked plenty bad—just because this passenger was a classmate of the big shore boss.

Red risked prowling around a little more, searching for Chester and wishing it was dark or the land was closer. Anyhow, passengers wouldn't know him, unless they noticed his red head. But if an officer sighted him he'd have to start running—and fast. He couldn't expect officers to look through him like men. They had their own standbys. Officers! If he couldn't get Bill Guffey out of this he didn't rate a ticket.

He went up a ladder and sighted Chester. The fat passenger was bellied up to the rail at the after break of the boat deck, scowling astern at the white water she was kicking up and tenderly feeling the side of his neck.

Well, this was it. Red Price walked up to him.

"Been looking for you, Mr. Chester," he said, trying to keep his voice from squeaking. Chester was startled. His scowl got blacker. He took a step forward and then stopped.

"The sooner you surrender yourself to the master of this ship, young man, the better off you'll be," he said, mighty rough. "We know you didn't steal my things or attack me from behind but you've gotten yourself in deep, nevertheless."

Red's heart dropped into his shoes. They'd figured out, then, he'd never have been able to land a wallop that high up on a man the size of Chester.

"That's true; I didn't pinch them," Red said slowly. "I was taking them back—for a shipmate. You wouldn't know about shipmates."

He looked Chester over with a lump getting heavier in his stomach. As people went, Chester was a long way off from him and Bill Guffey. Most likely Chester didn't figure they were the same species, even. A lands-

man, probably important, with much moola. Bunches of important friends. Classmates. A college man and all, not forgetting it after twenty-five years, either, with his cussed classmate in the front office.

Classmates? What were they, after all, except a kind of shipmate? Red Price reached out suddenly and grabbed Chester's arm.

"For a shipmate!" he cried. "That's why I did it! And he'd do the same for me!"

Chester stared at him woodenly.

"You know how it is, mister," Red went on. "Shipmates are like classmates. You stand by them. He's sort of simple but he stood by me and I'm standing by him."

His voice got thin with earnestness. "If you'll ease up on him I'll bawl the daylight out o' him and make him see—"

Chester shook his head. "That big thug was standing by himself alone—and always will be. Nobody else! Shipmates—pah! He deserves to go to jail and it's my duty to— Look at the fellow!"

The mate had come out in the waist of the ship three decks below, with Bill Guffey shambling along behind him in handcuffs. There was a man on each side of Bill. Gunnerson was taking the big A.B. to the hospital in the poop that could be used as a brig. In there he'd have no chance of breaking out with the help of buddies next door in an alleyway.

Even that far below them Bill Guffey didn't look too innocent. His bristly head was down and his thick shoulders were furled around it. His long hefty arms dangled in handcuffs in front of him. You could just picture what a judge would do to a mug like that.

"He's a shipmate—my shipmate—like you'd back a classmate—and once the cops get him—" Red Price babbled.

Horace Chester laughed at him.

"I've had faster talkers than you work on me, son," he said.

"But, mister—"

Chester's face was inflexible. Glancing past him, Red saw the third mate quietly closing in on him.

"You'll be better off away from a murdering brute like that," Horace Chester said firmly to Red. "Anti-social! You're kidding yourself, boy. He'd rob you just as quickly as he would me.. Now give yourself up to Captain—"

"I'll show you what I mean," Red Price croaked. "Shipmates!" He cupped his hands around his mouth.

"Bill! Bill!" he wailed and there was real despair in his voice. "Help!"

Bill stopped dead. He whirled around and the mate, making a grab for him, was knocked ten feet by his shoulder. Bill's head came up and his eyes popped at the sight of Red Price up there on the boat deck with Chester looming over him and the third coming at him fast.

"Bill!" cried Red again. "Stand by!"

He gulped in a breath and clapped his hands on the rail. Before Chester could move a finger Red jerked himself over and went falling down toward the steel deck plates thirty feet below.

Bill Guffey, with his legs spread and his knees bending like a gorilla, rocked from one foot to the other. His head was lifted high. His eyes were slitted now, gauging Red's falling body.

Bill ran in. His locked arms raised up, shuddered convulsively and the handcuffs parted with a little click. His arms spread out; he took another step and got right under Red's plunging body. He took the weight of Red Price squarely on his arms and chest.

The shock of it knocked the big guy down like the sock of a piledriver. He went flat on the deck and his head cracked against a ringbolt. He lay there like dead.

Shaking, Red Price crawled off him. He didn't risk climbing up onto his legs but as soon as he got one knee under him he looked up at Horace Chester.

"You see what I mean?" he quavered. "Classmates—I mean shipmates, mister! He'd ha' done it for any one of us."

Chester was hanging onto the rail. His face was paper white and his knees were buckling. After a minute he shoved off and came fumbling down the ladders to the deck.

THEY were waiting for him down there, not saying anything, and Mr. Gunnerson was pinching his narrow chin.

"Is the man dead?" Chester cried. His voice was hollow and high as he stood over the body. Bill made a fine looking corpse, spread wide out like that on deck, and it did seem a waste.

"Not Bill Guffey," said Red, looking up from beside the big seaman. "He's coming to. He's got plenty of bone in him, especially in his head."

Horace Chester turned to the mate. "Ah—of course there is no convincing evidence against this man," he said and now his voice had the shakes.

"No," said the mate.

"He has certainly been punished, anyhow," Chester said. "And I—I would not like to expose my shipma—my classmate, Mr. Handley, to a suit for false arrest. So-So—"

"I see what you mean," Gunnensen said.

Bill Guffey was sitting up with questions all over his solid mug.

"I got a good mind to have the Old Man log you for busting my handcuffs," Mr. Gunnensen said to him, mighty savage, as he felt for his key. "And you"—he looked at Red Price—"I suppose I got to go on checking your navigation. Just because we happen to be shipmates."

Horace Chester stared for a moment, then nodded his three chins.

"That's how it goes," he said and turned out a feeble grin. "I'll have a word with the captain."

"He's lettin' me go?" Bill asked. His eyes bulged. "Gee! Even passengers can be shipmates!"

"He's a fast learner," Red told Chester proudly.



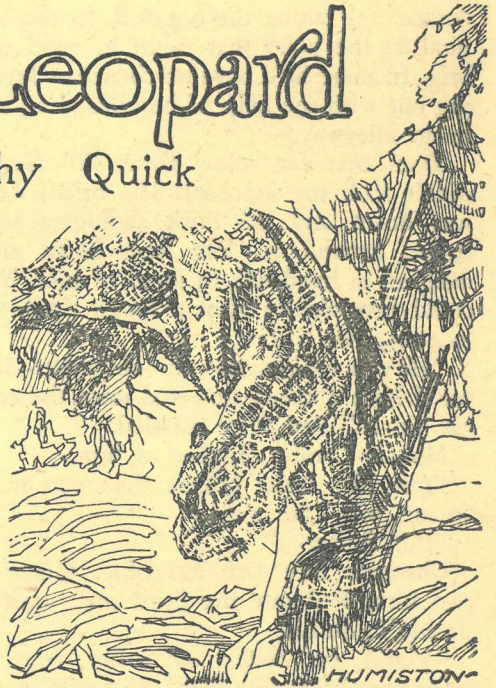
Snow Leopard

by Dorothy Quick

OUT of unending silences of snow
Comes the snow leopard. Gleaming in
his eyes

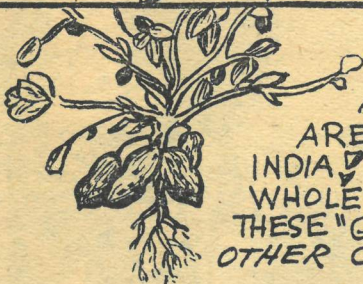
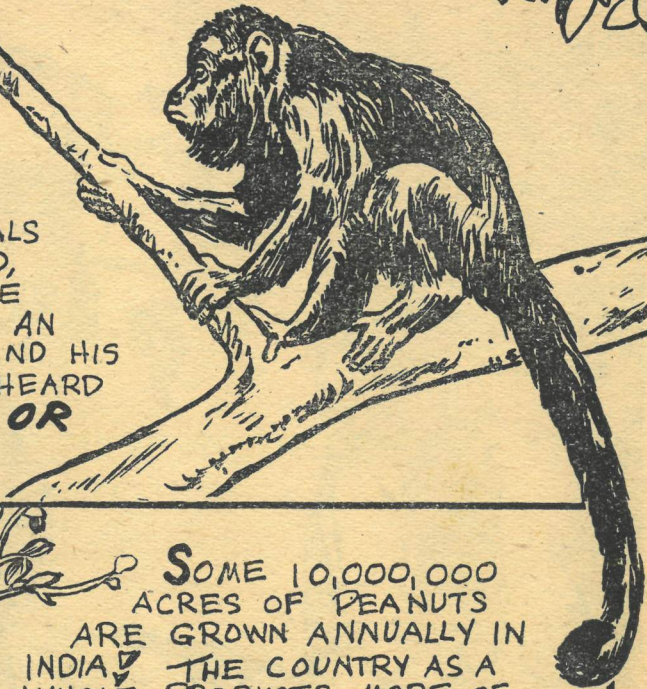
The vision generations can bestow
To make their progeny alert and wise.
His fur is pillow gentle and his feet
Stealthily padded hold the hidden claws.
His is a world where everything is meat
For appetites prehensile. His no cause,
Yet in him there is wisdom and a sense
That makes his eyes more kindly than his
might.

He is attuned to landscapes so immense
That mortals must seem puny to his sight;
Within him there is majesty and power,
Courage to meet each fateful coming hour.



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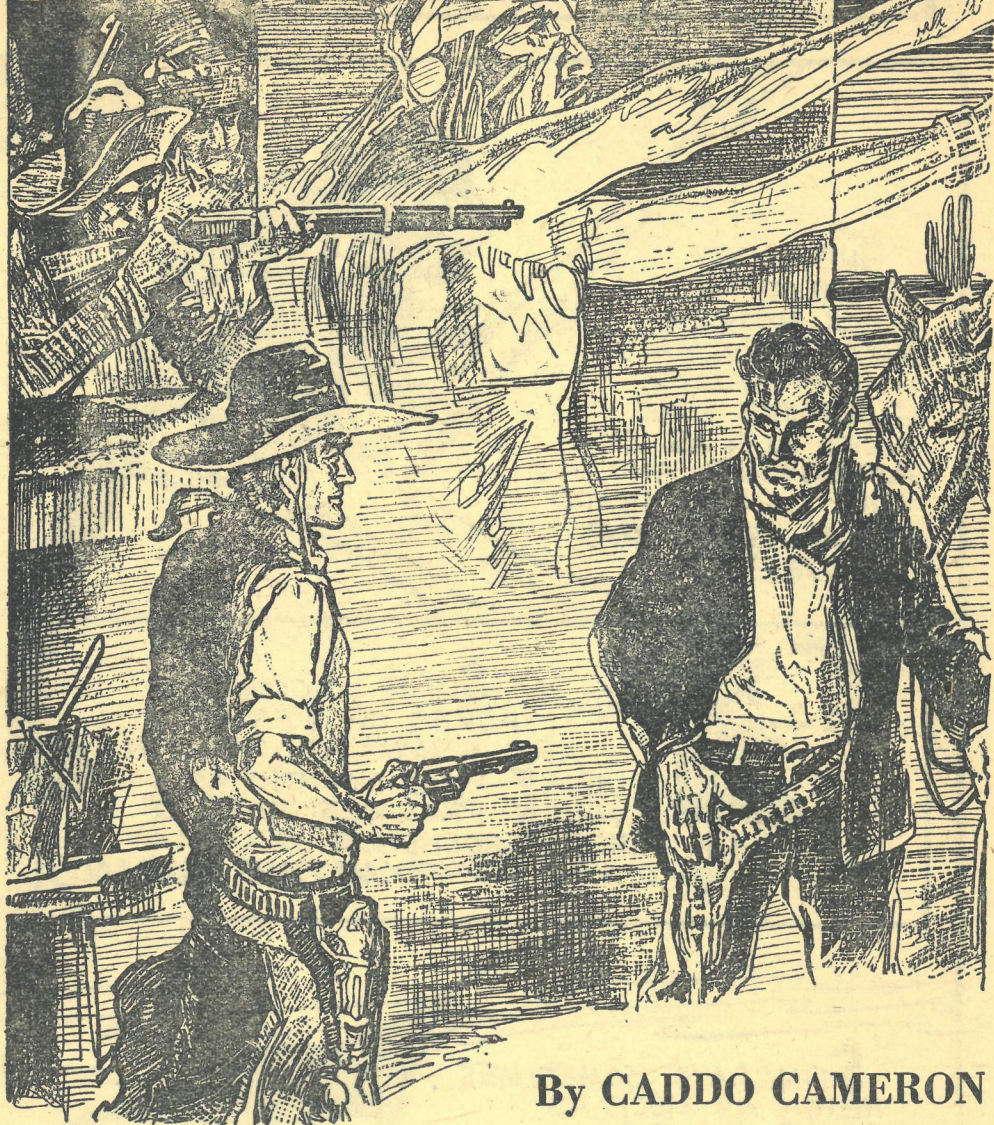


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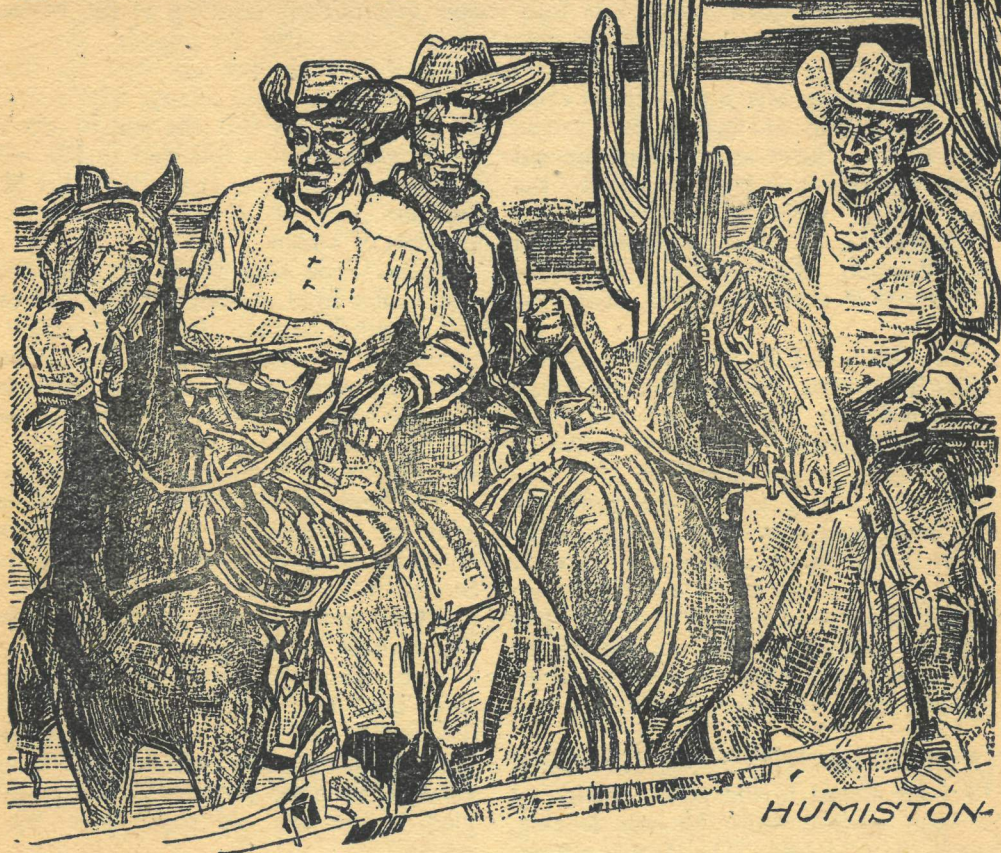


By CADDO CAMERON

*“Well, After All, Who in
Hell Wants to Live a Long
Ways from Trouble!”*

A SMALL column of dust boiled out of the brush, hotly pursued by a larger one. Hidden high in the dense foliage of an ancient liveoak on the edge of Mustang Prairie with an evening sun behind them, two young men gazed northeast across a gently rolling sea of chaparral and speculated upon what moved beneath that dust. It might be danger, and hard experience in this lawless country had taught these boys

the Brush!



the value of caution. Under the canopy of the fifteen-foot chaparral that blanketed a large part of Southwest Texas from the Nueces to the Rio Grande, there lived many things, most of which avoided daylight and hunted shadows—creatures born wild and those that had gone wild, men and other animals alike.

Matt Shannon's lean dark face was serious. He said to his partner, "Looks like they're on the Willow Springs Trail. It's one rider runnin' from three four more and I can't understand why he doesn't take to the brush."

Broad shouldered and stocky with powerful arms, Jose Santos reached up and drew himself to a higher limb as if his one hundred ninety pounds were nothing.

Though he was a *Tejano*, (Spanish or Mexican citizen of Texas by birth or naturalization,) Jose spoke the lingo of the southwestern cattle country with scarcely an accent. "Thinks he can out-run 'em, I reckon. Hope he ain't a-pointin' trouble our way."

"Me, too," muttered Matt. "Lord knows we've had a-plenty. If we can get by another year without tanglin' with some of the big cattlemen around here, we can stop gatherin' strays and stolen stuff and spend all our time a-buildin' up our own brand. That way we'll quit makin' so damned many enemies."

Age had come early to Matthew Shannon, for he was not yet twenty-one, and tragedy had left its mark upon him. Shortly before

his sixteenth birthday he and Jose, together with the *vaqueros* and their families and the American hands at El Rancho Valle Verde, his father's outfit, had gone to a San Jacinto Day celebration and were away two days. Jose's father, Juan Santos, was foreman or *caporal* at Valle Verde. The Santos' ancestors were on the land and employed by the owner when Matt's grandfather came over from Ireland and bought the "league and a labor," (4605 acres) from the old don to whom it had been granted by the Spanish king. Only the *caporal* and his wife remained at home with Brian and Mary Shannon, Matt's parents, for Brian had insisted that all the others attend the *fiesta*.

When Matt and Jose returned with the holiday party that morning five years ago they found that Valle Verde had been raided, all buildings destroyed or gutted by fire and their people murdered. No witnesses were living to tell the gruesome story, or at least none came forward to do it. The sign indicated that it was the work of Indians, only one set of boot tracks being discovered, and a band of Lipans had been seen passing through the country the day before. However, the atrocity remained a mystery in the opinions of many.

MATT SHANNON'S long and whippy body flexed to the gentle motion of the limb against which he was leaning. Quietly, he told Jose, "That fool is a-head-in' for the prairie. He'll be within easy range of 'em when he hits open country where they can get a clear shot at him."

As often happened, their conversation switched to Spanish then, which they spoke as well or better than English. "Yes, and I do not understand it," said Jose. "Neither do I like it. He will enter the prairie near us and if there is shooting, three or four against one—I know you, my *capitan*."

"And why not?" returned Matt. "Since that day of sorrow, my friend, you and I have been two against many and it has taught us to sympathize with those who are fighting odds. No?"

"Yes, and I like it that way."

While waiting for whatever might emerge from the thicket, Matt Shannon thought back over the past five years—a habit with him. His father had left a will

giving everything to him, an only child with no near relatives, and asking that the court appoint as his guardian Brian Shannon's good friend, Louis Oppenheim, the San Antonio banker. In his mind's eye Matt now saw himself standing in the banker's office shortly after the tragedy. Again he heard the kindly Jew say that his father owed the bank some money, which would be written off so that the son of his old friend might have a fair start in life without a burden of debt. It was then that Matt Shannon grew up, shouldered the responsibilities of a man.

Valle Verde tally books showed, (estimating five head yearlings and up, for each calf branded annually, less sales—a rule of thumb on the open range in this region), that there were enough cattle in the brand, plus the horse stock on the ranch, to liquidate the Shannon indebtedness. Matt insisted that Valle Verde brands be transferred to the bank to satisfy the mortgage and with the approval of the court, this was done. He and his constant companion, Jose Santos, made hands at gathering the stock and later, in the ruins of the Shannon home they burned the mortgage.

Matt, the sentimental and imaginative Irish boy, had remarked then, "My big dad always used to tell me, 'Pay your debts, son, and hang onto Valle Verde.' If he's watchin' us now, Jose, betcha he's mighty glad to see that old paper goin' up in smoke."

Left with only the clothing on their backs, a rifle and six-shooter apiece, two saddle horses and a pack of three dogs trained to hunt wild cattle in the chaparral, the boys had gone to work and proved their spunk. Even then they were qualified brush hands who knew every animal path and hidden watering in the thickets for miles around. The country swarmed with wild horses, so Matt and Jose turned mustangers and presently had caught, gentled and trained a band of saddle stock ideal for work in the brush where a horse from open country would kill up quickly. Meanwhile, they lived in the chaparral and in the ruins of Valle Verde when at home, selling an occasional horse for a little cash.

After having thus mounted themselves, the boys went to several of the big cattlemen running stock east of the Nueces,

whose stuff was continually drifting into the brush country or being driven there by thieves, and made contracts to deliver strays at the river for One Dollar a head. They came home with powers-of-attorney to take possession of stock in more than one hundred different brands. It was a tough and dangerous game, man-killing work, but they had made some money and done a lot of living, too. Naturally, Matt and Jose had run into trouble with known thieves and others who were thieves in disguise and, by recovering stolen stuff and strayed animals at the mercy of thieves, they had made enemies far and wide; all of which merely served eventually to age, season and harden them.

A HORSE plunged from the chaparral as if a devil were nipping at its heels. Lying flat along its neck and quirting and spurring like mad the rider couldn't be identified at that distance, but the boys quickly recognized the stockinged bay as belonging to Felipe Diaz, a *Tejano* who used to ride for Brian Shannon and still lived in a *jacal* (hut) on Valle Verde property less than a mile from headquarters. Years ago Felipe had been captured and tortured by bandits, rescued by Matt's father, and the experience had affected his mind. He had not spoken a word since then, so far as anyone knew, though he was in good physical health, usually understood when spoken to and could work as well as ever. At times Felipe appeared to be entirely sane, except that he couldn't or wouldn't talk or attempt to communicate with others in any manner. Diaz avoided people and spent most of his time wandering alone in the brush. However, he seemed fond of Matt and Jose and occasionally helped them to gentle a particularly bad horse or to handle a gathering of wild cattle.

"Why, that's Felipe!" exclaimed Jose. "Wonder who's after *him*. He never does nothin' to nobody—don't even pack a six-shooter."

"We'll find out in a minute," said Matt. "Now we know why he didn't take to the brush. Poor cuss is like a wild animal a-runnin' for its den instead of hidin' right where it is."

The pursuers were not far behind. They dashed from the crooked trail through chap-

arral onto the open prairie, three men riding hard, a small fellow leading them on a tall sorrel.

"Damn the luck!" growled Matt Shannon a moment later. "John Henry Jones and his two toughs, Barney Weaver and Gip Little! Here I been hopin' we wouldn't tangle with any of the big fellas and yonder comes the biggest one of 'em all, a-fetchin' us trouble."

"Maybe Felipe will make his getaway," suggested Jose.

"No chance. Looky there!"

Jones threw up an arm, reined in suddenly. Over his shoulder he snapped an order at Barney Weaver. The big fellow jerked his rifle from its scabbard, leaped to the ground, dropped on one knee and fired. Felipe's bay stumbled, somersaulted. He hit the ground rolling, came to his feet and ran like a fleeing fox toward the nearest brush. The riders sank home their spurs. Gip Little, a tall and lanky man, took down his rope and shook out a loop. They caught the *Tejano* within one hundred yards of the tree in which the boys were hiding. Little sat his horse down, jerked and threw Felipe with stunning force.

Jose Santos muttered an oath in Spanish.

Notwithstanding all that serious trouble with the rich and powerful John Henry Jones might mean to him, Matt Shannon neither gave the danger another thought nor hesitated a second. "Come on," he said quietly. "We better go and see what's comin' off out there."

Perhaps the most noticeable thing about Matt was the way he moved. Gaunted up but not weakened, hardened but not stiffened by years of gruelling work in the saddle and afoot in the brush, he moved with the light-footed ease of a cat and the grace of a dancer. As for Jose—in movements and speed he was like a bear, and *El Oso* some folks called him. The boys dropped into the brush at the base of the tree, crept a few yards to the edge of the prairie.

Barney Weaver was tying Felipe's hands behind him. Gip Little's rope was looped around his neck and Gip and Jones were sitting their horses, waiting for Weaver. In a moment Barney mounted and they drove Felipe toward a liveoak a short ways south of the boys. Matt and Jose quickly bur-

rowed through the chaparral to a point behind the tree and close to it.

John Henry Jones had a pleasant voice, neither loud nor harsh. "There's a good limb," he said. "It's out in the open. I want Matt Shannon to find one of his thieves a-hangin' on his own land. It ought to be a lesson to him."

Barney and Gip started to dismount. A few quick steps carried Matt into view beside the tree trunk. He asked quietly, "Can you prove that Felipe Diaz is a thief, and why d'you think that I need a lesson?"

Weaver and Little dropped back into their saddles. John Henry Jones folded his hands on his saddlehorn, showed no sign of surprise, and he grinned. The only evidence of Indian blood bequeathed to him by an Apache mother were remarkably keen dark eyes set deep above high cheek bones, for his hair and skin were light.

"Howdy, Matt. There's Jose, too," he said easily. "Yes, we caught Diaz drivin' four O-Bar-O steers this way on the Willow Springs Trail. I own that iron, you know. Bought it from Jake Simms two year ago. As for the lesson, boy—we all need a lesson ever so often." To Barney and Gip, he added, "It's gettin' late and we've gotta hit for home. Go ahead and get it over with, fellas."

Matt Shannon's thin face seemed to have grown thinner and darker and his lips had lost a little color, for he felt the strain of the moment. His next move might change the whole course of his life, either bring it to a violent end or make him an outlaw with a price on his head.

"You're the one who needs a lesson, Jones," he said calmly. "Even if Felipe is guilty, which I doubt like hell, you haven't got any right to hang him. We're supposed to have a law to do our hangin' and nobody talks more about law and order than you do. Barney and Gip—you better take it sorta slow and easy."

Felipe Diaz had Latin eyes—large and soft, and now they fixed wistfully upon the slender boy as if trying desperately to tell him something that he ought to know. There was the light of sanity in those eyes, too, though it frequently flickered as if in danger of being snuffed out by the stress of emotion. Matt saw this, was touched by it. *To the devil with consequences!* He moved

quickly to the *Tejano's* side, his right hand swinging carelessly near his holster. Jose stepped into the open, folded his big arms across his chest. With his left hand Matt reached to the back of his belt and drew his bowie knife, cut the thongs that bound Felipe's wrists and lifted the loop from around his neck.

While this was going on neither Jones nor his men made a move or said a word, though it was apparent that Weaver and Little needed only a nod from him to make their play. The cattleman sat his horse with perfect composure, grinning dryly.

Sheathing his knife, Matt calmly told him, "If there's ever any hangin' done on my land, I aim to do it myself. Have Felipe arrested for cow stealin' if you're a mind to. I'll guarantee to round him up when he's wanted."

Jones said nothing at the moment.

Obviously spoiling for a fight, big Barney Weaver exploded, "What the hell, John Henry? You can't let him run a sandy on us like this! He's every bit as cussed as his old dad was, and—"

"Be still, Weaver!" Matt Shannon didn't lift his voice above a conversational level, but it cut like cold steel. "You need a lesson. Felipe needs a horse. That bay was one of the few friends he's got. It was an orphan colt and he raised it on a bottle. You either give him fifty dollars to buy him another horse, or get down and strip off your riggin'. Make 'aste, now!"

This surprising demand knocked the breath out of the Jones men. Jose Santos was close beside Barney Weaver before the big man decided what to do about it. Then Barney made a pass at his holster. Jose's long arms shot up and his steely fingers clamped on Weaver's wrist. The horse reared, Santos gave a violent jerk and a heave and Barney landed on head and shoulders with the breath momentarily knocked out of him. Jose flipped the fellow's six-shooter out of its leather and tossed it aside.

Meanwhile, Gip Little tried a sneak draw under cover of the excitement. Matt Shannon went for his gun in the way he did nearly everything else—no fancy motions, just plain smooth and easy and mighty fast.

"Stop it, Little!" he snapped. "That's it. Now keep 'em up."

Gip stared at the muzzle of Matt's six-shooter as if he didn't believe it. John Henry Jones sat with hands folded on the horn of his saddle and grinned through it all.

"Too bad, fellas," he said quietly, "but it's your own fault. I've warned you that these kids are poison."

The cattlemen's keen eyes took Matt's measure, stopped at his face. "I'll give Felipe the fifty dollars for his horse. I told Barney to shoot it." He tossed over three gold pieces, two twentys and a ten. "Anything else you want?"

A small frown drew lines in young Shannon's forehead. What was gnawing on Jones? He was known to be a fighter from who laid the chunk, cold, ruthless and selfish clean through and through. Nobody had ever put anything over on him and got away with it. How come he was backing down today? *It ain't natural*, thought Matt. *Somethin' up his sleeve and I'd better try to find out what it is.*

"All we want, Mistah Jones," he answered politely, "is to be left alone. We're mighty busy attendin' to our own business."

The cattlemen nodded. The grin left his thin lips and moved up to his deepset eyes. "And if I'm not mistaken, you're in the business of brandin' other men's cattle."

"That's a lie, Jones," retorted Matt quietly. "We never iron up anything but genuine mavericks, stuff upwards of a year old with smooth sides and slick ears and not trailin' a branded cow. After what you just said, mistah, I wish you'd make a fight. Why won't you do it?"

John Henry Jones narrowed his eyes slightly. "You're a minor and Louie Oppenheim is your guarden. Otherwise, Matt, I'm not afraid of you, not a particle."

Young Shannon holstered his six-shooter, nodded for Little to lower his hands. "I savvy how it is with you, Jones. There may come a time when you want to borrow money from Oppenheim. I'm sorry you let that stand in your way, but you won't have long to wait. A week from today I'll be twenty-one and Jose is just a day younger than me. Reckon you're plumb glad to hear that."

The rancher smiled, said politely, "Yes, boys, I'm right glad that you'll soon be men." He lifted his reins. "Come on,

fellas. We're through here for the time bein'."

"Don't forget your Colt, Weaver," said Jose. "You might need the thing."

Barney picked up his six-shooter and climbed onto his horse, his face a thundercloud. He glared down at the boys, and growled, "I'll see the time when I'm lookin' at you through smoke, and you're too damned dead to skin!"

THIS evening the boys returned to what had always been their home, Valle Verde. Built around a flagstone patio the long U-shaped adobe was a roofless shell now, except for the kitchen which they had covered with poles and thatched with long grass tied in small bundles and laid on like shingles. Here they had lived for five years, when not in the brush, and would continue to live until they could afford to restore the Shannon home. Matt was determined to do that some day.

Tonight his spirits were low. The reaction after his clash with Jones had something to do with it, but mainly it was Barney Weaver's remark, ". . . every bit as cussed as his old dad. . . ." Matt knew that Brian Shannon was cussed—a fighter—and he also knew that if Brian's father and mother and friends had been murdered Brian would've devoted the balance of his life, if necessary, to hunting down and punishing the killers. That's what Brian Shannon would have done. And that's exactly what Matt and Jose had resolved to do, then old Padre Bartolome talked them out of it—no preaching, just good common sense—convinced the boys that the pursuit of revenge was a wicked waste of time because when you got your revenge it didn't do anybody any good. But there were times when Matt Shannon had his doubts, thought maybe he was throwing off on the job, and tonight was one of them.

After supper, he and Jose went and sat on a bench under a huge hackberry in the back yard. Neither the *Tejano's* jokes nor his gay songs could rout Matt's despondency, and for once he was insensible to the beauties of the place he loved. Their dogs, Thorn, Cactus and Dagger, came and lay at their feet, and a big moon made ghostly shadows around them. Above them a mockingbird sang to its mate on the nest, but

Matt scarcely heard the little fellow. A barred owl boomed its challenge and ended with a gargle that sounded like it was choking, but the boy didn't smile as usual. Down in timber on the spring branch an old bullfrog ground out his thunderous song, which suddenly stopped with a squeak as if a raccoon had got him. The dogs lifted their heads, worked their noses and ears, then looked hopefully at Matt—*Good huntin' tonight, boss*—But Matt wasn't in a mood for sport. The dogs looked at Jose, then. Quick to respond to his friend's emotions, the burly *Tejano* had himself fallen into a somber silence. The dogs lay down again.

Two hundred yards out there the silvery prairie ended at a dark and forbidding wall—the brush. Many and varied sounds combined to compose the nocturnal song of the brush—beautiful, wild, happy, sorrowful, boisterous, plaintive, savage and fearful sounds, made by all manner of things—the living and the dying. Suddenly the voice of the brush was stilled. All nature stopped to listen to another voice, a male tenor, weird and unearthly like the voice of a spirit attempting a rollicking drinking song while suffering the torments of the damned. In Spanish it sang a song that dead Brian Shannon had often sung to the accompaniment of dead Juan Santos' guitar:

"Know ye not pulque,
That liquor divine?
Angels in heaven
Prefer it to wine."

And two more verses lauding the virtues of the Mexican Indian's favorite drink, extracted from the *maguey*, *agave* or Century Plant, as it is called.

Neither Matt nor Jose moved a muscle. They froze there in the shadow of the hackberry, lips parted, eyes staring fearfully into the night, listening breathlessly to a ghostly voice singing their fathers' song, the song they had so often heard their fathers sing while wine glasses tinkled and their mothers laughed. The song of their fathers always ended in a joyous shout. This song from the brush ended in a cry of anguish.

Immediately, the voice out yonder dropped into a chant, slowly rising and

falling, a weird and somber thing in both tone and words:

"Father, I am about to die.
Let me die with courage
As a man dies.
Drive fear from me,
For I am about to die."

The chant left dead silence behind it. Cactus and Dagger crept closer to their masters' feet, trembling, whining. Old Thorn pointed his scarred face at the sky and howled dolefully. Then the night song of the brush burst forth at normal volume as if the mysterious voice was so soon forgotten. In the brush, mysteries were commonplace things, for mysteries were born in the brush.

Jose Santos now stood in the shadow of the tree as if rooted there, mumbling prayers and crossing himself. Matt Shannon had broken into a cold sweat. His fists had clenched so tightly his fingers cramped. He brushed a hand across his forehead. Veins stood out there. His father's *pulque* drinking song—why had it come back to sadden and torment him tonight? Was that the spirit of Brian Shannon crying out for vengeance? Was the spirit of the father upbraiding the son for failure to seek revenge upon his murderers? Matt didn't know. Padre Bartolome was a wise old man, but maybe he had been wrong about revenge. Matt didn't know.

And the chant, an Indian death song—somewhere, sometime Matt had heard it before, was frightened by it. When? Where? The tantalizing memory seemed to spring from his earliest childhood, elusively moving up to the borderline of his conscious mind, then fading away again. What, if anything, did the chant mean to him tonight? Did it tell him something that he should be able to interpret? This chant would haunt him until he solved the riddle.

Neither of the boys had much to say now. They went to bed in the ruins of Valle Verde. They *tried* to sleep.

THE following morning Matt was already awake when Jose turned in his bunk, and wanted to know, "After sleepin' on it, what d'you think about last night?"

Matt grinned. "Last night I didn't know,

what to think. 'This mornin' I know less than ever.'

"D'you reckon it was a spirit?"

"Bein' all Irish," answered Matt, "maybe I'd ought to believe in ghosts, but somehow or other I don't. What say we try to forget last night and go to thinkin' about today and tomorrow and next day? We've got a heap of gettin' ready to do, and I ain't talkin'."

"Gettin' ready for what?"

"Trouble," answered Shannon soberly. "It's on the way and a-ridin' hard. I figure it'll hit us inside of ten days. I mean John Henry Jones. He may not have a hand in it himself, but he'll be behind it and anything that Jones is behind is bound to be big and bad. Now, I been layin' here a-thinkin' some. With our maverickin' and the stuff we've been able to buy and the calf crop we've branded the last three four years, we'd ought to tally better than a thousand head in our Flyin' S brand. That little dab of cows ain't much in Texas, but it's a nest egg. We *could* sell out and run out and go somewheres else and start us a one-cow ranch a long ways from trouble. You're my pardner. Got any ideas?"

Jose Santos swung his bare feet to the flagstone floor and sat on the edge of his bunk. Naked to the waist, he stretched his long arms over his head and yawned. Great muscles rolled and rippled and knotted beneath his brown skin. "Who in hell wants to live a long ways from trouble?"

"That's what I figured," drawled Matt dryly. "Lawdy! It's a-breakin' day. Time we was in the saddle."

SPURRED by the conviction that serious trouble wasn't far away, Matt and Jose drove themselves harder during the next few days than ever before. First—they hired two *vaqueros*, Tomas and Ramon Perez, brothers whose father had worked for Valle Verde in the old days. Then Shannon and Santos went out and literally rode themselves into the ground, often changing horses four and five times in a day and night, chousing wild cattle out of the brush with dogs in daylight and snaring others that ventured into open places after dark to feed, penning or roping and tying the savage brutes, later driving to Mustang Prairie where the *vaqueros* were holding

their gatherings and loose herding their saddle stock. Meantime, they branded every maverick they combed out of the chaparral.

Often unmanageable cattle were necked to oxen, six of which Matt had bought for that purpose. One of these gentle beasts would bring the meanest critter home from the chaparral and partly tame him on the way, or the ox would hold him in one place until the *ladino* became somewhat accustomed to restraint.

With what they had already gathered, at the end of four days the boys had shaped up a bunch of two hundred head of strays in several different brands for delivery east of the Nueces. The spooky cattle were nowhere near herd-broke, so they'd need Tomas and Ramon to help on the drive and Matt went and asked Felipe Diaz to stay at Valle Verde to guard the horses. The strange *Tejano* gave no sign that he understood, but that evening he showed up with his blanket, skillet and coffee pot. He wouldn't sleep in the remains of the ranch house, hadn't crossed its threshold since the raid.

Two days later a representative of Tom Marble's big outfit received the cattle, said he'd notify the other owners at the next stock meeting, if not before, and he paid the boys their two hundred dollars. Jose and the *vaqueros* went home with strict orders not to leave headquarters for fear of running into trouble somewhere. Matt rode up to Oakville, left his horse at a livery stable and caught the San Antonio stage. Tomorrow would be his twenty-first birthday.

When Matt Shannon rode down to Valle Verde a few days later he bore the responsibilities of manhood, legal and otherwise, and his lean jaw may have been a shade firmer, his long back a little straighter. Jose and the *vaqueros* greeted him this evening with the news that everything was all right at home.

Matt stepped down and, without cracking a smile, he handed Jose Santos a long envelope. "This is for you, Pepe. I stopped at the countyseat and had it recorded legal and proper. It's a deed for forty-nine per cent of Valle Verde, brand, stock, dogs, land and everything, includin' trouble. You used to be a *vaquero*, big fella, but you

ain't now. You're a *ranchero*. Sounds sorta good, don't it?"

Jose's big face always mirrored his feelings. Now it showed amazement, confusion, lack of understanding. He stared wide-eyed at the envelope, then suddenly the truth dawned upon him. "No-no-no, Mateo!" he exclaimed in Spanish. "You cannot do this! You cannot give me half your property. *I will not take it!*"

Tall Matt Shannon placed a hand on his stocky friend's shoulder. He spoke slowly, and in English, "Looky here, Pepe. You lost every bit as much as I did that day five year ago. If your Dad and Mom hadn't stayed home to keep mine company you'd still have them. Since then you've done more hard work than I have. You can do things that I can't do and you've done 'em. Whenever we've run into trouble you've sided me all the way, regardless. I'm mighty proud to have you for a pardner. Now, damn it! Be still!"

A humble *vaquero*, the son and grandson of *vaqueros* who had never owned anything of tangible value, Jose Santos held the envelope in both hands and looked at it like a man in a dream. Presently, his eyes filled with tears and his cheeks were wet with them. He walked slowly into the house that way.

SHORTLY before sundown the four Valle Verde men were seated under the hackberry, getting ready to start work again in the morning. Jose was finishing a new rawhide riata that he had plaited. Catching wild cattle in the brush was hard on ropes and rigging. Matt, Tomas and Ramon were repairing saddles, bridles, hackamores and hobbles when Shannon looked north and saw a small band of riders top a rise out on Mustang Prairie. They were coming at a lively clip and he counted six.

"We're due to have company before long," he said quietly, nodding in that direction. "Maybe they're just cowhunters and maybe they ain't. Soon's they drop into the next sag out of sight, it might be a good idea for you boys to take your rifles and go into the house. There's three windows that look this way. You can hear everything that's said. Don't start nothin' until I give the sign. Better take this here truck with

you so's they'll figure I'm alone. Maybe I'm gettin' spooky, but we'll play it safe anyhow."

"Make certain that *you* play it safe," cautioned Jose, swiftly coiling his riata. "Why d'you always take the dangerous jobs?"

Matt grinned, and drawled, "Because I'm so all-fired skinny it takes a damned good shot to hit me. A blind man couldn't miss you with his eyes shut. Yonder they go into a holler. Make 'aste, now, and fade away."

When the riders reappeared they were close enough to be recognized. Matt's heart beat a little faster, for he had guessed right. He called out, "It's trouble, sure enough—Chick Foster and a cut of five out of the scalawag bunch."

Mexican cuss words came from behind the roofless walls, and Jose spoke up, "Foster is a bad man to monkey with. Don't take chances, Matt. Let's order 'em off with our rifles and bring 'em to grass if they don't go fast enough!"

"That way we wouldn't find out nothin'," drawled Shannon, "and I'm gettin' to be a powerful curious fella in my old age."

As the visitors approached Matt dropped the stirrup leather he was working on, arose, settled his gunbelt on his hips and touched briefly the handle of his six-shooter. The six men halted facing Matt, less than twenty feet from the open windows on their right. They spoke or nodded curtly in response to his greeting and Foster alone dismounted.

"Get down and sun your saddles, fellas," said Matt cordially. "I'll round up a pot of hot coffee and haze it out here."

Chick Foster shook his head. His pale blue eyes were almost on a level with Shannon's, they were built about alike, but Chick was as light as Matt was dark. He wore two guns, could use them and they were known to be for hire on practically any job, no matter how dirty.

"We're here to talk business with you, Shannon," he began sharply. "Serious business. Where's that Greaser pardner of your'n?"

"He's a *Tejano* and his folks settled in Texas long before yours or mine, Foster," answered Matt coldly. "Jose is in the house. Make your talk. I'm a-listenin'."

"You've made yourself short in this country," crisply declared the gunman, "and it's time for you to pull your freight. Put the Nueces behind you. The farther you go the better off you'll be."

"If it's a fair question," asked Matt softly, "who sent you here to tell me that?"

The gunman's hard eyes wavered, but he answered quickly, "The honest cattlemen in this border country felt sorta sorry for you and put up with your stealin' while you was just a kid, but you're a man now. They aim to see that you either make dust or kick air, but they'd a heap rather you moved out peaceable and healthy."

Shannon pretended to think a moment. "D'you reckon they'll give me a little time to sell off my stuff and make some kind of a deal on my land? Understand, though, I ain't promisin' to do nothin' of the sort—yet."

Foster answered so quickly he sounded eager, "Sure! They're square that way. And you'd better promise, mistah."

While he didn't want to overdo it and make Chick suspicious, Matt again pretended to ponder the matter. He hunkered down on his heels, picked up a twig and went to drawing aimlessly in the dust, which seemed like a foolhardy thing to do when confronted by a gunslinger of Foster's caliber.

"It'll take time to comb out what little stuff I've got," mused Matt, "and where in hell will I go to find a buyer for this place on such short notice?"

Chick Foster was really interested now. Evidently he had orders to run Shannon off if possible, rather than to take sterner measures. He hunkered down facing Matt, and told him, "Lots of men around here with the money to buy *you* out. If I was in your boots I'd try Jones first off. He borders you on the north."

"Jones—uh-huh. John Henry Jones has got the money, all right," said Matt thoughtfully, "but—"

With his left hand he reached back and got his bowie knife and went to sharpening the twig as a man will when thinking hard, then returned the knife to its scabbard with his *right* hand. As that hand again passed near his holster, he whipped out his six-shooter!

"Thanks, Foster," he said calmly. "You

told me what I wanted to know. Steady, Chick! Don't be foolish. You're good, but you ain't good enough to down me when I've got the drop. Hold it, you other fellas! Take a look at the house."

With elbows on his knees and hands clasped, the gunman was caught cold. His lids drew downward to his pupils and he had the watchful look of a cat who heard its victim approaching. In the act of reaching for their weapons, the mounted men looked at the house. The muzzles of three rifles caught and held their eyes. Behind those rifles they no doubt saw the eager faces of excitable Latins who needed but a spark to touch them off. The riders sat very still.

"It's your turn to listen, Foster," continued Matt in the same quiet way. "Go back and tell Jones that we ain't a-runnin' none, none at all. We'll mind our own business, but we'll fight like hell to keep what we've got and to get what we've got a perfect right to get. Just tell him that. Far's you're concerned, Chick, I ain't holdin' nothin' against you. You're gettin' paid for what you're tryin' to do. Strikes me it's a mighty poor way to make a livin', but that's *your* business."

Put to shame before his men and aware that this encounter would soon be the talk of the country, the gunman was so mad he could scarcely speak. "You're a-talkin' big for a young'n that ain't hardly shed his milk teeth," he growled hoarsely. "You ain't got no right to be packin' a gun. It's crazy kids like you that get to be killers. What you need is a good lickin' with the double of a rope."

Matt Shannon took the abuse and hung onto his hot temper. He couldn't afford to get mad. Too much at stake. Had to keep cool and try to use his head. He didn't want to get a reputation as a gunsharp. That *would* make it tough on him, but it was a mighty easy thing for a kid to do if he was handy with a gun.

"If I wanted to be a killer," said Matt, "I've had plenty chances. A few days ago Barney Weaver and Gip Little asked for it, then here you come a-huntin' trouble. You'll admit that I *could* have killed you, won't you, Foster? Now, get to hell away from Valle Verde, *and don't come back!*"

Shannon stood up then, alert, weight

partly on his toes, holding his six-shooter slightly above waist level, fully expecting Foster to make a break to redeem himself. The gunman got to his feet carelessly. He made a move to turn away to his horse, throwing his right side toward Shannon, then his left leaped to his holster!

Split seconds measured the difference between life and death then. Matt didn't want to kill the man, yet didn't have time to lift his gun and strike with it. He jabbed with its muzzle. The barrel darted at Foster's head quicker than any man could draw and fire. It drove into the burr of his ear, a paralyzing blow. His six-shooter slipped from his fingers. His eyes rolled back in his head and he wilted in his tracks.

Matt struck harder than he had intended. For a moment he thought the gunman's neck was broken, then realized that it probably wasn't. He glanced up at Foster's men. Menaced by the rifles they had behaved themselves.

"Hope he ain't dead," said Shannon casually. "Tie him on his horse and take him away from here."

AS THE Foster men rode off, Jose and the *vaqueros* hurried out to Matt, the three of them talking at once. Santos exclaimed, "You'll be the death of me yet! Takin' chances with a killer like Chick Foster. I damned near put a bullet through him when you squatted down in front of him that way. Then you buffaloed him! Why didn't you shoot the cuss?"

Matt shook his head. "We've got enough trouble without goin' into a crooked court on a murder charge and having five men swear that we're liars. Besides, I had somethin' more important than a two-bit gunslinger on my mind. Looky here."

He sat down and picked up the twig. "While I was a-settin' here thinkin' about Jones and tryin' to figure what I'd do with Foster, my hand was a-runnin' brands in the dust like this."

He drew a J-Bar. "That's a Marble brand on our list."

Afterwards, he drew an O-Bar-O. "Like Jones said the other day, he owns that iron. Bought it from Jake Simms, the thief who finally got hung for stealin' horses. Now, watch—See, it ain't no trick to burn a

Marble J-Bar into a Jones O-Bar-O. Plumb easy and simple."

The other men wondered why they hadn't thought of that. "Me, too," continued Matt. "Reckon it was so daggoned simple us smart folks couldn't see it. Anyhow, here's the important thing. Jones said they caught Felipe drivin' O-Bar-O steers this way on the Willow Springs Trail. Sounded fishy to me then, but it don't now. I'll gamble that poor Felipe run onto those steers when his mind was a-workin' right and he spotted 'em as burned J-Bars and he was fetchin' 'em down here for us to see, because he knows that we represent the J-Bar. What d'you think?"

Everybody agreed that it was a good bet. "So now we're goin' to carry this war to the enemy, as a fella says," declared Matt, "and see if we can't get him snarled in his own rope so infernally bad he'll leave us be. I've heard my dad say that John Henry Jones was one of the biggest thieves in Texas and he was fixed to prove it, but sorta hated to start trouble. So do we hate to start it, but we won't throw off none when it comes to finishin' it."

Jose, Ramon and Tomas were spoiling for a fight and said as much. Shannon again warned them not to get trigger-happy and give the crooked law in this county a chance to send them over the road or make them take to the brush as wanted men.

He went on to say, "Here's what I figure we better do. If any of you have got other ideas, just talk up. Chances are that Felipe picked up those steers somewheres near the Willow Springs Trail, which means in the big thicket on Willow Springs Creek or on the prairie up there. We know several waterings in the thicket and you'll recollect that a short time back we found some thieves' pens in there. So tomorrow mornin' at the crack of dawn we go to gatherin' on Willow Springs creek and prairie. We ain't worked that range in three years anyhow. I'm a-hopin' we'll comb out some of those burnt J-Bars, if there are any, or maybe catch Jones thieves in the act. We'll be on Valle Verde land, you know."

Though the plan meant a sleepless night, it appealed to everybody and they got busy forthwith. Ramon went to bring in the remuda of twenty-five horses, led by a bell

mare with a colt, Matt and Tomas rode out onto Mustang Prairie to find the oxen, for they decided to play safe and take everything with them. Meanwhile, Jose made up a pack of staple grub sufficient to last a week, including plenty of dried beef. They'd kill fresh meat on the works. The boys moved fast and were ready to go by the time a full moon peeked through timber down on the spring branch.

The oxen lumbered along in the lead, Old Joshua and his yoke-mate, Jericho, carrying packs wrapped in tarps and tied between and behind their horns. Ramon grazed the remuda while crossing the prairie, for the steers were slow. This night pasaeer was an old story to the dogs. They stayed close to Matt and Jose and kept silent, having been trained to sound off only when in pursuit of cattle and certain game. A barking dog in a cow-hunter's camp could raise plenty hell.

Matt pointed his outfit to the Willow Springs Trail and took them into the chaparral there. Later he pronged off to the west on a little-known trail that led to the upper Willow Springs watering, the springs themselves at the source of the creek. As this brush-wise outfit fell into Indian file on a trail that was scarcely more than an animal path, Matt Shannon took the lead. When the chaparral locked its thorny arms above him so densely as to defy the moon at times, he felt the tingle of excitement that he always experienced, though he had lived his life in the brush. He loved the brush, yet feared it as every smart brush-hand did, for he knew it to be a refuge for all manner of criminals from both sides of the border and the rendezvous of many dangers.

They made camp at Willow Springs. The remuda was hobbled as a safety measure and dropped with the oxen on a nearby *sendero* large enough to provide good feed for several days, and the two *vaqueros* were left there to guard the outfit. Matt cautioned them to keep their eyes and ears open. To be set afoot now by having their horses stolen would amount to a major disaster.

By three o'clock in the morning Shannon and Santos were sitting their horses in the shadow of the brush on the edge of Willow Springs Prairie near a cowtrail that entered

the chaparral there and led to a watering on the creek, waiting for cattle that came out of the brush to graze only at night. These wild brutes would soon be trailing back to the chaparral where they'd water and remain in hiding until darkness. While each pony dozed with a hip down, head and ears sagging, the boys chewed chunks of dried beef and had little to say. Jose was busy with his own thoughts and Matt Shannon groped far into the obscurities of a distant past, trying desperately to recall where and when he had heard that Indian death song. He had a growing conviction that it was somehow related to the mystery of his parents' murder.

After a while the horses awoke. Their heads went up a notch, their weight settled onto all four feet and their ears pointed at the moonlit prairie. The boys came back to the present, too. Maybe it was only a band of mustangs heading for water, maybe wild burros who ran like ghosts and were mighty nigh as hard to see, but they hoped it was a bunch of the long-legged steers that ran like either of the others and fought like very devils. They listened until all doubt was removed by the rattle of hocks and the occasional clash of horns that rode down the breeze. The cow-ponies' nostrils flared, their hearts beat against the riders' knees.

Jose Santos pulled his hat on solid. He grinned and his teeth showed white in his dark face. "Well, *capitan*, here we go again. Hope I tie onto a big one. I'm needin' a good fight."

MATT SHANNON took his leg down from the horn, tightened his flank cinch a hole. "Just you snare me a burnt J-Bar and I don't care how big he is or how much of a fight he makes, providin' you hang onto the cuss," he drawled. "Let's meet 'em a little farther out than we generally do so's to have time to look 'em over good before they hit the brush. We've simply got to catch out a couple of O-Bar-Os if there's any in that bunch."

The cattle were barely visible now, moving like a heavy shadow drifting slowly across the silvery surface of the prairie. The boys walked their horses, hoping to get as close as possible, meanwhile taking down their ropes and building loops in preparation for the wild dash that would follow in

a few moments. They now saw that this bunch comprised mixed cattle of all descriptions. It wasn't long before one of the way lead cattle lifted its head, looked, flopped its big ears, and snorted. Every head came up then. Moonlight glistened on polished horns and an instant later the bunch was away in a mad run, quartering off toward the brush. In a twinkling the trained ponies were after them. Built like quarter horses, stocky and powerful, they ran that way and quickly struck the run of cattle on its left flank. The herd veered away from the brush, ran straight down the prairie for a short distance, then scattered like quail!

Matt Shannon muttered an oath. Reading brands on running cattle by moonlight was tricky business and he had not yet spotted an O-Bar-O. Glancing over his shoulder, he was glad to see Jose lay in after a giant steer. A burnt J-Bar, more than likely. Well, they'd get one of them, anyhow. Jose was an artist with a rope and they didn't come too big for the husky *Tejano* and his chunky brown horse. A short distance ahead of Matt a leggy steer swerved to dodge a prickly pear and showed its side to the moon . . . O-Bar-O!

Shannon's buckskin seemed to read his rider's mind. Head stretched out at the end of his neck, ears laid flat, he pounced onto that steer like a cat after a mouse. Trained for close-quarters work in the brush where a roper rarely had a chance to whirl his loop or make a long cast, the pony ran onto the steer like he aimed to tromp the critter. A little over-handed throw across the steer's back forefooted it and a lightning flip dropped slack on its off side. Horse and rider worked as one. The buckskin sat down behind a brute that weighed more than he did. The riata popped and sang, the pony's hoofs plowed dirt and he took the shock with the fire of battle in his eye and his belly in the grass. He busted that big steer. Matt was on it with a tie rope before the beast had a chance to recover from a nearly broken neck and a jolt that knocked the wind out of it. A fresh-branded O-Bar-O and screw worms working the burn. Daylight would show whether it was an original J-Bar.

While Matt was examining the brand, Jose Santos rode up. "Now that we've got

'em bedded down nice and comfortable, what'll we do with 'em? I hate to think of wrasslin' these brutes all the way back to camps."

"We won't," answered Matt. "Might lose the critters. I clean forgot to fetch Josh and Jerry. We'll go back and get 'em and let them snake these *ladinos* in."

Which they did, driving the oxen and their fighting prisoners to camp. It was daylight before they got there and Matt determined definitely that his steer was a burnt J-Bar—a botched job of burning, too, for although the original stamped brand had been run over with the iron, there were several points where the old scar still showed.

As they shoved the steers into the small pen at the springs, Matt observed, "There's somethin' for John Henry Jones to look at when he comes. Betcha he's here by night, too."

TOMAS and Ramon were standing alternate guards and getting their sleep, so Matt and Jose turned in and slept until noon. Afterwards, hoping to learn where all this brand burning was carried on, they saddled fresh horses and rode down Willow Creek to look at the thieves' pens they had discovered a while back.

When still quite a ways from the hideout with the breeze in their faces, Matt reined in and tested the air. "D'you smell anything?"

Jose sniffed. "What I mean—I smell burnin' hair and hide!"

"Uh-huh, and from here on we go plumb quiet."

They rode slowly and carefully single file on an animal path, dodging the chaparral as much as possible so as to avoid the noise it made gouging and scratching their clothing. When still a safe distance from the pens they got down, shed spurs, leggings and brush coats, and went on afoot. Presently, they were close enough to hear low voices and shortly thereafter crawled under a clump of young *huisache* at the edge of the opening in which the pens were situated.

One quick look sufficed to tell the whole story. Five steers in the pen, another tied down outside near a branding fire and three men working on it. (Dangerous to brand

in a pen with loose cattle as savage as these.) Matt recognized the men—Jones riders long suspected of being two-bit cow-thieves and known to be good for little else.

With lips at Jose's ear, he whispered, "There ain't a fight in the three of 'em, but we won't take chances. No shootin' if we can help it. No tellin' who all might hear it."

Matt eased his six-shooter from its holster, stood up suddenly. "Howdy, boys! Need any help?"

Frank Baker was lifting a running iron from the fire. He dropped it, raised his hands. Bud Williams was sitting on the steer's hind quarters with his back to Matt. He slid off, landed on hip and elbow, put up his free hand. Slick Stevens—smartest of the three, sprang from the steer's head, gave a quick jerk to the loose end of the tie rope and darted into the brush like a rabbit.

"Let him go," said Shannon. "Two is a plenty for us to catch and have to feed until we hang 'em."

Meanwhile, the steer kicked free of the rope and scrambled to its feet.

"Catch it, Pepe!" snapped Matt.

Instead of running into the brush upon either side, the fright-crazed animal ran straight down the narrow opening toward chaparral at its far end. Three horses under saddle were standing near the fire. Jose leaped onto one and took after the steer. Looking for a rope he found none on the saddle. Valuable evidence would soon lose itself in the brush and gunfire might draw trouble, so the brawny Tejano did the only thing left for him to do. He rode onto the steer, caught its tail and dallied the switch around his saddlehorn, then kicked his horse ahead and whirled abruptly to the left. The plunging brute was thrown in a terrific somersault and broke its neck when it landed. The J-Bar's partly burnt hide couldn't escape now.

Jose skinned out the steer and they took the hide, the two thieves and a supply of fresh meat back to camp.

Believing that Slick Stevens would head straight for the Jones Ranch headquarters with news that Baker and Williams had been captured, Matt decided to wait and see whether John Henry wouldn't come looking for him. He'd rather have it that way. In

this finish fight he aimed to make certain that every move he made was strictly on the level so that when the particulars were known, no honest citizen could have reason to criticize him for what he had done. He hoped that the capture of the thieves would bait Jones into making another break. If the showdown came on Valle Verde property, so much the better, for Matt now had the evidence to prove that, no matter what happened or who got hurt, he was merely protecting the interests of those he represented.

He sent Ramon a short distance northeast to a sharp rise from which the *vaquero* could watch one of the few places where the main trail into Willow Springs crossed an opening, and Jose spent the balance of the evening high in a tree near the spring where he could look out across the chaparral for a long ways in all directions. Tomas remained with the remuda and oxen, Matt guarded the prisoners in camp.

Minutes and hours dragged their heavy feet slowly past, and this waiting gave Matt Shannon too much time to think. However, no matter where he went or what he did now, he couldn't banish from his thoughts the mysterious singer in the brush. Though he took pains to hide the fact, the monotonous moaning of that Indian death song as it drifted continuously in and out of his mind and his fruitless efforts to grasp its significance were wearing him down, throwing him off balance, making him irritable and increasingly dangerous to tamper with. He hoped that he could hang onto himself in his next encounter with John Henry Jones.

The sun was dipping at the western horizon when Matt, Jose and the prisoners ate the supper that Matt had prepared. Afterwards, Shannon relieved Ramon, then Santos took Tomas' place on herd. It was long after sundown when Matt sighted three riders crossing the opening on the Willow Springs Trail, coming this way and apparently in no great hurry to get here, too far off to be identified. At the rate they were traveling and considering how the trail wandered here and there through the brush, it would be dark before they arrived. He had started to climb down when a fourth horseman rode into the opening, halted as though listening, then came on at a walk,

Matt thought, *it won't be long now*, and he went back to the camp feeling better.

Shannon told the *vaqueros*, "Wish you'd both go on herd for a while this evenin'. Hard to tell what'll happen out there to-night."

Ramon stopped eating, eyed him sharply. "My *capitan*," he said in Spanish, "you have seen something. You have seen danger coming through the chaparral and you do not want Tomas and me to be here when it arrives."

Matt grinned. "Maybeso, but don't forget that we're payin' you boys workin' wages, not fightin' wages. Now, don't argy."

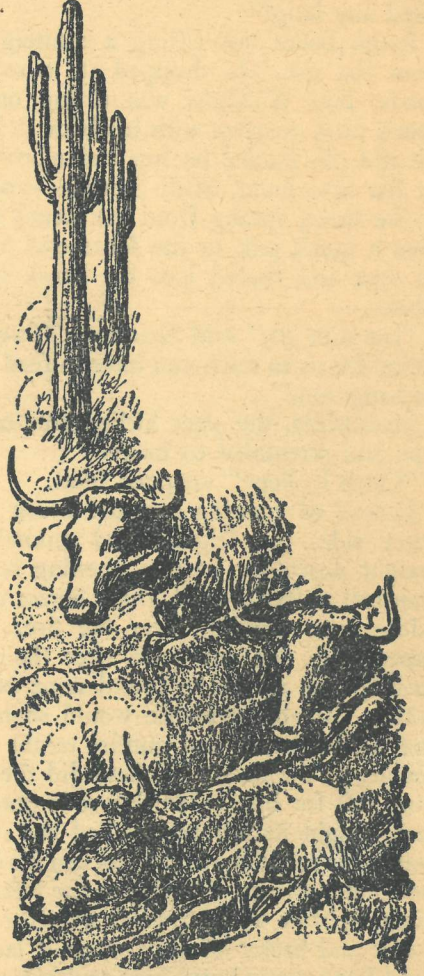
DENSE brush surrounded their camp on three sides. On the other were the springs and a little ways below them on the branch, the stockade pen. An old coffee pot simmered in the coals of their cooking fire. A coal oil lantern hung from a mesquite limb where it cast its yellow light over the two steers in the pen, the burnt hide on the fence and the cow-thieves seated with their backs against a down log near by. Matt and Jose sat on another log with their backs against the trunk of a giant liveoak whose low-hanging foliage cut off the light from them. Horses were coming along the trail in the chaparral not far away and the boys faced the point where they would enter the opening.

Jose spoke softly to Matt, "I'm still wonderin' who was that fourth man you saw."

Muscles knotted on Matt Shannon's lean jaw and for an instant his dark eyes blazed with anger. That harmless remark had jerked his thoughts back from a scene materializing out of his past: the long front room at Valle Verde, his mother sewing in a rocking chair while he and his father played a game on the rug with a new cross-bow that Brian Shannon had whittled out and strung for his little son. The boy was shooting Indians with blunt-pointed arrows and his dad was an Indian chief who got shot. Whereupon the chief stood very all and straight, threw back his big black *ker* and sang his death song. As Brian Shannon's big voice rose and fell in the somber chant it was a terrible song and it scared the kid into a spasm of fear. He ran and jumped on his mother's lap screaming, and

the little woman made the big man promise never again to do that. Then his dad took the boy and joked away his fright, and told how he had once shot a Lipan chief and heard him sing that way; and how the Lipans had sworn to take the scalp of Brian Shannon for killing their chief, and that a certain half-breed— And right there, Jose spoke up.

Matt got hold of himself before he said



anything to hurt his sensitive partner's feelings. "Hard to tell who that fourth fella was," he declared, "but like I was sayin'—wouldn't surprise me none if it was Felipe. Never can tell what Felipe will do, or why he does it."

Though invisible in the chaparral, the horses on the trail were nearing the opening now. Their hoofs rustled leaves and twigs and the brush noisily snagged the

clothing of their riders as if it were trying vainly to hold them back, for there was something grim and determined in the thud of the hoofs coming down solidly on hard ground. The riders themselves were silent. The prisoners in camp, disarmed but not tied, fidgeted nervously and whispered one to the other. A steer moaned and slashed at its companion with needle-pointed horns and slammed against the pen as though it, too, was fearful of the silent riders on the trail. Matt and Jose stood up. Matt loosened his gun in its leather, Jose knotted and opened his big fists—both unconscious gestures, but significant.

Three horses carried their riders into the opening. They halted where the light from the lantern struck harshly on the faces of the men—John Henry Jones, Barney Weaver and *Chick Foster!*

Evidently they didn't at once see the boys in the deep shadow of the liveoak, for Matt's voice startled them. "Glad you finally got here, Jones. We've been waitin' for you. Get down."

Without a word the three men swung from their saddles and dropped reins. With the others at his elbows, the cattleman strolled toward the liveoak and the boys moved out to meet them. Jose carried a coiled riata carelessly in his left hand as if he had forgotten to put it down, meanwhile absent mindedly whirling its honda end in a small circle with his right. He stopped facing Barney Weaver.

John Henry's quick eyes swept the camp with a sharp glance that seemed to take in everything. Afterwards, he inquired in a low and gentle voice, "What did you want to see me about, Matt?"

"With what you've seen here and what Slick Stevens told you, you'd ought to know," answered Shannon. "But I don't mind tellin' you."

A cold grin pulled at the corners of Jones's thin lips. "Maybe I know and maybe I don't," he said softly. "Go ahead and tell me."

Before he resumed, Matt took the measure of the three of them. Big Barney Weaver was standing with weight on one leg and arms folded, trying to look ferocious. At first glance John Henry Jones appeared to be the same wiry and polite little man he had always been, but closer inspection dis-

closed a stern and ruthless determination just beneath the surface of him. As for Chick Foster—he made no secret of his intentions. As vicious as the musk-hog that roamed the brush and as poisonous as a rattler, he was the professional killer here to redeem himself.

This was not the first time that Matt Shannon had looked death in the eye, but never before had it come to meet him with such calm deliberation and avowed intention. He felt like a man behind bars, looking out at a gallows building to receive him. The balmy night air caressed him, but its warmth failed to reach the cold deep inside him. His lean cheeks were drawn and gray as if he were chilled to the bone, yet his dark eyes blazed with the unmistakable fire of a man backed to the wall and fighting for his life.

His voice, however, was low and steady, and he selected his words with unhurried care. "Jake Simms made me that O-B-O iron so's to burn Tom Marble's J-Bar cattle," he began, "and you bought it off'n Jake for the same reason. The J-Bar is one of the biggest brands in Texas—plenty of 'em to steal. I've got positive proof of these things now and I aim to turn it over to Marble. He's a bigger man than you are, Jones, and I'll gamble that he gets you salted away for a good long stretch. He'll put you where you can't bother the Valle Verde for a hell of a long time and that's all I want. By the time you get out maybe we'll be big enough to hold our own with you."

This brazen challenge flung at a man like John Henry Jones by a mere boy, momentarily set the older men back on their heels. Foster shot a quick glance around him, no doubt thinking of the rifles at Valle Verde. Barney Weaver was definitely deflated and nervous. He didn't seem to be able to keep his eyes away from Jose's whirling honda, now spinning in a wider circle and a little faster. John Henry's keen gaze never wavered for an instant from Matt's face. His eyes narrowed, as if he were thinking, *Now, what in hell has this smart kid got up his sleeve?*

Then he shifted his weight to his other leg, hooked his thumbs in his belt and laughed silently. "This is funny," he said quietly. "A shirt-tailed boy like you tryin' to re-form the cattle business in Texas. Sure

I brand Tom Marble's cattle. He brands mine. We all brag that we never eat our own beef. You've got a lot to learn, Matt, but you won't live to learn it. You're a thorn in our side, fella, and you know how we handle thorns in this country. *We get shed of 'em.* Don't know why I'm wastin' my time a-talkin' to the likes of you. Reckon it's because I sorta admire your guts and—"

From somewhere in the brush on their right and slightly behind the Jones men burst into the Indian death song!

"Father, I am about to die.
Let me die with courage
As a man dies.
Drive fear from me,
For I am about to die."

Deep, resonant, rising and falling in somber cadence, it filled the camp and rolled out across the chaparral and lost itself in the distant night. It came suddenly, lingered, departed slowly. It brought stunning surprise and amazement to the Jones men, jerked them around to face its source, and it brought a brilliant light to the dark past in which Matt Shannon had groped so blindly. In a flash he looked into the past and correctly interpreted the present, and it staggered him.

Never before had Matt Shannon's gun-hand moved so fast and it might never do it again. "Jones!" His voice had changed, too—no louder, but each precisely spoken word blazed with a fire that burned deep into the sensibilities of his listeners. "You'd ought to see yourself now. You ain't a white man now, Jones. You're red through and through, a Lipan Apache listenin' to the death song of a Lipan chief that my dad killed. Your mother belonged to the tribe that swore to take my dad's hair. You knew that *he* knew that you were a thief and had the goods on you, *so you led the raid on Valle Verde and—!*"

Chick Foster was first to strike—a killer with the nerve to look another man's gun in the eye and go for his own. He spun half around and went down on his face. Smoke boiled turbulently over him, his

smoke and Shannon's. Big Barney Weaver grabbed at his holster. Jose Santos—an artist with a rope, whose powerful arm and steely wrist could snap a riata fifteen feet and hit a spot the size of his hat with its end—flipped his whirling honda at Weaver's face. The rawhide eyelet, hard as iron and almost as heavy, crushed Barney's chin. He fell like an ox, jaw broken and twisted out of shape.

John Henry Jones tried to take advantage of his companions' misfortune. He let them start it, then joined the battle when at its height. If a delay of a fractional second could be called waiting, Matt Shannon waited for him to get his gun out. They fired almost together. His bullet gouged a wing of Shannon's legging. Jones broke at the middle, pulled himself erect again, clung to his gun. His lips drew back from his teeth, his cheeks sucked in and his eyes sunk deep in their sockets, and he looked every inch a savage then. He lifted his Colt. Matt Shannon shot him again and again—emptied his six-shooter into the slender body of the man who had murdered his people. Flung this way and that, John Henry Jones stood up under the shock of four bullets, then collapsed in a lifeless heap, still making futile efforts to lift his gun!

Matt Shannon coughed in the smoke, swept a hand across his eyes to brush away the red haze of battle. When he looked around again, there stood Felipe Diaz—tall, hawk-faced and as sane in expression as any man. He smiled!

"Felipe!" cried Matt. "Good! You're all right now! You saw the raid on Valle Verde and knew that Jones led it! Answer me, please!"

Felipe Diaz nodded affirmatively, opened his mouth to speak, then the light of sanity flickered and vanished from his eyes, leaving them dull again. His head drooped, his shoulders sagged and he turned away like a man groping in the dark.

"*Madre de Dios!*" whispered Jose Santos.

"He done the best he could, Pepe," muttered Matt Shannon, "and as long as we live, he's got a home at Valle Verde."

*One Could Be Killed for Spying on the Moon Worshippers—
or for Having Precious Jewels in One's Possession*

The Edge of Dawn



By PHILIP KETCHUM

GRIM sat on his haunches and devoured the rabbit he had caught in one of his snares. He would have preferred to have cooked it, but the making of a fire was a long and arduous process and the smoke of a fire might have been seen by an enemy. Besides, the cooking would have taken much time and he was to meet Torg just after dusk at the foot of the hill used by the Moon worshippers. For three nights, now, he and Torg had hidden in a thicket near the clearing on the top of the hill and had watched strange and exciting ceremonies.

When he had finished the rabbit, Grim rubbed his hands in the dirt to clean them, then he moved on and examined his other snares, hoping to find another rabbit in one

of them. He was disappointed that all were empty. He had thought that perhaps Torg would give him one of the strange, translucent stones he carried in the pouch around his waist, in exchange for a rabbit. Nuna, he felt, would love such a stone. She might even accept him as her husband if he had such a gift for her. This possibility had been in his mind when he had come here to see what he had caught, and he regretted, now, that he hadn't saved the rabbit he had eaten. At the same time, he knew that Torg wouldn't have parted with one of the stones for a rabbit. Torg prized the stones too highly.

The sun was dropping down toward the hills and it was time to hurry to the place where he would meet Torg. Grim shouldered his club and set off through the for-

est. He followed a well marked trail but he moved along it cautiously. Other tribes lived near here and some were war-like, and the men he might encounter were not to be trusted. They were men like him, short, stooped, hairy, and clothed in skins, but this land would not furnish a living for all, and so there was no alliance, no friendship between any of them.

This was a forest in southern France. Centuries and centuries and centuries, however, would pass, before it would be known by that name. Game was plentiful, but the trapping of game was not easy. Vine snares would not hold the larger animals and there were few men daring enough to brave them with club or spear. In fact, Grim was only then learning to use the spear. He was still awkward with it. He didn't think that it would ever become so important to him as his club. Torg did, but then Torg was a strange man. Torg kept his stones hidden in his pouch around his waist. He admired them in secret. He had shown them to very few. If Grim had owned those stones there are many things he would have done with them. He of course would have given one to Nuna, to buy her. And he might even have given one to Flor, who was the Old Woman's daughter and who would someday succeed the Old Woman as head of the tribe. It would have been nice to have Flor indebted to him and to have her admire him above Ug, her husband.

GRIM neared the Moon hill just at dusk. He relaxed, then, for he was now in a friendly part of the forest. He came to the thicket where he was to meet Torg and stopped and gave the peculiar whistle which he and Torg used as a signal. There was no answer. Grim was pleased at that for it meant that he was here ahead of Torg and had not kept Torg waiting. Torg did not like to be kept waiting. Grim moved deeper into the thicket. At the edge of its hidden clearing, he stopped, every muscle in his body tense. Torg's body lay sprawled out on the ground in front of him. Torg's head was crushed.

An enemy had been here. An enemy had crept up on Torg or had been lying here in waiting and had killed him without warning, for there was no sign of any struggle. The enemy might still be here. A cold,

terrifying shiver ran over Grim's body. He listened intently. His eyes jerked from side to side, probing the gathering shadows. He could hear no one. He could see nothing strange, no lurking figure.

Grim stepped into the small clearing. He stood above Torg's body. He was scowling. He was still tense. Torg had been his friend but in Torg's death he felt no deep, personal loss or any emotion of anger. In it, instead, he saw an evidence of the danger which threatened him. The enemy who had killed Torg, might kill him. Or if Torg had been killed for spying on the Moon worshippers, this same fate might be his. In it, also, he knew a momentary regret. Now, he could never barter with Torg for one of his stones.

Grim's mental processes were slow. Such thinking as he did, fell into three main channels. There was the problem of keeping alive in a world filled with danger. There was his endless quest for food in a land whose abundance he had not learned to tap. And there was his awakening need of a woman. He had turned away and was half through the thicket before it occurred to him that Torg would have no further use for his strange stones and that there was no reason to leave the pouch on Torg's body. Torg's death might be a wonderful thing for him. He would have not one stone, which Torg might never have given him, but all three. He would have one for Nuna, one perhaps for Flor, and one, certainly for himself. He returned to the clearing. He dropped on his knees at Torg's side. He felt under Torg's still warm body. The pouch and its three stones had disappeared.

The village where Grim's people lived was in a forest clearing on the sloping bank of a river. It was a village of crude huts built in no particular pattern or design and offering a very inadequate protection against the occasional torrential rains and the winter's cold. Grim didn't go at once to his family's hut. He squatted for a time in the deep shadows fringing the village. The communal fire had been banked for the night. Grim was hungry again. He considered the possibility of raiding the fish nets which were owned by the village. He decided against it. The waters of the river were cold and the nets, usually, were empty. The moon came up, an almost full moon.

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On the Moon hill, the ceremonies would be starting. The memory of what he and Torg had seen the night before excited him briefly, but not enough to drive him to make a trip to the Moon hill, alone. After a time he stood up and headed for his hut. His mother, when he came in, demanded food, but he had brought none. She was still grumbling at him when he fell asleep.

A day went by and then another and another. Torg's body was not found and his continued absence caused no great alarm. Torg had not been a great hunter. His mother complained that he had run away, but with no real concern. Fang, one of the young men, said that Torg had been trapped by evil spirits. Ug, who was married to Flor, the Old Woman's daughter, and who therefore was a man of some importance, said that Torg had probably been killed by an enemy. Ug had always been scornful of Torg's ability as a fighter. Grim said nothing. During these days he did not go far from the village. Here, he felt safe. Here, the fate which had overtaken Torg could not touch him.

Hidden in the bushes, one morning, Grim watched the women visit the fish traps. Half a dozen fish were caught in the thickly meshed vines. Grim was desperately hungry but none of those few fish, he knew, would come to him. The Old Woman would take most. The other women would get what was left. Grim thought of his secret rabbit snares. He could almost taste a rabbit. Tomorrow, he decided, he would risk a visit to the snares.

After leaving the fish traps, Nuna slipped away from the other women and disappeared into the forest. This interested Grim. He wondered where Nuna was going. The thought that she might be going to meet Fang or Rad or one of the other young men, sent a stab of jealousy through him. He hurried after her, moving with a stealth born of long practise.

Not far from the village, Nuna stopped. She looked carefully around her but she didn't see Grim. After a moment she stooped over and dug at the base of a tall tree. Grim was puzzled. There were various succulent roots which were good to eat but these would not be found where Nuna was digging.

Nuna had straightened up, now. She held something cupped in her hands. She bent over it. She rubbed it against her face. Grim crept closer. He caught sight of what Nuna was holding, then stepped out and confronted her. A startled cry broke from the girl's lips. She turned to flee but Grim caught her by the wrist.

"Where did you get it?" he demanded. "Tell me."

Nuna shook her head. She still struggled to get away but Grim held her tight. He forced her hand open and the stone she had been holding, one of Torg's stones, fell to the ground. Grim released her, then, and picked it up.

"Give it to me," said Nuna.

"Where did you get it?" Grim asked again.

"From a great hunter."

"Torg?"

"Not Torg. Give it to me."

She reached out and grabbed the stone and turning, fled toward the village.

Grim started after her, then stopped. It would not be wise for him to be seen chasing Nuna. It might be misunderstood. He turned back to the river and still hidden from the village, sat down. He was bitterly disappointed. Someone else had given Nuna what he had hoped to give her. His chances of winning her, now, were practically gone. He had nothing with which to buy her from her mother. All the young men were poor, but none was more poor than he. All were poor, but someone had given Nuna one of the strangely beautiful stones. One of Torg's stones.

Thinking came hard to Grim but it came to Grim, finally, that someone besides himself knew that Torg was dead and where his body lay. Someone had been there ahead of him and had taken Torg's stones. It had not been an enemy who had killed Torg. It had been someone from this village. Grim remembered now that there had been no signs of any struggle in the clearing where Torg had been slain, and even Torg, poor fighter that he was, would have made some kind of battle with an enemy.

It took Grim a long time to figure this out and his first reaction was one of relief. Since it had not been an enemy, Torg's death could not have any connection with

their spying on the Moon worshippers. This meant that it would be no more dangerous than usual to make a trip to the rabbit snares. It was late for such a trip, but Grim was hungry. He got suddenly to his feet and hurried away.

There were three rabbits in the snares. Grim ate one, raw. The other two he brought back to the village. One of these he hid for his own food the next day. The third he took with him to his hut. His mother woke when he came in, as usual, demanding food. Grim tossed her the rabbit. The other children, most of them younger than he, woke up, demanding their share. The quarrel grew more intense. Grim left. He walked past the hut where Nuna lived and he wondered again who had given her Torg's stone and what had happened to the other two. He wondered if Fang had given her the stone. Fang, he had considered as his most dangerous rival. Fang was strong. He stood more erect than most men. He was bigger, a greater hunter, and Nuna had said that a great hunter had given her the stone. Fang could easily have crushed Torg's head with his club.

Near the river Grim hunched down. He stared moodily at the dark waters. If it had not been Fang, he decided, it might have been Rad. Both Fang and Rad had been friendly with Torg. Both had known of the stones and of the pouch where Torg carried them. Both had tried to gain them through barter, and had failed even as he had failed.

The puzzle was too much for him. Grim thought of the rabbit he had hidden nearby. Tomorrow he would get it and carry it away and build a fire and cook it. He could taste the warm meat already. He licked his lips. Thinking of food was much more pleasant than thinking of Torg's stones.

But there were still two stones unaccounted for. Grim remembered that the next morning after he had eaten the rabbit he had cooked and while he lay in the shade in a narrow valley, far from the village. Someone had given Nuna one of the stones, but if he could get the other two and give one to Nuna's mother, she might look with favor on his suit. Grim suddenly had new hope. All he had to do now was get the other two stones. He lay on his back and thought of Nuna and wanted her. He lay on his back

and hated Fang and Rad and the others who desired her. Let them go somewhere else for their woman, leave and join some other tribe or steal a woman if necessary. He would have Nuna. But first, he must get the other two stones.

This presented a problem which was too much to cope with right now. Grim's belly was full. He stretched out on his back and dozed.

IT WAS not Grim's way to return boldly to the village. Always, no matter what the occasion, he would stand hidden by the fringing trees and shrubbery and study the village for a moment before entering it. He would notice who was there and what they were doing and if possible he would never move forward while the Old Woman sat in front of her hut.

This afternoon, he noticed Nuna sitting in the shade of one of the huts, sewing some skins. As he watched her, Ug came by and stopped to talk to her. He talked to her, it seemed to Grim, for a long time. Nuna kept shaking her head. After a time, Flor, Ug's wife, came to the door of her hut and called sharply to Ug and Ug turned and walked that way. Near the communal fire, Fang was cooking something and watching Nuna. Rad was also at the fire. Rad was more stooped than Fang and more hairy.

Grim finally moved on into the village. He took a course which would lead him past Nuna and when she saw him coming she didn't get up and enter the hut as she sometimes did. This was encouraging. When he reached her, Grim stopped.

"Where did you get the stone?" he asked bluntly.

"What stone?"

"The stone I saw yesterday."

Nuna shook her head. "I have no stone."

"If you will tell me who gave it to you," said Grim boldly, "I will get you two more."

Nuna's eyes widened. "Two more."

"Two more," Grim promised.

Nuna stared down at the skins she was sewing. After a moment she shook her head. "I cannot tell you."

"Why?" Grim demanded. "Was it Fang? Was it Rad?"

Nuna made no answer. She got up and entered the hut and beyond the entrance of

the hut, Grim dared not follow Nuna.

"She will have none of you, bold hunter?" called the taunting voice of Fang. "If you want a woman, go steal one from the Moon worshippers."

Grim was startled at the mention of the Moon worshippers. He had thought that no one, now that Torg was dead, knew of the trips he and Torg had made to the crest of the Moon hill. A shiver ran over his body.

"What did you kill today, great hunter?" shouted Rad. "Was it another rabbit?"

"He would flee from a rabbit," said Fang.

Grim turned and approached the fire. He was safe, here in the village, from all save the ugly things that men like Rad and Fang might say to him.

"Well, what did you kill?" asked Fang.

"I dug a trap," said Grim. "A trap for a tiger." This was a lie. Grim made it better. "He fell in the trap and I smashed his head with my club just as Torg's head was smashed."

Why he had added that part about Torg, he didn't know, but apparently neither Fang nor Rad thought it strange. Both were making derisive noises. "A tiger!" Fang shouted. "The great hunter has slain a tiger. And where is his body, Grim?"

"Yes, where is his body?" Rad shouted.

"In a thicket near the Moon hill," said Grim. "It was too heavy to carry in."

Other men were gathering near the fire to join in the fun. Grim was at once sorry he had lied. He scowled at Fang, at Rad and at the others. They would not let him forget this boast, he knew. They would demand that he produce the tiger. For days they would remind him of it.

Ug had come up to the fire. Ug was thin, stooped, gaunt. He was in an evil mood. He added his voice to the voices of the others but with a sharp bitterness in all he said.

The Old Woman came from her hut. She had been old as long as Grim could remember. She was haggard, toothless, dirty. Her bony legs were crooked as though in protest against carrying even the feeble weight of her body.

"Who has killed a tiger?" she demanded.

"Grim boasts that he has killed a tiger," said Fang. "He is a great liar."

The Old Woman faced Grim. "Where is this tiger?"

Practically everyone in the village had gathered by this time. On the edge of the group Grim saw Nuna and her mother. He saw his brothers. He saw Flor, and of all these people, only Flor was paying him scant attention. Flor was watching Nuna. She was scowling and this was strange for Flor and Nuna had been close friends.

"Where is this tiger?" asked the Old Woman again.

"He says it is in a thicket near the Moon hill," answered Rad.

"Then bring it here," said the Old Woman.

"There is no tiger," said Ug. "He lies to you, Old Woman."

There was no tiger, it was true. Grim faced the very real necessity of doing something to re-establish himself in the eyes of the Old Woman. The life of a man she hated could be made miserable. The Old Woman controlled the common food and this gave her great power.

"Is there no tiger?" asked the Old Woman sharply.

"There is no tiger," said Grim, "but in the thicket near the Moon hill there is something else."

"A rabbit," cried Fang. "A fierce rabbit."

"Two of them," said Rad.

Grim shook his head. "There is a man's body. The body of Torg."

He had everyone's attention, now, and even though many of these people had assumed Torg was dead, actual word of his death had a sobering effect.

Grim was beginning to enjoy this. He had the center of the stage and it flattered his vanity. He wanted to hold this place of importance. There was more he could tell.

"Torg," he said clearly, "was not slain by an enemy. He was not killed by evil spirits. One from this village broke his head with a club. He did it to steal the three strange stones which Torg carried in a pouch at his waist. The man who killed Torg gave one of these stones to a woman."

AS GRIM said this he happened to be glancing at Flor and by the sudden look of fury which came into Flor's eyes and by the way she was staring at Nuna, he knew the answer to the problem which was puzzling him. He turned so that he could see Ug. Ug had stiffened. His hand was

clutching at his waist, clutching at something hidden under the tiger skin which he wore.

"A man should not kill his friend," said Grim.

This was an important moment. It was more important than Grim would ever know. He was pronouncing the first rudiments of a moral code. He was calling for the first awakening of conscience. The words sounded good to him. He said them again and glanced from one face to another. Several were nodding. Even the Old Woman was nodding.

Grim felt suddenly very bold. He turned. He lunged toward Ug. He caught the tiger skin covering at the throat opening and jerked. The tiger skin was very old. It tore as though it had been rabbit. It dropped from Ug's body and revealed the pouch tied at his waist. Torg's pouch. Ug was clutching it. He was shouting. "It's mine! Mine. Torg gave it to me."

"Torg would have given his stones to no one," said Grim.

"That is true," shouted Fang. "He would have given them to no one."

Now, made even more bold by this support, Grim tore the pouch from Ug's grasp. He opened it. He took out the two stones which were there. He held them aloft and they seemed to catch some of the fire from the rays of the late afternoon sun. Some of those near him stepped back, startled, perhaps even frightened. Grim would have loved to have kept the stones for himself but he was too cunning for that.

"Torg," he cried, "who was my friend, said that the larger stone was for the Old Woman. He said that the smaller stone was for Nuna's mother."

He held out the larger stone toward the Old Woman. She reached a claw-like hand for it. She grasped it hungrily. Nuna's mother came forward and reached for the other stone.

"They were mine," Ug insisted. "Mine."

He was a slow witted man. His guilt had trapped him. He would have fought Grim for the stones, but Grim no longer held them and even the bravest of the tribe would not have lifted a hand against the Old Woman. And now, suddenly, Flor turned and caught a spear from one of the

men and ran toward Ug, screaming at him, her face distorted with anger.

Ug turned and fled. He dropped his tiger skin and plunged naked into the river. From the bank, Flor threw the spear at him, but missed. She stood there screaming. It occurred to Grim that Flor had known of the stones and of the gift of one of them to Nuna. Why Ug had given Nuna a stone was puzzling. Ug had had a woman and could not have openly taken another.

Grim, however, didn't puzzle over this long. He was thinking of the way Flor had cast the spear. He had never before seen a spear thrown. A spear, a jagged rock tied to the end of a stick, was a weapon of defense, an extension of a man's arm. But if a man could learn to throw one accurately, he might even brave a tiger. Grim shivered.

The group at the fire was breaking up. Across the stream, Ug was clambering up the bank. Flor still screamed at him and after a time, Ug turned and disappeared in the forest. He would not dare return. Everyone there knew that. Flor would take a new husband. Grim considered that but not with any great interest. Flor would someday head this tribe but she was ugly and had a temper and her husband's life would not be easy.

The Old Woman sat in front of her hut, clutching Torg's stone in both hands. Grim passed her boldly. She spit at him but Grim only laughed. He stopped at the entrance to the hut where Nuna lived. He called her name and Nuna's mother came to the entrance.

"I want Nuna," said Grim boldly.

"What have you more than the stone?" said Nuna's mother craftily.

"Food, when you need it," said Grim recklessly. "I have a new way of hunting." He was thinking of the way Flor had cast the spear.

Nuna's mother gnawed at her lips. She had been impressed by what had happened at the communal fire. The stone in her possession had come to her through Grim. It placed her, in importance, next to the Old Woman. It was true that there had been a reference to Torg, but Torg was dead and her mind had not grasped the full story.

"I want Nuna," said Grim once more.

The woman nodded. She turned and called her daughter.

*It's a Fine Thing When You Put the Coffee Pot on for a Pilot
Friend of Yours—and Find a Gun in Your Ribs*



ICY WINGS

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

I

MART KELLY heard the station door open, felt a momentary blast of cold air, then heard the door close. "You are early, darling," he said. "Not due to take over the shift for another hour." He expected to hear his wife say something about not sleeping, or being nervous, and when there was no answer, he turned, and

—looked into a forty-five-caliber automatic pistol.

"Not a word," the man ordered. "Come away from that transmitter."

Mart Kelly obeyed. "I don't know what this is all about," he said, "but throwing a gun on a CAA operator can get a fellow into a lot of trouble. One hell of a lot of trouble. Government trouble."

"You don't need to make it any stronger," the man said. "We know the chances we're

takin'. The game's worth it. And don't get any heroic ideas about dyin' at your post, in the line of duty, because one funny move and you'll do just that. Face down on the deck. That's the stuff."

"Just a minute. My wife—"

"Yeah, we know, you and your wife are one of the CAA husband-wife communicator teams. And she's going to have a baby, any time." He spoke crisply, as if every angle had been considered, including throwing a gun, if necessary, on a pregnant woman. The man wasn't masked, but the wolverine fur on his parka facing, effectively concealed his features. He bound and gagged Mart Kelly expertly and then he took over the transmitter.

An hour passed, and he carried out routine duties while Mart's limbs grew numb from lack of circulation. Once he stepped outside and checked on the weather. "Ceiling two thousand feet," he muttered. "Visibility five miles."

The call he was expecting came in at last. "What kind of weather have you got, Mart? This is Jerry Lane."

"Sure, Jerry," the man answered, "I've been expecting you. It's zero-zero. Over."

"Zero-zero?" Plainly the pilot was puzzled. "Must be a local disturbance. An hour ago—"

"Sure, an hour ago it was just fine. I put the coffee pot on for you," the man said. "But you'll have to take a rain check on that mug of java. Why not try Long Lake if your fuel is low. You can set her down on the ice. You just passed over the station, Jerry. Over."

"Long Lake?" Jerry said. "It's worth a try." He looked at his co-pilot, Pete Peterson. "I'd've gambled Mart Kelly wouldn't be socked in. Local disturbance. You know how it is—breeze kicks up the fine snow and the first thing you know it's zero-zero." He set a course for Long Lake.

A trapper lived at the head of the lake. He was a ham radio operator, and he kept his batteries charged by wind chargers. Bush pilots caught in bad weather often set their planes down, then waited companionably for a break.

Their method of communication was simple. If the trapper didn't answer, they assumed he was asleep. They flew over his cabin, gunning the engine, which was better

than an alarm clock. Within seconds he was at his transmitter.

Jerry Lane gunned his engines. Three thousand feet altitude cleared all ridges by a safe margin. He turned back and was making a run parallel with the lake when he got an answer. "The Snow Ridge strip is socked in, Mike," Jerry said. "Want some company?"

"Sure. Visibility two, three miles, ceiling—hell, I don't know how much but it's plenty."

Jerry laughed. Mike Manning never could judge a cloud's elevation, but he knew what altitude a pilot needed to come in. And when he said it was okay, it was okay.

When Mike reported the plane over his cabin, Jerry knew he was on the course. He let her down and broke through the overcast at fifteen hundred feet. The landing lights picked up a stretch of ice as smooth as any landing strip and miles in length. He set her down, turned and taxied up to the head of the lake, guided—as many a pilot had been—by the friendly light in Mike's window.

He opened the door and began climbing over the DC-3's amazing cargo—a knocked-down helicopter; drums of fuel; blasting powder; and an outfit for burning metals; equipment and fuel for winter work in the ice and snow.

Three men who had been sleeping on cargo, awakened, yawned and one asked, "Where are we, Jerry?"

"Long Lake."

"Which Long Lake, there are several in Alaska."

"*The* Long Lake," Jerry said. "Mike Manning's. Give us a hand with the wing covers."

Jerry let Pete boss the job of covering wings and tail surfaces and the engines. He liked to do the lashing down himself. Sometimes the wind came up suddenly—and strong—on these Alaskan lakes. He chipped out the ice until he had formed a toggle, then rove lines through and lashed the plane securely.

The smell of coffee came from Mike's cabin. It was good. Mike did a lot for the pilots who came his way. He did it without thought of reward. But the boys evened up by flying out his fur and flying in his provisions. All this was a heritage from the

days when there were less regulations and tariff rates in northern flying, and a man's conscience guided him in business affairs.

THE five men trooped up the snow-packed path in single file. As Jerry opened the door, a man stepped from a thicket and covered them from the rear with a sub-machine-gun. "Keep moving, boys. Hands up," he ordered. "We're a very tender bunch and we don't want to hurt anyone. The very sight of blood makes us sick." The sneer in his voice revealed his hardness.

As the men from the plane stepped inside, two other men searched them, then snapped handcuffs onto their wrists. "Make yourselves comfortable on a bench, boys," the evident leader said. "We'll be together for some little time, and to avoid confusion I'll give myself and my boys names easily remembered. Jerry, have you ever read the Bible?" Jerry nodded. "And you—Pete?" Pete Peterson nodded. "Good, I'm King Solomon. Interested in gold, you know. My men are Matthew, Mark and Luke."

"Where's John?" Jerry asked. "Surely there must be a John in this deal."

"John took charge of Mart Kelly. It was his voice you heard when you wanted to land," King Solomon said.

"I'm going to call you King for short," Jerry said. "King, I'll hand it to you, you seem to have thought of everything."

"Who wouldn't when there's a ton of gold at stake?" King replied.

"I said, you *seem* to have thought of everything," Jerry corrected. "You're dealing with the Federals when Old Man Law catches up with you. And he won't take this lying down. Wait, I'll say it first—you've thought it all out. Sure, you have. Who is going to fly the 'copter?"

"Who is going to fly Susie?" He grinned. "You are!"

If Jerry needed proof of the thoroughness of this gang's preparation, he had it. They even knew the 'copter's name. Each man had grown a beard, he noticed. Obviously, King had reasoned, it would be difficult to carry on an expensive operation while wearing masks. It was a little detail, but it was important.

The others in the cabin found themselves measuring and weighing the abilities of

Jerry Lane and this man who lightly called himself King Solomon.

Jerry was five feet ten inches, lean and hard. He weighed one hundred and seventy-five pounds. He could and had given away fifteen or twenty pounds and beaten a good man in a rough and tumble fight. He had been flying in Alaska since he was eighteen. He was now twenty-seven, and except for the war years, his flying had been done in Alaska and Canada. He was a bush, or contact pilot first. The instrument training had come later.

King was six feet tall, swarthy, heavily bearded, and there was intelligence, courage and craft in his blue eyes. Like Jerry he was born to command. Timid women, taking their first flight, would glance at Jerry on the left hand side of the office, and feel safe. King inspired fear in men, and yet they knew that he must be capable. In women he would create an odd sense of dread coupled with fascination.

Jerry would have given a good deal to have shaved off King's beard and get a good look at the man's features. He had an idea he had seen him before somewhere, but wasn't sure. Each man wore gloves at all times—a precaution against leaving finger prints.

"You've a smooth-working organization there, King," Jerry observed.

King's eyes flashed. "I'm a hard man to draw into light conversation, Lane," he said. "It's so easy to drop a clue. That takes care of that."

"What's this all about?" Mike asked. "A plane lands. This bunch gets off, and I put on the coffee pot—my usual welcome. And what happens? I get a gun stuck in my ribs. This cuss that calls hisself King uses my radio. He even makes his voice sound somethin' like mine."

"He sure did," Jerry agreed. "It fooled me. There's no need of covering up any longer, Mike. We might as well come out into the open. King Solomon, Matthew, Mark and Luke all know. My plane is equipped to go after the Parker gold. This bunch got onto it and figures to cash in."

Mike knew the story. A man named Parker had uncovered a pocket of gold on his claim. Several years ago he had put down numerous test holes. The values were uniform, and he had carried on a mining

operation that netted him twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars a year.

The price of gold hadn't gone up, but operation costs had. He could see his margin of profit vanishing slowly. Suddenly values jumped tremendously in a certain small area of the claim. Parker saw in this an opportunity to make a big personal clean-up without arousing the suspicions of other stockholders. He shut down the mine operation, insisting the drag-line scraper needed an overhauling. He gave his men a holiday in town on full pay.

Sure enough, a day later he hit an accumulation of nuggets that reminded him of the stories he had heard of the Klondike days. He worked almost around the clock putting dirt through the sluice boxes and cleaning out the nuggets. He didn't bother with fine gold. Time was too short and that could be taken care of later by working over the tailings dump.

He cached away a ton of gold before his crew returned. The drag-line scraper operator checked and realized almost no repair work had been done. But from Parker's appearance, he knew the man had missed a lot of sleep and lost considerable weight. The crew members talked, but arrived at no conclusion.

WHEN the season ended, Parker had shipped out the normal amount of gold, then he began speculating on what to do with the remainder. According to the law, he could sell gold that had not been processed, for more than the government rate of roughly thirty-five dollars an ounce. But he knew of no one who would pay a premium. And if he sold it to the assay office at Seattle, the amount might arouse speculation, and stockholders would ask questions. There was also a little matter of income tax.

And then he heard certain Chinese were paying fifty dollars an ounce—in China. It was then a daring plan came to Parker's mind. It would be impossible to ship gold out of the country, legally, unless a like amount were returned. Uncle Sam was watching his gold balance with a jealous eye. One ton of gold at fifty dollars an ounce amounted to a million, two hundred thousand dollars. And it would take up relatively little room on a plane. Shipping

gold out of the United States, without a return of like amount being a violation of the Federal law, Parker reasoned he couldn't make his situation any worse by ignoring the income tax also.

He made his Chinese contacts first, then he picked up a DC-3, had it overhauled and extra tanks installed. He paid pilot and copilot in gold, in advance. The inference being they, too, could sell their gold at the higher figure.

There was to be no clearance nonsense. They would take off, refuel at a trading post in the Aleutians. If weather conditions and winds were favorable, they would land on Chinese territory and again refuel. It would be a relatively short hop to the Chinese gold brokers who would pay off in American currency.

The plane had been badly overloaded when she took off. A frozen lake had given her the necessary runway and she had used most of it before leaving the ice. A warm front from the Pacific, jousting with the bitter cold of interior Alaska iced her wings within an hour after the take-off. The ice fog pressed in on all sides, and finally the pilot had contacted two CAA stations and asked them to fix his position by triangulation.

The CAA people had partly completed the job when the pilot had reported that he was caught in a downdraft and losing altitude at a dangerous rate. That was the last heard of the plane.

THE pilots' wife, Anna Marsh, had flown to Alaska and got in touch with Jerry Lane when the silence became more than she could bear. "I tried to talk Dan out of it, Mr. Lane," she had said. "I felt instinctively it was dangerous, besides unlawful, but it looked like a chance for quick money. Dan had flown The Chain during the war. Besides, he couldn't seem to settle down for any length of time. The nervous energy war service had developed couldn't seem to drain off. I think it was the challenge as much as the money that influenced him."

"I understand that," Jerry had told her. "There are times when I want to take the bit in my teeth."

She had told him the complete story and Jerry had gone to Parker's wife who was amazed when she heard it. "Why, my hus-

band told me he had repair work to do on mining equipment," she said. "He said he'd be gone a month or six weeks, and not to bother to write because there would be no mail delivery." She had been quite stunned.

Then the stockholders had heard something of the affair, because Anna Marsh had confided to several friends. "It's rightfully our gold," they had contended.

"You'll have to prove that," someone had said.

"That'll be easy," they argued. Then they had offered Jerry twenty-five percent of any gold he recovered. It was a no cure, no pay offer. Jerry must finance himself, or form a corporation.

Jerry had formed the Lane-Peterson Airlines, a corporation licensed to operate unscheduled flights and do a general charter business. He had the uncompleted figures of the "fix" the CAA stations were working on at the time of the crash. At best they gave the general location. To this dubious information he had added his own knowledge gained from experience.

A setter quartering a field during the pheasant season couldn't have done a better job than Jerry had done on several thousand square miles of mountains, glaciers and valleys. Not wishing to be observed Marsh had kept clear of the lanes usually followed by Alaskan pilots. He was even then uncertain of his position when he had crashed. Jerry was very much in the red when he finally spotted a wing protruding from a crevasse.

He had made repeated trips to the scene, pitching and tossing around until he was convinced the plane was Parker's and not the remains of a Russian Lend-Lease job lost during the war. There wasn't a chance in the world of an overland party reaching the wreckage. Whatever was done, must be done by air. A helicopter was the answer.

"The trouble with you, Jerry, is your fairness," Pete had observed. "This job is worth fifty of seventy-five percent of the gold we recover."

"Yes, I suppose so," Jerry admitted. "But I forgot this was area of updrafts and downdrafts. Now let's work out a practical means of getting to the wreckage. It'll have to be a winter or early spring job. The remainder of the year the snow bridges on the glacier are weak."

"You never can tell when a snow bridge will let go and drop you into a crevasse," Pete said. "A crevasse gives me the willies. It's like something you've pulled a wedge out of. One of these thin wedges. You fall into 'em. The weight of your body builds up a momentum, then you hit. Do you stop instantly? Hell no. You're squeezed and squeezed until you're finally wedged so tight you can't go any deeper. I'd sooner be run over by a steamroller."

"Shut up," Jerry had answered genially, "you're too damned realistic."

II

KING SOLOMON interrupted Jerry's thoughts. "You're planning to outfox me on this deal, Lane. Don't do it. Don't even think of doing it. My plans to grab that gold are as thorough as yours are to reach the scene of the crash. I'm trying to get by without bumping off people. But I'll not stop at murder. You realize that, don't you?"

"Yes," Jerry answered. "But what do I get out of all this?"

"Well, you save your life if you behave yourself," King replied. "You're young, good-looking, the gals like you. You have imagination, and some of these days you may develop an airline of your own. You've everything to win and everything to lose in the next few days. Think it over."

"Mister—I'm thinking," Jerry answered.

"That's fine," King said. "Now we'll all turn in and get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow there are things to be done. Mark, you stand guard. Luke will relieve you at midnight. At four o'clock Matthew will take over."

"What's the program for tomorrow?" Jerry asked.

"We fly to Lake Crescent."

Jerry grinned. "You do know everything, don't you?"

"That wasn't too difficult," King answered. "I sat down and figured out what I'd have to do if I were Jerry Lane. Obviously Lake Crescent was made to order as a base of operations. Almost no chance of being spotted by a plane. They give the region a wide berth."

"You're pretty thorough," Jerry said, and there was challenge in his tone. "But you've missed one point."

"Yes?" King's voice was skeptical.

"Yes. I'll bet you my plane against your's that I win the final hand," Jerry said.

"It's a bet," King said, and there was less confidence in his tone.

When they had bedded down for the night Pete whispered, "What've you got up your sleeve, to make a bet like that?"

"Nothing—yet," Jerry answered. "But if he has doubts in his mind, the feeling that he's missed some angle that may ruin his plans he's sure to give it considerable thought. Then, with his mind not on the immediate proposition, he may really slip. If he does, we'll have to hop onto the slip and hope for the best."

"Do you think we'll get out of this alive, if we play ball with him?" Pete asked.

"He's a high-class crook, with pride in his profession," Jerry answered. "He may let us live."

"But it'd be an easy matter to knock us off when the job is done, knock down Susie, stuff the parts into the DC-3 along with our remains and touch a match to the whole works. If the wreckage is ever found it'll be assumed it was an accident," Pete said gloomily.

"Good night," Jerry said. And to Pete's amazement he was sleeping soundly a few minutes later.

"You aren't human," Pete accused the following morning. "I hardly slept a wink."

The others, including Mike, had put in a restless night. "Something like the Arabian Nights book," the old-timer said. "You just don't believe it's happenin' to you."

"Arabian Nights," Jerry said softly. "Arabian . . . nights."

THEY had breakfast, then King said, "Mark, warm up the DC-3."

"Just a minute," Jerry objected. "When I'm flying a plane I like my own man to warm up the engines and make the checks."

"A reasonable stand," King agreed. "Mark, we'll let Pete do the job. Keep an eye on him."

It was quite a long job, because the engines were cold. When they were ready to take off, several of the men rolled up drums of fuel. Jerry smiled grimly and shook his head. "You thought of everything, King," he said.

"Obviously if you were coming into the airport for fuel, and we diverted you to Long Lake, you'd still need fuel," King answered. He turned to Luke. "Did you check Mike's cabin? We don't want any messages left around for casual pilots to read."

"I checked," Luke answered, and Jerry knew from King's expression that Luke's simple statement covered everything.

Everyone was herded into the DC-3. Jerry took over. King seated himself on the right hand side, while Matt sat on the little jump seat in the passage, ready to lend his chief a hand should Jerry get ideas.

Jerry flew straight to Lake Crescent, dropping through the overcast and leveling off and landing. "I've heard they don't come any better than you in this country," King said. "The rumor is well-founded."

Jerry shrugged. "Compared to Jefford, Woodley, Reeves and others I can recall, I don't even rate honorable mention," he said.

With engines off, the Lake Crescent area was strangely silent. The growl and grumble of the glaciers common in warmer weather when ice and snowfields are melting, was missing. Occasionally there was a groan of a giant disturbed in his sleep, but that was all.

"The head of this lake is quite a spot summers," Jerry said casually. "Was up here in a seaplane. I thought there might be a way of climbing to the wreck. Hunks of ice, as big as a ten-story office building, drop from a hanging glacier. When that stuff hits solid water after a seven-hundred-foot drop, there's quite a splash. Nearly lost my plane."

"You carry out your operation just as if we weren't here," King said.

THEY planned to sleep in the DC-3, but pitched a cook tent on the ice and kept the coffee pot going while the men assembled Susie. The job was finished and the tests made the afternoon of the second day. A small, ski-equipped plane arrived that evening. "Meet Simon," King said to Jerry. "In case you try streaking away in Susie, or attempting something equally foolish, his business is to shoot you down. This will be done with extreme regret, Lane, but—you get our viewpoint?"

"Clearly." Jerry answered. "Simon will

never have to warm up his guns on my account." Simon, it seemed to Jerry, appeared disappointed.

While they were warming up Susie the following morning, Simon warmed up his ski-equipped job. When Jerry and Pete took off, Simon soared above them like a hawk. "How're we going to get out of this with whole skins?" Pete asked. It was the first real opportunity they had had for private conversation.

"Ever read Arabian Nights?" Pete nodded. "Mike mentioned the book, and that gave me an idea."

Looking back at the lake they could tell from the position of the men's arms that they were being watched with binoculars. An updraft lifted them swiftly, and a moment later they were sinking. The wall, coated with ice, was dangerously close. They cleared the wall's crest and looked down on ice massed for a tumble into the lake when summer came. Arms of the glacier spread through mountain passes, and icy fingers seemed to be clutching at pinnacle rocks and ragged granite turrets as if to prevent the entire glacier from spilling into the lower country. Raw winds kept some of the passes clear of snow. The ice was like armor.

Jerry spotted the wrecked wing, then moved toward it. He settled down and could see that it had jammed across the crevasse, and was held in place by part of the fuselage members. An engine had hit and bounced, then skidded against an ice mass. Only the wind had kept it from being completely covered with snow.

Jerry set her down near the engine, turned the controls over to Pete, then stepped out. Even with a fur parka, he felt the driving chill of this altitude. Simon soared overhead, very low, and almost crashed as his plane cut through conflicting currents. Jerry grinned. "I'll bet that scared the hell out of him," he thought to himself.

He made his way from the engine to the wing and peered into the crevasse. It was thirty feet wide and the ice curved back from the yawning depths like lips parted in a sardonic smile. Anything getting too close would slip and fall in. There wasn't a chance of clinging to the ice. He cut a toggle in the ice, rove a line through it,

and worked his way onto the wing. It was solid enough to give him confidence.

Then he saw the remainder of the plane. He studied the wreckage and formed a pretty good picture of what had happened. A downdraft had hammered the plane onto the glacier. She had had an air speed of perhaps a hundred and sixty miles an hour at the time. But there was every chance she was bucking a hundred mile an hour wind. She had hit, thrown an engine, torn off a wing, then had skidded or rolled into the crevasse. The tail assembly was torn off and wedged some distance from the fuselage.

Everything pointed to a relatively light impact. It meant that the gold might well be in the wreckage instead of deep in the crevasse—perhaps beyond recovery. He returned to the Susie. "I'll need a rope ladder about thirty feet long," he said. "A wrecker's bar, and burning outfit."

"I don't like leaving you here," Pete said. "If I'd crack up, you'd freeze or starve to death."

"You can handle her," Jerry said.

PETE disappeared and returned an hour later, loaded with equipment. Jerry packed it down; secured the rope ladder and descended to the wreckage. He burned a hole on the top side of the office and looked inside. Three bodies were piled up against the instrument panel and controls. "They were frozen solid within a few hours after death," he muttered. "And it's going to take some doing to get them out."

After an hour's struggle he burned away enough metal to clear the pilot's body. He dragged it to the top of the wreckage, pointed to the body, then to Susie. Pete brought Susie over with some fifty feet of line dangling. Jerry secured the line to the body, taking up slack as Pete slowly settled. Susie was equal to lifting the body clear, and Pete got away from the area with its tricky air currents as quickly as possible. But for the grimness of the operation, Pete's eagerness would have been amusing. Jerry watched the machine, and he could only think of some strange bird that had swooped down and was bearing off a human being.

A walkie-talkie would have simplified operations, but King wouldn't permit the

use of one—too much danger of getting through a message to the CAA people; ham operators or a plane passing in the region. He held Jerry's resourcefulness in high respect.

When Pete returned, Jerry was waiting for him. "I'm going to call it a day." He took over and flew back to the camp, realizing Pete was showing the strain of bucking the currents.

Susie was immediately surrounded by King and his men, but the former did the talking. "Don't bother with the bodies," he said.

"You're a hell of an airman," Jerry retorted. "Up here, we fly out the bodies. And sometimes the boys have taken long chances to get to them."

"What about the gold?"

"I don't know whether it was being shipped in boxes, bags or melted down into bars," Jerry answered. "My guess is, due to head winds she was bucking, there was only a sixty or seventy mile an hour impact when she crashed. Gold is heavy and the momentum might have carried boxes, or bars through the skin."

"Then—what?"

"The boxes would slip into the crevasse," Jerry answered.

"If you hadn't fooled with the bodies you might have checked on the gold," King complained.

"Okay," Jerry said. "You take over from here on in. The burning equipment, tanks of gas, bars, axe and all the rest are up there. Handle it your own way."

"Time's important," King snapped. "You know that."

Jerry thought, "How well I know it." But he said, "Time isn't important to me. There was no sign of fire. But either because a warm rain melted some of the snow, or for some other cause, water did run into the fuselage through ruptures, then it froze. So we have a mass of broken up spare fuel tanks, structural metal and presumably gold frozen into a solid mass. If you want to hurry up things, give me a hand."

"Why not throw gasoline on the mass and light it? I mean in small quantities—enough to melt the ice?" King asked.

"And, perhaps, melt some of the ice that is holding up the wreck? Then it would

drop deeper into the crevasse. And where am I going to run to when the fire starts?" Jerry answered. "You don't do any running up there. You crawl. You make each move carefully, and you keep a good grip on something most of the time. Now I'm tired. I want no more gab. All I want is a square meal and a night's sleep. Yeah, and one more thing—I want it quiet while I sleep. If you think it isn't nerve-shattering to work on wreckage, hung up in a crevasse, try it."

Jerry's touch of defiance was greeted with silence.

THE following morning he carried up a blow torch and a tin of gasoline. "I'm going to try and rig up a thawing deal," he said.

When he returned that night, he handed King Solomon his first gold. It came in a hunk of ice. And the nuggets were mixed with debris and bits of wreckage. The hunk weighed sixty pounds, and the gold was worth three hundred dollars as an estimate.

"How much longer will it take to get to the big stuff?" King asked. "This isn't chicken feed, even."

"How do I know?" Jerry answered. "If you want the job speeded up, do it yourself. Another thing, every time Susie makes a trip, Pete and I risk our lives. If I'm going to do this job, I want to stay up there, two or three days at a time. I'll need a sleeping bag and grub. I can cook while I'm thawing."

Matthew, Mark and Luke looked intently at their leader. There was suspicion in their eyes. "No dice, Lane," King said.

"Mister, you have a strike on your hands," Jerry said. "You can beat the hell out of me, if you want to, but I'm not going to risk my skin unreasonably. Okay, if you have so much guts, why don't you fly up and look over the situation? Maybe you're over-rated."

King's face flushed darkly. For a moment it looked as if he might blow his top. Then he noticed his men were studying him and he sensed that Jerry had tricked him into a defensive position. And no leader who hopes to win can long remain on the defensive. He remembered, too, a ton of gold was at stake. "Fly me up, first thing in the morning," he said.

"Mark, you're boss. If this turns out to be one of those things, knock off the whole bunch. I'm not forgetting for a moment Lane hopes to pull a rabbit out of his hat."

"If you want to kill this here King Solomon," Mike said, "go ahead. I'll take my chances. What the hell, I've lived most of my life any way."

"But Pete and the others haven't," Jerry reminded the oldtimer.

Then he sat down and lit a cigaret.

The following morning he set Susie down and watched King make his way gingerly over a snow bridge to the rope ladder, then descend to the wreckage. He was gone a half hour, and when he returned he carried a ten-pound piece of ice containing a few small nuggets.

"It's going to take time," he said simply, "it's going to take time. Well—we've got it." Jerry wondered.

Jerry moved up sleeping bag and grub the following day. Each noon, thereafter, Pete came up with additional food and fuel for thawing. Jerry sent back one or two pieces of ice, studded with nuggets.

The eleventh day of the operation, Jerry said, "This it it, Pete."

"The day you've been waiting for?"

"The night I've been waiting for," Jerry answered. A snow flurry blotted out everything, then the air cleared briefly, and they could look down and see the DC-3 several miles away, snugged down to the ice. Far down the lake another snow squall was in the making. After that snow fell steadily. The hours passed, darkness, settled down and nine o'clock Jerry spoke what was on his mind. "You know what I have in mind. You know the odds are that Susie will crack up against an ice cliff."

"Yeah," Pete said, "I know the odds. But I also know you're tops in this country. If it's an order, I'll stay up here. If you can use me, I'll go along. My extra weight aboard Susie could make a difference."

"Sure, and it could also make one hell of another kind of difference in the show-down," Jerry reminded him.

They warmed up the motor and worked out a compass course. They took into account the prevailing wind, well knowing that if luck ran against them, a shift in

the wind could throw them completely off.

Each had the urge to shake hands before the take-off. It somehow seemed important. But each restrained the impulse, thinking it might affect the other's emotions. This could so easily be the last flight.

JERRY took over, and Pete cut the rope holding Susie to the ice. He closed the door and listened to the engine. Snow flakes pressed in on all sides. The altimeter indicated a quick climb, then remained reasonably steady. Jerry kept her on the course for fifteen minutes, then began to let her down. Pete's eyes never left the instrument board, while his heavily mitted hands gripped a hand axe and coil of rope.

They landed roughly and Pete looked out. "We're on glacier ice," he said.

"The wind off the lake is stronger than I figured," Jerry answered.

He climbed and headed in the direction Crescent Lake should be. Each had the same thought—the possibility of the wind carrying them directly over the DC-3 and the engine awakening King and his men and warning them to be on guard. Fifteen minutes later Jerry cautiously set her down.

A moment later Pete disappeared through the open door. The door closed and Jerry kept her almost glued to the ice. The landing gear was taking a beating, he knew. Five minutes of uncertainty, then Pete poked his head through the door. "Okay."

Jerry cut the switches and jumped down. Susie was moored to smooth lake ice. "Let's go," he said. "If we keep the wind on our left, we should hit the beach."

They kept the wind on the left, pushing doggedly ahead. The first indication of the beach came when Jerry went sprawling. He had tripped over a snow-covered sand bar. It was quite awhile before Jerry could identify anything on the bank, then they stumbled into a rock formation and he said, "I know where we are. The DC-3 is a half mile straight ahead."

"How're we going to get at the gang?" Pete asked as they neared the plane. "All hands will be inside. The guard won't be dozing. King Solomon doesn't string with careless men. Even so, the instant we opened the door the blast of cold air would alert everyone."

"I've thought of that," Jerry answered. "Remember, we're dealing with airmen. Airmen instinctively respond to certain situations, and we'll have to set about creating one."

"You know, Jerry," Pete said, "I had a sneaking admiration for King's nerve and daring until he didn't seem to give a damn whether we brought out the dead or not. After that he was just another so and so in my book."

"I felt the same way," Jerry admitted. "His attitude makes it easier for us to be rough." They had a plan of action worked out in detail as they stopped under the DC-3's wing.

JERRY cut one of the lines holding the plane to the ice, then they crouched near the door and waited. Under the blasts of air sweeping across the ice, the wing began to shake. In a matter of seconds a muffled voice within the plane warned, "Better check on the ship. Think a rope's busted."

"Sounds like Mark's voice," Jerry whispered. "He's probably got the guard duty." They could hear movement in the plane. Lights went on. "I hope our bunch doesn't try bare-handed action if there's an uproar outside. Somebody might get knocked off."

The plane door opened and a figure descended the ladder. Jerry's arm went around the man's neck. His free hand clapped a mitt over the man's mouth. Pete helped him drag the man under the plane, then socked him on the jaw. "I'm gambling," Jerry whispered, "if this guy's got a gun on him." They searched and found him without weapons. This was logical, because there was always the chance that one of Jerry's men might get to a weapon while a man was sleeping. "I'll gamble any way."

Jerry stepped from under the plane to the ladder, and with head bent low said in a muffled voice. "Gimme a hand." Snow covered his parka, blotting out all distinguishing marks. Within three feet of his hands Mark sat, automatic weapon across his lap. Jerry took another step. He didn't want to risk a struggle for the weapon and perhaps send a burst into his men sprawled out on the floor. With a

quick movement he knocked the weapon through the open door, yelling, "Take it, Pete!"

He kicked the astounded Mark on the jaw, wishing he wore a boot instead of eskimo mukluks. King, suddenly realizing the chips were down, charged down the narrow passage. Mike tripped him and King's shoulder knocked Jerry flat before the latter could step aside. King's quick thinking was never more apparent. He sensed his only chance lay in getting outside of the plane. He reasoned that in a finish fight within the DC-3, one of Jerry's men—handcuffed or not—would get in some good licks. King's hands kept him from going clear down. He swerved and dived through the door, landing on hands and knees.

Only a thick cushion of snow saved him from broken bones. Jerry leaped after him, yelling, "Pete, get that automatic and take command." He didn't know the automatic had skidded under soft snow and Pete hadn't the remotest idea of its location. Then he pounced on King.

Jerry knew that it was going to be a rough and tumble fight, a dirty fight, with no holds barred. As long as he held the upper hand King enjoyed the role of the calm, polite leader. It set him above the mine run of outlaw. It fed his vanity. This was different.

He used his knee effectively and when he felt Jerry's grip relax, he jumped up and drove his heels into Jerry's stomach. The latter doubled up, rolled to his knees and got to his feet. As King came in for the kill, Jerry clinched, pinning the man's arms to his body and hanging on. He wanted to shake off the sickness and pain and he needed precious seconds. King tried to sink his teeth into the back of Jerry's neck, but there were too many thicknesses of clothing and parka hood. He got a mouthful of fur and the taste of tanned skin. It wasn't good. He tried a rabbit punch without success. There was a no ment when Jerry wanted to call for help, but the urge to handle this himself was stronger. By sheer strength King shook himself free and made a run for it. Jerry shed his parka and took after his quarry. This was another gamble with long odds. It gave him freedom of movement, but if he

were knocked out, then frost would make short work of him in that temperature.

He made a flying tackle and brought down his man. They were on their feet in a matter of split seconds. A chin lost in a beard surrounded by the fur of a parka hood facing is an elusive target. Jerry drove his fists into King's stomach. The man didn't like it. He kept covering up until Jerry threw his fists at the man's face. He felt lips and teeth against his knuckles; then a nose flattening. He felt his bones break in the right hand as the fist struck King's forehead. He swung in with his left and King went down.

Jerry rapped the man's head against the ice as a safety measure then he wondered where he was. His tracks were covered up and he couldn't back track. He yelled. There was no answer. He paced back and forth swinging his arms to keep circulation at something near normal. The frost was beginning to bite and the fangs were long and going deep.

He yelled repeatedly, and then he heard a claxon squawk. Someone was using the alarm that sounded when landing gear wasn't down. It came again and again. Jerry moved toward it, dragging King behind him. He saw the vague outlines of the plane at last. Then Pete and Mike were rushing out to meet him.

"We got 'em all, wrapped, stamped and ready for mailing," Pete said. "What's next on the program?"

"I'll get on the radio and report to the United States marshal," Jerry answered.

"We'll fly out our prisoners and let the marshal take care of the loose ends. We'll fly out the bodies next, and after that we'll finish the gold job. It shouldn't take long."

"It shouldn't take long?" King demanded, speaking for the first time.

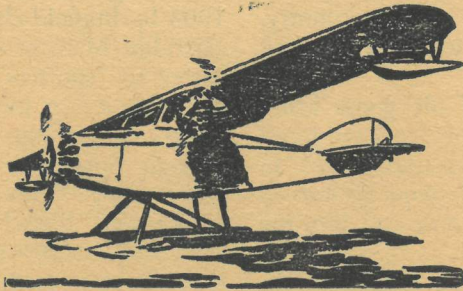
"You remember the Arabian Nights yarn where the gal got herself some needed time by keeping her captor interested by feeding him a yarn each night and leaving him eager for more?" Jerry asked. "I needed time for the weather to change so we'd have a chance to turn the tables. Well, you called yourself King Solomon, and I was the captive. Not a fair captive by a long shot, but, captive just the same. And so I kept you interested by bringing you, daily, a little gold in ice." He grinned. "I could have flown out that gold on any clear day—the whole ton of it."

"But the stuff you brought out was in a hunk of ice," King said.

"That was the easy part of it," Jerry replied. "First you melt snow into water, then you mix gold nuggets, bits of wood and metal into the water. Then you let it freeze. After that you string your man along by relying on his greed for more gold."

"Who gets that ton?" King asked. "Uncle Sam?"

"No, the stockholders," Jerry answered. "It was theirs. It hadn't left the country. It was still under the American flag. There'll be no legal complications. The illegal business, most illustrious King Solomon, is all on your side."



THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

CONDUCTED BY PETE KULLHOFF

Fine American Rifle

EVERY now and then Shooter's Corner gets a letter signed, "ded i dick of ole goose krik." What a character! he writes a chatty and very funny letter (mostly unprintable) but he knows his guns. He invariably ends his notes with "y don't u tel us about the bestus rifel manufacturd in the u s." Incidentally, his notes are posted from various towns in Oklahoma and Texas. He seems to get about!

It's a big order to "tell about the best rifle manufactured in the U. S." The old saying "One man's meat is another man's poison" certainly holds good when it comes to rifles. One shooter will insist on such and such lever action weapon, another will take one of the bolt action jobs chambered for a high intensity .25, .270, or .30 caliber cartridge or perhaps an automatic or a slide action, still another will insist on a single shot rifle usually of the falling block type of action—and he will practice until he can shoot it almost as fast as the average shooter can handle a repeater. Such a fellow usually is a fine shot and knows how to hunt. I know a fellow who lives in a state where deer must be hunted with a shotgun. He uses an old double barrel shotgun, with "punkin ball" or rifled slug shells, and swears it's the best "rifle" in the country. So how can we say just which *is* the best rifle?

But if "ded i dick of ole goose krik" were to ask me what I considered the finest rifle manufactured (not custom made) in the United States today I could go out on a limb and tell him, and also give him my reasons for such a choice.

Before we get into what I think is the "bestus" rifle, let's take a look at the development of various types of actions and see if we can figure out just what made them popular.

During the civil war the rifles that generally gave the best results (at least the users thought so) were all lever action. In this group we find the single shot Sharps, the Spencer, and the Henry, both repeaters. The Henry was the forerunner of the Winchester which was introduced in 1866. The lever actions naturally received a lot of publicity and were very popular.

After the war lever action-rifles were even more in demand during the development of the old West. The Indian fighters liked the repeaters for fast shooting and many of the buffalo hunters preferred the heavy single-shot (Sharps) for their fine long range accuracy and tremendous shocking power.

As a matter of fact, it got to the point where it was almost impossible to sell a rifle that was not lever action.

During the Spanish American War the Krag bolt action riue was in use, superseding the old Springfield .45-70 caliber single-shot. It wasn't long before shooters began rebuilding the Krag military rifle into one of sporting type and lever actions began to lose their popularity. The Krag "made up" into a fine hunting rifle and it is still preferred by many riflemen.

BY THE time that World War I came along our service rifle was the Model 1903 Springfield chambered for the .30-'06 cartridge. Many of these rifles had been converted to "sporters" and shooters generally were becoming more bolt action minded. When we got into the war there were not enough Springfields available to outfit a large army. Three large manufacturing plants were tooled for producing the Enfield caliber .303 rifle for the British. So this rifle was modified to take our .30-'06 cartridge and produced to help arm our growing army. We know this rifle as the Model 1917 Enfield, caliber .30-'06.

At the end of World War I more young

men were familiar with the bolt action than any other type of rifle. Such a sporting rifle was in great demand so naturally most of the big arms companies started producing them.

At that time some authorities on the subject of hunting rifles maintained that the sporting bolt action rifle was just a fad and it wouldn't be long before the lever action, the slide or trombone action, or perhaps the automatic (self-loading) type of big bore rifle would become the most popular in our game fields.

This premise was based on the fact that these rifles are faster than the bolt action, the auto being first, the slide or trombone a close second and the lever action third. Also these rifles are easier for the left handed shooter to operate, and they are lighter in weight.

It was in 1925 that the Winchester people brought out their famous Model 54 High Power Bolt Action rifle. This was the first bolt action rifle produced in any great quantity in the United States solely as a sporter was so small that it was discontinued.

By 1936 the sale of Winchester's most powerful lever action rifle, the Model 95 was so small that it was discounted.

THIS ONE'S THE BEST!



Late in that year (1936) a new Winchester bolt action rifle for powerful cartridges was introduced. It superseded the Model 54 and is the Model 70, and is my candidate for the title of finest assembly line rifle being produced in the United States at the present time.

Criticisms that had been made of the Model 54, such as poor stock design, high angle bolt handle (which made it necessary to alter the bolt handle for low scope mounting), vertical safety, not-so-good trigger, sear bolt-stop, solid floor plate and poor trigger guard were taken care of in the new rifle.

The firing mechanism was a new development. The trigger and sear design gave a fine crisp let-off with no military take-up.

A new bolt stop, working with the left-hand locking lug on the forward end of the bolt was a great improvement over the old sear (not-so-good) type of stop.

My first Winchester Model 70 was of .30-'06 caliber. In this rifle I have fired all commercial ammunition and every combination in hand loads that I could dope out. I still have this rifle and after carrying and using it over a large portion of the U. S. it still shoots as well as when it was new. And as it has had very good care, today it could easily be taken for a new rifle.

Since the introduction of the Model 70 I have used it in all calibers it has been factory chambered for, and some wildcats.

During the last war the self loading or semi-automatic (commonly called "automatic") rifle was the predominate small arm used. The consensus of opinion among the so-called experts seemed to be that after the war so many ex-soldiers would demand high power sporting rifles of self-loading type that the arms companies would be forced to develop such weapons.

So far no new automatics have been designed and produced. Yet two new Remington bolt action rifles Models 721 and 722 (I told you about these rifles some time ago) have been put on the market. While I think of it I want to make it clear that when I say that I believe the Winchester Model 70 to be the finest factory rifle produced in the U. S. today I do not wish to give the impression that other bolt action rifles are no good. For instance, take the two new Remington guns just mentioned. They are very fine big game rifles and as far as accuracy is concerned will no doubt shoot just as well as any other rifle in the sporting class. I can't say for sure because I have not had enough experience with them. But they are manufactured to sell at a price considerably lower than that of the Winchester Model 70 and as a result can not have certain refinements or niceties of the latter gun.

To get back to the Standard Model 70. I have found it to be very accurate and reliable for long range big game work, especially in .270 Winchester caliber. In .250-3000, .257 Roberts, .220 Swift or .22

(Continued on page 102)

THE OLD MAN'S PET BUG



THE booted feet marching around and around seemed to be trampling Peter Breton's throbbing brain. A slow, rhythmic "clink-clank," as of metallic pawls, kept time with the thudding footfalls, while above the racket rose the lilting rhythm of an old-time chantey:

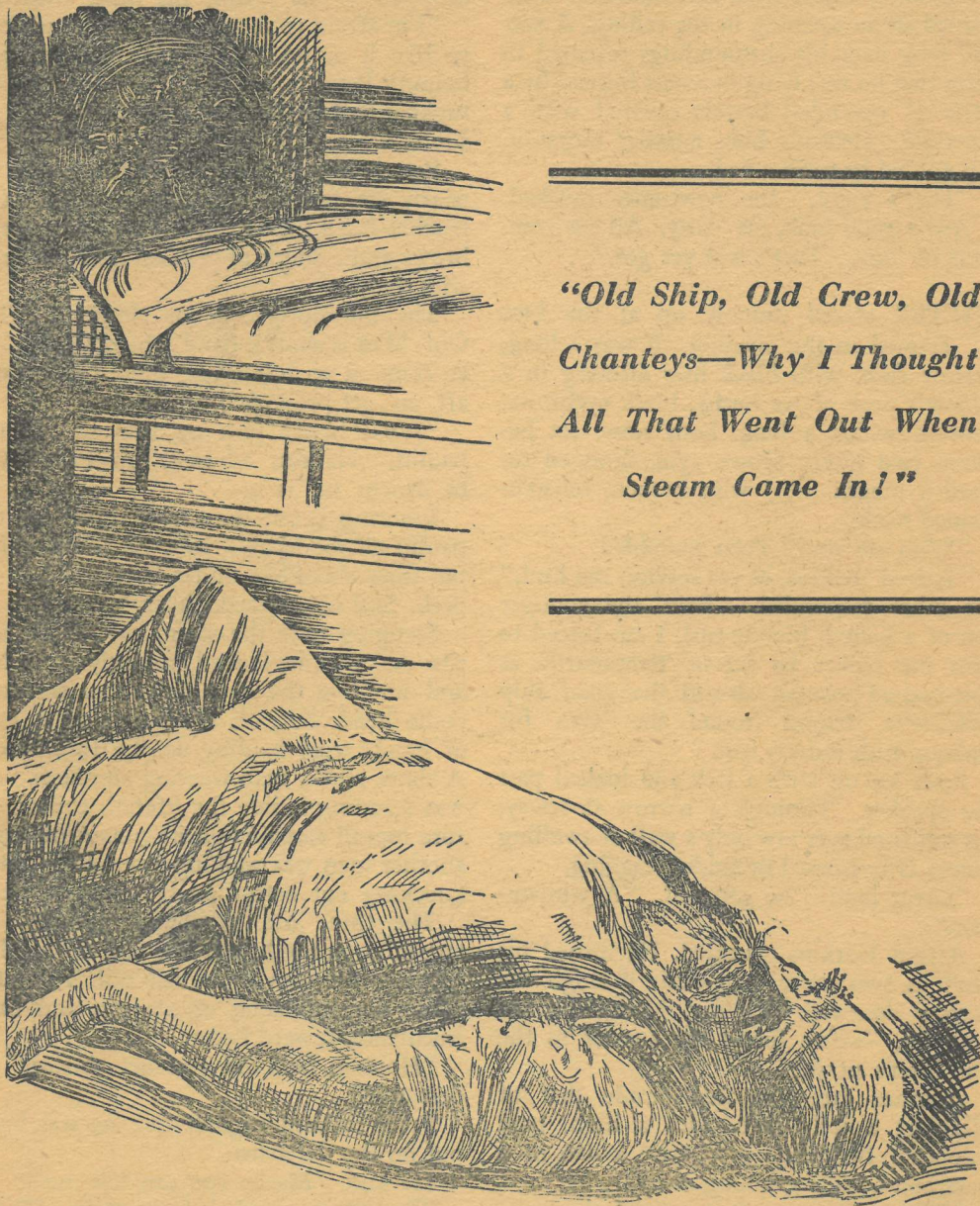
"A Yankee ship came down the river.
Blow, my bully boys, blow!
With a bucko mate and a Bluenose skipper.
Blow, my bully boys, heave a pawl!"

"Oh, brother!" Peter groaned. He opened his eyes and stared into intense darkness. "Wish they'd stop that racket and let a guy sleep."

He tried to remember where he was, but thinking made his head ache all the more. Turning over on his side, he covered his exposed ear with his left hand in an effort to shut out the racket, and drifted back to sleep.

Some time later he was jarred awake by the hoot of a siren. Fully conscious now, he listened with growing wonder to a soft ripple of water, above which rose the whine of block sheaves, blending with a clear tenor vocie.

"Oh, whiskey is the life o' man," declaimed the tenor.



*“Old Ship, Old Crew, Old
Chanteys—Why I Thought
All That Went Out When
Steam Came In!”*

“*Whiskey, Johnny!*” a dozen other voices bawled in lusty assent.

“It’s always bin since time began,” the tenor philosophized.

“*Whiskey for my Johnny!*” roared the others.

“What the blazes is coming off?” Peter wondered. He propped himself on his right elbow as someone came hurrying toward

where he lay. A harsh rustling sounded directly above his head. He opened his eyes, only to close them again as a beam of sunlight struck him full in the face. “Hey!” he exclaimed in protest.

“Yer don’t like ter ’ave yer beauty sleep disturbed, wot?” a high-pitched cockney voice suggested mockingly. “Blimy, yer a bleedin’ sight.”

Peter opened his eyes again and stared at the speaker, whose head and shoulders were framed in an opening in the ceiling. A second look over his surroundings revealed to Peter that he was lying in a nest formed by a circle of up-ended barrels covered with a tarpaulin. Beneath him, another tarpaulin was folded to form a bed.

"That's right," the newcomer mocked. "'Ave a good look, me 'earty. All the comforts of 'ome. That's wot yer got."

PETER stared dumbly up at the face framed in the opening. It was a long, narrow face, with black hair meeting in a widow's peak above bushy, black eyebrows, beneath which a long, bony nose, set between two merry brown eyes, drooped toward a mouth filled with broken, tobacco-stained teeth.

"Who are you?" Peter mumbled.

"Alfred 'Arkins, at yer service, me lord," the other responded. "Bein' the younger son of a belted, bloody earl, I am forced to earn me tucker by servin' temporarily as able-bodied seaman aboard the good ship *Glengorm*, bound 'round the 'Orn for Ilique with railway iron."

Peter sat up with a jerk and looked past the speaker. Through a narrow doorway, his confused eyes saw only a wall of swelling canvas criss-crossed by spidery rigging.

"Great land!" he groaned. "A winjammer."

Alfred Harkins chuckled. He turned his head as two more men came through the narrow doorway. "Hi say, Mick," he announced, "we've found the answer to the Ole Man's prayer."

Another face appeared beside that of Harkins; a jolly face, with a high, bald forehead, twinkling gray eyes, a dab of a nose and a wide grinning mouth.

"Will ye look at that, now!" the newcomer exclaimed in a mellow voice which Peter recognized as that of the man who had led the chanting. "A stowaway. 'Tis quare the things people will do when they take a drop too much."

Peter pushed himself to his knees, grasped the chine of a barrel and hauled himself to his feet. "Let me out of here," he demanded. "I've got no business aboard any windjammer. Gangway!"

He clambered over the tops of the bar-

rels, landed awkwardly on the deck and dropped to his knees, his head whirling.

"I'm afraid ye're stuck wi' it, lad, whither ye like it or no," the third man declared, helping Peter to his feet. "We dropped the tugboat half an hour ago, an' we're 'way off shore."

Peter looked down from his height of nearly six feet at the speaker, who was a hatchet-faced little man, with tufted red eyebrows and a shock of reddish hair sprinkled with gray.

The middle-aged tenor chuckled. "The Oul' Man is short a hand," he declared. "So ye come at an opportune time. Come away aft, an' get properly introduced."

"We'd better pick up that bloody tarpaulin," Harkins advised, "or Paddy will be dancin' on 'is 'at."

Ignoring Peter, the trio dragged the tarpaulin off the barrels, rolled it loosely, then put their shoulders under it and started on deck. Still half dazed, Peter followed.

Stepping over the storm sill of the narrow doorway, he looked curiously about him and saw that the door led under the fore-castle head. Aft, on the port side, a gang of hands were hauling on the fore braces. A short, stocky man wearing an officer's cap was standing beside the fife rail, coiling the fore topsail clewline on its pin. Amidships, another man was walking around the hatch, knocking out batten wedges with a maul.

The three old shellbacks dumped the tarpaulin on the hatch. The one called Mick spoke to the man at the fife rail. The latter made the coil snug on its pin and came truculently toward Peter.

"How in hell did you get aboard?" he demanded.

Peter realized vaguely that he was being put on the defensive.

He said, "Maybe you can tell me."

The other scowled ferociously. "Put a stopper on the smart cracks, fella," he warned. He looked Peter up and down. "A dockwalloper, eh?"

For the first time, Peter took stock of his appearance. He was wearing grimy dungaree trousers and jumper, his feet thrust into heavy brogans, a single-pronged cargo hook stuck in the cracked leather belt about his waist.

"Sure," the officer drawled, "I know how you got here. Lemme tell you how it hap-

pened: you filled up on pop-skull and snugged down behind them barrels under the foc'sle head to sleep it off. That right?"

"It certainly isn't, Mister," Peter denied, surmising that the other was the second mate. That he was no stranger to the bottle was attested by his red-veined nose and watery blue eyes, which, Peter realized, must be why, at forty, he was still a second mate on a wind ship.

The second turned and glanced aft, then grasped Peter's left arm and hustled him through the waist to the break of the poop, where a small, bewhiskered figure stood at the head of the starboard ladder.

"Got that extra hand you were needin', sir," the second mate announced. "One o' the dockwallopers that was loadin' us. Got drunk and calked off under the foc'sle head. Cockney found him a very few minutes ago."

The skipper rubbed his bony hands and grinned approvingly down at Peter. He appeared to be at least seventy-five, a waspish, little old man, with tufted white eyebrows and a snowy beard, from which projected a nose that seemed to have been carved from mahogany.

"Plenty o' beef in those shoulders, Mister Doyle," he said. His manner changed suddenly and he glared down at Peter. "What d'you mean by stowin' away abroad o' me, young man?"

Peter stared back, gripped by a feeling of unreality. The ship, her officers and crew were out of a bygone era. Looking upward, past the scrawny figure of the Old Man, Peter saw the flag of Panama fluttering at the peak of the spanker gaff.

He asked, "Would you mind telling me what year is this, sir?"

The skipper raked the fingers of his right hand through his beard.

"The year," he declared slowly, "is Nineteen Forty-seven, the date, April Twenty-sixth. Why do you ask!"

Peter shrugged. "I thought for a minute I'd gone backward to the year Eighteen Forty-seven. In that period, shanghaiing was, I believe, the approved method of filling out the crew list."

The Old Man raised his white eyebrows and grinned. "But you haven't been shanghaiing, young man," he protested. "You just happened to be sleeping off a drunk, under

the foc'sle head, when we sailed. That makes you a stowaway, you see."

SO THAT, Peter thought, was to be the Old Man's alibi. For more than twenty years the illegal shipment of seamen had been punishable by fine or imprisonment. Consequently, seamen no longer were shanghaiing; they were "discovered" stowed away after the ship had sailed.

Another man came forward to the break of the poop and paused beside the skipper, topping him by a head and shoulders; a burly figure, with a wide, sallow face pitted with open pores, like tanned pigskin. He rubbed the sandy bristle on his chin with a calloused forefinger and regarded Peter with a glint of mockery in his pale blue eyes.

"That guy ought to make a good hand, once he's broken in," he said. "I think I'll take him in my watch."

The second mate snorted. "Like hell, Mister Skreene," he protested angrily. "I saw him first. Besides, my watch is short a hand."

"You fellows are taking one hell of a lot for granted," Peter said with forced calm. "I'm not a longshoreman. My name is Peter Breton, and I'm first officer of the Breton Line steamer, *Medora*, at present loading in Mobile for Hamburg."

Skreene grinned skeptically. "That's big talk, fella." He nodded to Doyle and ordered, "Search him, Mister."

The second mate gave Peter the once over, then jerked open the front of his dungaree and lifted a worn leather billfold from the breast pocket of Peter's shirt.

"Let me see that," the Old Man said.

Doyle climbed half way up the ladder and handed him the wallet. Opening it, the skipper extracted an oblong of blue cardboard, glanced at it and chuckled.

"This," he declared, "is a longshoreman's union card, made out to one Ed. Hayden." He next brought forth a folded paper, grimy from much handling. When he shook out the folds, Peter identified it as an Army discharge.

"H-m!" the Old Man grunted, glaring down at Peter. "The description on this discharge fits you like a coat o' paint. Listen to this: Ed. Hayden; born, Fairhope, Alabama, February Tenth, Nineteen Twenty; Height, five-eleven; weight, one seventy;

hair, dark brown; eyes, blue—"He paused and looked down at Doyle. "What's the color o' that feller's eyes, Mister?"

The second mate peered intently at Peter. "Blue, sir."

The Old Man nodded and continued, "Complexion, ruddy; no distinguishing marks—" He frowned over the top edge of the paper at Peter and drawled, "I don't like liars, young man."

"Dammit!" Peter shouted, "I'm not lying. These damned papers aren't mine. Neither are these dungarees. Someone slugged me, took my clothes and substituted these rags."

"When?" the skipper queried.

"Last night, I think," Peter told him. "I recall someone calling my name from a car parked on Government Street, in Mobile. I stepped over to see who it was. That's the last I remember until I woke up while the anchor was being hove short."

The mate snickered. "That guy ought to write a book."

"He tells a good story, all right," the Old Man conceded. "But, somehow, it doesn't ring true." He folded the discharge and returned it with the union card to the billfold, which he tossed down to Peter, who ignored it and let it fall on the deck. "Take him below and sign him on as an ordinary," the skipper ordered.

"Like hell, you'll sign me on!" Peter bled.

"You'll sign now, or go in irons an' be fed hard tack an' water until you come to your senses," the Old Man warned.

"That's illegal," the young man pointed out. Quoting from memory, he continued. "It shall be illegal to ship any person on board a vessel of the United States while he is intoxicated or under the influence of drugs, or to induce him to sign articles by force or threat or by any statement or representation known or supposed to be untrue."

"Dockside lawyer," the mate jeered.

"That law is applicable to ships under the American flag," the skipper pointed out. "As we're under Panamanian registry, it doesn't touch us by a mile. Now let me add a few more threats. We're goin' west about the Horn. That means lots o' cold weather. You'll need warm, substantial clothes. Unless you're on articles, you can't draw clothing from the slop chest. Legally, you're a

stowaway and, as such, liable to prosecution when we reach Iquique. In the interval, you'll work, unless you'd rather make the passage on hard tack and Adam's ale."

Peter shrugged, aware that the Old Man had him in a strangle hold. Legally, the skipper could do everything he had threatened to do and, at the end of the passage, prosecute him as a stowaway.

"I guess you've got me," he surrendered. "But I warn you that you're building up plenty of trouble for yourself."

"If I enter the affair in the log," the Old Man said, "that makes it legal and above board. You say you're Peter Breton, chief mate o' one o' the Breton boats. All I know for certain is that you were found stowed away aboard o' me an' carryin' the identification o' one Ed. Hayden, a longshoreman. That's all I'm supposed to know. Take him below to the chartroom, Mister."

Doyle conducted Peter on the poop and aft to the chartroom, which was situated above the main cabin. The Old Man and the mate were waiting, with the articles spread on the chartroom table.

"Now, my man," the skipper said judicially, "you're signing as ordinary seaman on the ship *Glengorm*, Farland Mac Veigh, master, for the port of Iquique, and from there to San Francisco, service not to extend beyond a period of two years. Sign your name here." He indicated a blank line and handed Peter a fountain pen.

"I might as well warn you that any seaman shipped as I'm being shipped may leave the vessel at any time," he said. "Also that any agreement I make may be considered null and void." Bending over the table, he signed his name, "Peter Breton," with a flourish. "You'll find you've caught the wrong rabbit this time, Captain."

The Old Man put on his glasses and looked at the signature. "I see you persist in that fiction," he chided, peering at Peter over the tops of his spectacles." He replaced the cap of his fountain pen and looked significantly at the mate. "He's in your hands now, Mister."

The mate bared his big teeth in a grin and pushed Peter toward the door. "Topside, bum," he rumbled.

"No pushing," Peter warned.

"Oho! A hard case, eh?" The mate's right hand dipped into the side pocket of

his coat and came out armed with brass knuckles. "We have the right medicine for that."

Peter's right hand shot out, and his fingers closed in a desperate grip about the mate's bony wrist, while with his left he tore off the brass knuckles. Dropping the weapon on the deck, he slammed a left to the jaw that sent Skreene reeling into a corner of the chartroom.

Picking up the brass knuckles, Peter balanced them in his right hand and glared accusingly at the skipper. The Old Man looked over his glasses at the mate and murmured:

"Tut! Tut!, Mister Skreene. I don't allow that sort o' thing aboard o' me."

The mate struggled groggily to his feet. "I'll tear his liver out," he blustered.

The skipper shook his head. "Never mind, Mister." Turning to Peter, he ordered, "Get for'ard, my man."

"Very well," Peter retorted. "But I warn you I'll stand for no bucko tactics. If you sick that gorilla onto me again, I'll take him apart."

"You do your work, and you'll have no trouble, young man," the skipper said mildly. "Now get for'ard."

Peter stepped out on deck, tossed the brass knuckles overboard and went off the poop. Ignoring the curious stares of the men in the waist, he walked forward and sat down on the hatch. He rested his elbows on his knees and stared down at the deck, already beginning to regret the flash of temper which had caused him to slug the mate. All his training rejected the idea of a common foremast hand striking an officer.

"But I had to do it," he argued with himself. "Otherwise, the damned gorilla would have grooved my mug with those knucks. Still, it gives that hairy-faced old hypocrite an excuse to plaster me with a charge of mutiny. Wish now I hadn't thrown the knucks over the side. They'd come in handy as evidence in my own defense, in case—Oh, hell!" he changed his line of thought abruptly. "All the self-justification in the world can't alter the fact that I'm stuck for the long drag down to the Horn, and up through the Pacific to Iquique. All I can do is carry on and watch my step."

He sat erect on the hatch and looked over his surroundings. The ship, a trim

square-rigger, with nothing above the upper to'gans'ls, was heading southwest by south, close-hauled on the port tack, her canvas rippling in the light breeze. Ahead, the Gulf stretched like a vast sheet of rumpled blue silk toward a horizon piled high with fleecy clouds. Astern, Dauphin Island lay like a gray-green smear along the skyline. A tugboat, obviously the one which had cast loose from the ship a while before, was making toward the pass, a belch of greasy black erupting from her funnel.

Someone said "Psst!" Turning his head, Peter saw a lantern-jawed face, topped by a tall, white cap and embellished with a graying handlebar mustache rising above the lower half of the galley door. The cook surveyed him for a second or two in brown-eyed appraisal and then crooked a finger.

"What's gallying you, Doc?" Peter asked.

"Gotta mess o' spuds what's needin' to be undressed for the supper hash," the cook informed him in a nasal twang that rivalled the skipper's. "Mebbe you could do with a shot o' Java, huh?"

Peter rose quickly from the hatch and stepped over to the galley door. "Coffee's just what I need," he declared.

The cook opened the door half and waved Peter to a well-scrubbed bench. "Set down." He sniffed loudly and grinned. "Boy!" he twanged. "You musta bin on a reg'lar ol' whingding. You smell like you bin swimmin' in a distillery vat with yer clothes on. Mebbe you'd like something to eat, huh?"

Peter's stomach rebelled at the thought of food. "Just coffee, if you don't mind," he pleaded.

The cook filled a pannikin with coffee. Stepping to the door, he looked cautiously over the deck, then stooped and drew from a locker a quart bottle. "Reckon you'd like a stick in yer Java, huh?" he queried. Without waiting for an answer, he added about half a gill of whiskey to the coffee and handed the pannikin to Peter. Raising the bottle to his lips, he took a generous swallow, then returned the bottle to the locker with an air of finality.

"Hear you made an auspicious beginnin'," he said, seating himself on the bench beside Peter. "Ain't every sailin' day a greeny pokes the mate in the kisser. No, sir-ee!"

Peter took a swallow of coffee and shook his head. "I wish now I hadn't," he said. "But the Old Man as good as ordered him to work me over."

"Not our Ol' Man!" the cook protested. "He wouldn't stand for anything like that. Not him. He's a good old guy. A blasted saint. That's what he is."

"He certainly didn't act like any saint I ever heard of," Peter argued. "How long has he had those two would-be buckos?"

"Skreene shipped this voyage," the cook revealed. "Worked by the ship while we were loadin'. Paddy Doyle, the second has bin with the ship fourteen years. Acts hard-boiled, but gotta heart o' gold."

"Paddy Doyle?" Peter murmured. "That name seems familiar."

The cook chuckled. "Name ain't really Paddy—it's John Allowishus. Lads call him Paddy on account of a chantey Mick Scully sings."

"Lad?" Peter grinned. Nearly everyone aboard here seems to be a fugitive from Snug Harbor. Old fellows."

"Mick Scully an' Alec Frazier have bin in this one since 'way before the first world war," the cook declared. "Cockney Harkins, Alfonso, Tony Lambert, Dutch Becker an' me, we've bin in her since the middle Twenties. The Ol' Man has sailed her since Nineteen hundred."

"By damn." Peter exclaimed. "Your Old Man certainly must have something on the ball—keeping men with him like that. How does he do it?"

"Well, for one thing," the cook said slowly, "he treats the lads right. If a man stays with her more than two voyages, the skipper pays him a bonus. Scully and Frazier and them others, they've bin collectin' their bonuses for years. Y'know, a lotta ol'-timers don't like steamboats. That's why them fellers ship over and over in this one."

"Cripes!" Peter grunted. "I still have a feeling I've slipped back a hundred years. Old ship, old skipper, old crew—and all that chanteying. Why, I thought that sort of thing went out when steam came in."

"Not aboard this one," the cook declared. "Ol' Man likes to keep up the ol' customs. Mick Scully, he's the official chanteyman. Skipper claims a singing crew is a contented crew."

"He might have something there," Peter

admitted. "He should have swallowed the anchor twenty years ago."

"Retire? Not him!" the cook asserted. "He'll never turn this one over to anyone else. He'll stay with her as long as she's afloat, unless they slide him overboard in a canvas overcoat first."

"I should think his owners would have something to say about that?" Peter suggested.

"He's the owner—lock, stock an' barrel," the cook snorted. "That is, until this voyage. Went into pardnership with a guy in Mobile. Name of Algard."

"George Algard, the shipping agent?"

The cook nodded. "That's the guy. We brought up a cargo o' hides from Santos," he continued. "But we couldn't get a cargo out. Then this Algard guy made the Ol' Man a proposition to keep him in cargoes if he'd sell a half interest in the ship. He'll be sorry he ever put himself under any landshark's thumb, as sure as my name's Tom Ward. Yes, sir!"

Peter finished the last of his coffee and stared into the empty pannikin. The cook's rambling disclosure had opened his eyes to a number of possibilities, none pleasant to contemplate. George Algard was agent in Mobile for the Breton line of steamers, and could switch bulk cargoes from the Breton boats to the *Glengorm* without anyone, except himself and Mac Veigh, being the wiser. But the But, most significant was the fact that George Algard, now half owner of the *Glengorm*, was Peter's first cousin.

"Algard musta put some sort o' squeeze play on the Ol' Man, to get him to sell an interest in this one," the cook was rambling on. "Changin' to Panama registry, too, was his idea, takin' the ship from under U. S. maritime law, so the Ol' Man can do just about as he damn well pleases. Well, one good thing, there won't be any union delegate tellin' how he must walk his own deck. Never did go much for unions myself. No, sir!"

PETER scarcely heard him. His mind was busy with the events of the night before. He remembered leaving his cousin's bachelor apartment, after a parting drink, and standing on the sidewalk outside the building, waiting for a taxi to carry him down to the waterfront. Someone had called his

name from a closed automobile parked against the curbing, and he had stepped over to investigate. And that was all he could remember.

Orphaned in childhood, Peter had been brought up by his bachelor uncle, Hugh Breton, and his education devoted to the prospect of his one day succeeding the older man in the presidency of the line. That he would some day inherit Hugh Breton's holdings was a foregone conclusion. His hitch in Annapolis, his war service in the South Pacific, his berth as first officer of the *Medora* had been part of the education that would fit him to take his uncle's place. But, should Peter pre-decease his uncle, the logical heir would be George Algard. And that, Peter suspected, was the core of the matter.

"Most o' the old Crowd shipped over," the cook was saying. "We only got four stiffs, includin' yourself—"

Peter grinned, remembering that "stiff" was a seagoing term for a green hand. "So, I'm a stiff, eh?" he remarked.

"You won't be for long," the cook assured him. He set a mess kid filled with potatoes on the bench between them and handed Peter a paring knife. "Paddy Doyle will show you the ropes. He'll soon make a sailorman outa you. Now let's get busy with these Irish bananas."

LONG before the *Glegorm* cleared the Florida Passage and headed into the Atlantic, Peter decided upon a course of action. When aloft, he was careful never to pass around a man on the yard, nor to take any station that would place him directly below someone on the yard above. Too many men, he realized, had fallen to their deaths by being butted from a hand hold on the jackstay while trying to pass around another man on the yardarm. Moreover, a marlinspike dropped on his skull from above could be explained as an unfortunate accident. These were obvious precautions. To prevent his being knocked on the head and passed overboard in the night, he had no defense except to make sure that no one came up behind him in the darkness.

On the evening of his second day on board, Peter went aft to draw an outfit of clothing from the slop chest. The Old Man beckoned him into the chartroom and opened the log book.

"I want to convince you that I'm tryin' to be fair," the skipper declared, indicating an entry. "Read that, young man."

Peter studied the entry which, he saw, was dated the previous day. Beginning with the usual notations regarding wind and tide, it continued:

"Fifteen minutes after being dropped by the tug, Seaman Alfred Harkins discovered a stowaway hiding under the forecandle head. This man asserts that his name is Peter Breton, although he is obviously a longshoreman named Ed. Hayden, according to identifying papers found on his person. He has signed articles as O. S., but insists on signing under the name Peter Breton."

The Old Man looked quizzically up at Peter and asked, "Would you like to add anything to that, young man?"

Peter shrugged, realizing that the skipper was trying to keep his skirts clear by being frank. If the drunken young longshoreman discovered under the forecandle head should prove to be the nephew of the Breton Line, Captain Farland Mac Veigh could hardly be blamed.

"Nothing to add, sir," he declared.

He went forward and stowed his new belongings in his bunk, suspecting that the episode had been planned to lull him into a false sense of security by letting him conclude that a man had been needed to complete the crew, and that the dockside thugs hired to fill the order had, by an unfortunate coincidence, picked on him. That, Peter decided, was the way the Old Man intended to play it. But instead of causing him to let down his guard, it made him more cautious than before.

Reaching far into the Atlantic, the *Glegorm* picked up the Northeast Trades and went curving south toward the Line, through days of sapphire seas and turquoise skies and far horizons piled high with fleecy trade-wind clouds. During those days Peter learned why the old ship, with half a century of service behind her, still looked neat and trim as if she had just left the builder's yard.

There were no afternoon watches below. From "three bells to three bells"—from one-thirty until five-thirty in the afternoon—all hands were kept busy with snipping hammer and paint brush. Even when the

pleasant weeks of "flying-fish" weather came to an end, and the ship nosed into the doldrums, there was no let-up in the work. With the ship idling through a flat calm, the Old Man ordered the boats down and the steel hull chipped and painted from water-line to cap-rail.

For a week the *Glengorm* idled while she should have flown, with the pitch bubbling from her deck seams, and the still air heavy with the odor of hot paint. All around her the sea lay like a vast disc of blue glass, with waterspouts moving like attenuated ghosts along the horizon, in every possible direction.

ON the afternoon before the calm broke, the outside painting was finished, and the boats were ordered on board. Wind wasn't far off, for a haze was stretching a gray curtain along the northern horizon. Standing on the rail, Peter waited for Scully to hook in the falls of their work boat when he glanced to port and noticed something white bobbing on the surface a quarter of a mile from the ship.

"What d'you suppose that is, Mick?" he called down to the old shellback and pointed in the direction of the floating object.

Scully stepped up on a thwart and shaded his eyes with his right hand. Suddenly, he clambered hand-over-hand up the boat fall, like an aged monkey, his eyes popping in excitement. Landing on the deck, he ran aft and barged through the forward companionway. A minute later, he appeared on the poop, accompanied by the Old Man.

Peter watched Scully point excitedly to port, while the skipper focussed his glasses upon the white patch. Then Scully dived off the poop, swung over into the boat and grunted to Peter: "Come on."

When Peter joined him, Scully cast off the falls, set an oar in stern notch and sculled expertly toward the floating object.

"Would you mind telling me what this is all about?" Peter asked.

"I ain't rightly sure," the older man said. "But if it's what I think it is, our bloody fortune's made."

Sitting on a bow thwart, Peter looked back at the *Glengorm* lying like a painted ship against a background of brassy sky and incredibly blue sea, her sails hanging limp from yard and stay. All work had stopped,

and the men were now lining the rail to watch the progress of the boat as she neared them.

When, finally, Scully brought the boat alongside the object, Peter saw what looked like a great lump of tallow speckled with black, horny particles which made it look like a huge, uncooked plum duff. And it stank like nothing he had ever smelled before. His feeling of detachment dropped from him as he recognized it for what it was.

"Ambergris!" he exclaimed.

"Ye can say that again, me lad," Scully grunted. He ejected a stream of tobacco juice into the water alongside and scowled. "Now how in the name o' the seven protestant gods are we ever goin' to get that dollop alongside?"

"Shove the boat hook into it and tow it astern," Peter suggested. "I'll handle the oars."

"Me sound man!" Scully drove the boat hook like a harpoon into the evil-smelling mass. "Think it'll hold?"

"If it doesn't," Peter said, "you can keep on jabbing with the hook." He set the oars against their thole pins. "Here goes."

It was a long, laborious pull back to the ship, with Peter straining at the long oars, and Scully clinging to the boat hook driven deep into the lump of ambergris, which dragged astern, an inert weight that added to Peter's labors.

As they came alongside the ship, the Old Man leaned over the poop rail and belatedly:

"Three hundred, if it's an ounce. Bully boys!" He turned to Doyle and ordered, "Break out a cargo net, Mister."

The second ran forward to the fore-castle head and came aft again with the cargo net, which was lowered into the boat. Peter and Scully worked the net around the prize, hooked onto a boat fall and ordered it heaved on deck.

When Peter came over the side, he found the Old Man studying the ambergris which, now that it was out of the water, was even larger than it had first seemed. The mates and the crew stood about gaping, apparently insensible to the awful stench.

"Oil barrels, Mister," the skipper ordered. "Three ought to do." He rubbed his hands together and cackled. "By tunket, a

man might sail the seven seas for a thousand years and never make a find like this."

Even after the stuff had been packed away and the barrels headed up, the odor lingered. But no one seemed to mind. The skipper ordered the boats lifted inboard and stowed on their chocks. Then, after evening wash-down, all hands went below to supper.

During the dog-watches, with the ship drifting in the Equatorial calm, the men lounged on the hatch and talked about the windfall. With a fair division of the proceeds, the sale of the ambergris would leave each one in possession of more money than he could have hoped to earn in a lifetime before the mast. Where only a few hours before they had been content to loaf through the blazing days, because of the sailor's philosophy of "more days, more dollars," they were now whistling for a wind, impatient to be on their way down to the Horn, eager to get the voyage over and their pockets lines.

AT FOUR bells—ten o'clock—that evening, Peter went aft to relieve the wheel. Although the helm hadn't been shifted in more than a week, the regular watches had been continued. Mounting the starboard ladder to the poop, he paused to look toward the north.

The sea lay flat as a pool of black oil which reflected the feeble light of the stars struggling through the growing overcast. The ship hung motionless, her sails black against the sky. Above the northern horizon a dark cloud was mounting toward the zenith, its forefront riven by vivid lightning flares.

"What the blazes?" he muttered. "Obviously, the Old Man doesn't know about that, or he'd have all hands shortening down. That squall's coming fast. If it catches her with everything set, it'll rip every sail out of the boltropes."

He started aft toward the wheelhouse, wondering why Doyle hadn't called all hands. Half way through the gangway between the raised poop and the starboard rail, he stumbled over the body of a man.

"Cripes! What goes on here?" He stooped, turned the man over on his back. Even in the darkness, he recognized the stocky figure of Doyle. He touched the back of his right hand to the side of the second

mate's neck and felt a fairly strong pulse. "Well, at least he's alive."

Suddenly his ears caught a faint rustle of clothing. Turning his head, he saw the figure of a man silhouetted against the sky, a club balanced in his upflung right hand.

Not an instant too soon, Peter threw himself out of the path of the descending club. He kicked out backward, felt the impact of his bare foot against the other's knee. The man sprawled on the deck. His club fell from his hand and rolled into the scuppers. In an instant he was up and racing toward the break of the poop, his feet falling with a soft patter on the planking.

Peter snapped erect. Groping in the scuppers, he found the club, which he identified by feel as a greenheart belaying pin. He ran forward to the break of the poop and peered over the waist. Except for the watch below huddled on the hatch, there was no one in sight.

"What in tunket's going on here?" The Old Man's voice whanged from the darkness about the wheelhouse. "Don't you see that weather makin' up to nor'ard. Mister? What in tunket are you thinkin' about?" His hurrying figure flitted through the faint light from the binnacle as he passed the door of the wheelhouse. "Where the devil are you, Mister Doyle?" Then he tripped over the prostrate figure of the second mate and went sprawling.

Marveling at the uncanny weather sense which had brought the Old Man on deck in the nick of time, Peter helped him rise.

"It's Mr. Doyle, sir," he explained. "Someone knocked him on the head. I found him lying there when I came to relieve the wheel—"

"Why in tunket are you going around on my poop with a belayin' pin in your hand?" the skipper twanged indignantly.

"Apparently the same one who knocked the second out tried to perform a like service for me," Peter explained. "I kicked his legs from under him. He fell down and dropped this belaying pin. Then he scrambled up and legged it for'ard. I grabbed up the pin and started after him."

"And he got away, of course?" The Old Man's sarcasm was apparent.

"You seem determined to hang this on me," Peter snapped. "But why not have Doyle carried below? He isn't badly hurt.

When he comes out of it, he'll probably be able to identify his assailant."

The Old Man grunted, then trotted to the break of the poop and bellowed: "All hands lay aft."

When the men mustered abaft the mainmast, he ordered, "Scully, you and Frazier come up here an' carry the second mate to his room. He's been hurt. You," he glowered at Peter, "go ahead an' relieve the wheel. We'll thrash this matter out later."

As Peter started aft, the Old Man drummed his right heel on the deck, summoning the mate. "Oh, Lord!" Peter heard him exclaim. "Why did you foist upon me a pair o' bumboat hands for mates? Why, I ask you, Lord?"

The mate emerged from the companion, rubbing his eyes. "Anything wrong, sir?" he inquired.

"Can't you see that weather a-comin'?" the Old Man growled. "Get her shortened down, before it rips the sticks out of us."

Skreene nodded. Facing the assembled crew, he bellowed:

"All right, you soldiers. Tops'ls and to'gans'ls first. Hop to it."

The men hurried to their stations. Clewlines and buntlines were manned. Parrels creaked as the upper topsail and to'gans'ls yards slid down the masts. Mainsail and cro'jack were hauled up, after which the crew swarmed aloft to bring the canvas to a furl.

For a while the windless silence was broken by the rustle of dry canvas, the slap of reef points and the subdued voices of the men aloft. The Old Man trotted to and fro across the poop, muttering in his beard. Finally he snatched the megaphone from the box inside the companion, raised it to his lips and bellowed in a far-reaching tone:

"Aloft there. Have you lost your voice, Scully?"

"No, sir." Scully's temor boomed down from the lower main topsail yard. "All right, lads." Raising his voice, he began to recount the woes of the old-time crimp who shipped out a crew but forgot to collect their advance notes, each verse ending with the refrain:

"Oh, we'll heave—o!

An' we'll sing—hey!"

While the others took a fresh grip on

the stubborn canvas, fisted it to the yard and roared in response,

"*And we'll pay Paddy Doyle for his boots.*"

"Ah, Mister," the Old Man declared, "give me a singin' crew every time. Singin' sailors are happy sailors, I always say."

"Yes, sir," the mate agreed. He looked about him, frowning. "Isn't it time somebody called Mister Doyle, sir?"

"He's in his room," the skipper grunted. "Somebody knocked him on the head. Had him carried below."

Skreene rubbed his chin. "What d'you know!" he exclaimed. "Some of the hands got a grudge against the afterguard, you think, sir?"

"Might be, might be, Mister," the Old Man twanged. "But I'll get to the bottom of it if it takes me from now until we raise Iquique Light."

THE sea was rising. The storm clouds were moving southward. Lightning flares gave momentary glimpses of the horizon. The rumble of distant thunder blended with the rattle of blocks, the whine of running gear and the slap of loose rope on the deck. The woes of Paddy Doyle had come to an end, and now Mick Scully was giving out with:

"Oh, Shenandoah, we're goin' to leave you."

To which his mates responded lustily,
"A-way, rollin' river!"

Standing beside the idle wheel, Peter hummed the haunting old chantey as he watched the sails come in, one by one, until the ship was stripped down to lower topsails and courses.

Another hour passed. With everything shipshape, the Old Man sent the hands forward for a smoke. All about the ship, the sea was lifting and falling in an oily swell which rolled her like an empty barrel. Overhead, the advancing storm clouds were shutting out the feeble light of the stars.

Presently the first breath of the squall hummed in the taut rigging, slowly rising to a shriek. The slack mainsail bellied taut with a thunderous clap and strained at sheets and tacks. Peter gripped the wheel, steadying the helm, as the *Glengorm* swung her stern to the onrushing squall. Then she moved ahead, gathering speed until she

was charging like a runaway horse on the lip of the storm, hurdling the seas which now broke white beneath the onslaught of the wind.

Spindrift whirled in sheets across the deck and pattered like hail against the taut sails. Overhead, the sky was filled with crackling incandescence, while thunder rolled like artillery drumfire. And through the turmoil, the Old Man tramped to and fro across the poop, leaning against the tearing blast, his bewhiskered face widened in a pleased grin in appreciation of the first wind in more than a week.

"By tunket, Mister," he boasted to the mate, "this bit of a breeze will boost us right over the Line an' into the South-east Trades. An' then watch her go rompin' down to old Cape Stiff. Aye, Mister, you'll learn what real sailerin' is like then."

BEFORE dawn the squall roared away to leeward, and the rain came in a crashing downpour that beat flat the seas. By mid-morning, the *Glengorm* was again reaching southward under full sail, with the trade wind booming through her rigging.

When Peter turned in after breakfast, he was worrying over the events of the night. Studying his watch mates, he wondered which of them could be guilty of the assault on Doyle and the subsequent attempt upon himself. Outwardly, they looked harmless. Scully, plump and jolly; Joe Mills, loud-voiced, compensating for a completely bald head by raising a huge, reddish mustache; Harkins, nicknamed the "cockney," who fawned upon the mates, flattering their ego, and later laughed about it in the fore-castle. These three were well past middle age, old fellows, who should have swallowed the anchor long ago, but who were driven to sea, voyage after voyage, by a fierce pride which refused to defer to charity. Neither could Peter see the remaining four as potential killers. Turner, Sanders and Dahl were all in their middle twenties, green hands, still awkward despite their two months on board. Finally, there was Alfonso, dark-faced and soft-voiced, the only authentic Panamanian among the ship's company.

Peter realized that death was still stalking him. Only his alertness the night before had saved him from a broken skull and,

perhaps, a passage over the side, a fate which he suspected had been intended for the second mate.

At seven bells — eleven-thirty — Peter turned out for the afternoon watch, when all hands would be on deck, and the endless work of ship maintenance would be resumed. As he pulled on his shirt, Scully informed him:

"No dinner till we see if the Oul' Man will splice the mainbrace. Come away aft."

"To blazes with that," Peter retorted pettishly. "I don't need any liquor."

"Haven't we just crossed the Line?" Scully demanded, a gleam of humor in his eyes. "And would you be breakin' an oul' custom?"

"Oh, all right," Peter surrendered, adding, "Seems to me there are too many old customs aboard this one."

Alec Frazier came over from the starboard side of the fore-castle, grinning hopefully "Mebbe he'll have a change o' heart this time, Mick," he suggested. "Ye can't win always."

Scully grinned and turned to the others. "Let's go, lads."

The watch trooped aft. As if by some pre-arrangement, the men of the other watch dropped whatever they were doing and joined the crowd as it halted abaft the mainmast.

The Old Man and the two mates were on the poop, getting ready to take a noon sight. Seeing the men mustered, the skipper came to the head of the port side ladder and looked down at them.

"Well, men," he twanged, "what is it this time? Not the grub, I hope."

"We're across the Line, sir," Scully informed him.

The skipper raised his tufted eyebrows in mock surprise. "You don't tell me!" he exclaimed. "Did you come aft to tell me that?"

"No, sir," Alec Frazier spoke up, "we thought ye'd like to splice the mainbrace. Just a wee drappie, to celebrate, like."

The Old Man threw back his head and glared down his huge nose at the little Scot. Then he gazed slowly over the crowd, his lips clamped tightly in disapproval.

"You younger men" he said slowly, "may not know that, in spite of my regard for old customs, there has been no liquor

served the crew since I took over this ship. Nevertheless, for the past thirty years, those old pelicans have demanded on every occasion like this that I splice the mainbrace. I won't do it."

He raked the fingers of his right hand through his beard and glowered down at the men. "Drink" he declared, "is a curse. Even the poor dumb animals have more sense than mankind. Do they fill themselves to the gunnel with hooch? They do not. No sir, they drink water—good, old Adam's ale. And that's exactly what you can do. Now lay for'ard, the lot o' you, before I get mad."

"Aye, aye, sir," Scully responded. He poked Alec in the ribs and declared, "That's another five y' owe me, oul' tight-purse."

The crowd broke up and drifted forward, laughing at Frazier's discomfiture. The little Scot took their banter good naturedly, and prophesied:

"That domned oul' corbie will splice the mainbrace before this passage is. Just ye wait an' see."

Peter was mildly amused at the incident. As they entered the forecabin he asked:

"Am I to understand that you old-timers have been pestering the Old Man for the past thirty years trying to make him splice the mainbrace?"

Scully nodded. "Ye said it. But I think it's bin longer than any thirty years. Anyway, Alec tried to wangle a shot o' liquor out o' him wan passage, a long time ago. When the Oul' Man refused, an' gave Alec a sermon on the evils o' drink, Alec swore he'd make him splice the mainbrace. Since then, he's bin payin' me a five dollar bet at the end o' every voyage."

"Well," Frazier said hopefully, "this voyage is no ower yet. Mebbe I can win the bet this time. Let's just wait an' see."

THE succeeding weeks of flying fish weather ended when the *Glengorm* reached the southern Horse Latitudes. Now the days grew increasingly colder as the ship drew in toward the South American coast. Despite the uncertain winds, all hands were kept busy, setting up preventers, placing chafing gear and changing the light sails for heavy-weather canvas in preparation for the stormy seas of the Horn.

At four bells in the morning watch, four

weeks after the *Glengorm* had crossed the line, Peter went aloft on the foremast, armed with a scalding hammer, a wire brush and a small can of black paint. The weather of the past two days had been heavy, but during the night the wind had fallen to a fair sailing breeze, although the sea was still running high. Now the yards were braced sharp up on the port tack as the ship reached toward the south-west, bearing down toward Cape San Diego.

Starting at the parrel of the upper fore to'gallant yard, Peter chipped away a few flakes of rust, scrubbed the ironwork with the wire brush and applied a coat of paint. After brushing paint over the burton bolts, he eased in off the yard and descended to the yard below, where he scaled and brushed the sling and truss, completed the job with a coat of paint and containing his descent.

He had finished on the upper and lower topsail yards, and was at work on the foreyard when Doyle came aloft. Since nothing further had been said about the attack on him, Peter assumed that the second mate was unaware of the identity of his assailant. Also, he seemed none the worse because of the experience.

Doyle started at the upper to'gallant yard and worked downward, inspecting the ironwork, seeing that the weather braces were taut and the lee braces properly slacked. This inspection was just another example of the Old Man's precautions. He left nothing in to chance, because, in the cold, gray seas at the foot of the continent, a broken parrel, a cracked sling or a chafed halyard might mean disaster.

Peter had finished his work on the foreyard, and was inching along the footropes toward the platform when he noticed Doyle on the upper topsail yard. Suddenly the yardarm swung aft, slammed against the to'gallant backstay with a force that made the mast quiver and then see-sawed to and fro like a runaway semaphore. A cry of horror broke from Peter's lips as the body of the second mate plunged past him, turning over in mid-air before it struck the caprail, from which it rebounded like a rubber doll and catapulted into the tumbling, gray sea.

"Man overboard!" Peter sang out. "Port side."

Fighting back an insane impulse to dive

off the yard, he watched the frothy patch where Doyle had gone under, hoping that the man's body would come to the surface. On the deck below the men were standing as if petrified, while above him, the yard swung to and fro, its parrel groaning like the rusty hinges of some monstrous door.

"Good Lord!" Peter thought, realizing his own danger. "All that slamming against the backstay may carry away the to'gallant mast. Me, I'm getting out of here."

He glanced once more astern and saw that the foamy patch had disappeared. He sighed, realizing now that the impact of Doyle's body against the rail must have caused instant death. As he inched in along the footrope, he muttered:

"God rest his' soul. He wasn't a bad sort."

His knees were trembling when he dropped from the sheerpole to the deck. A glance aft showed him that the lee brace had carried away. On the poop, the Old Man was jumping up and down like a crazed Jack-in-the-box and screaming for someone to haul aft the weather brace. The mate was nowhere in sight.

Setting his paint pot and chipping hammer in the scuppers, Peter joined the rush to haul after the weather brace. When the yard had been steadied by jamming it against the backstay, they turned their attention to the parted brace.

Scully whipped the hauling part of the brace from its pin, peered at the broken end and grunted. Now Peter saw that the rope had been cut.

"Some scut drew a knife across the lay o' the rope, just where it came through the lead to the belayin' pin," Scully growled. "He cut through two o' the strands an' left the other to part under pressure o' wind in the sail. Damn him to hell, whoever he is!"

More minutes were lost before the hauling part of the brace was again passed through the lead and the severed ends joined in a temporary hitch. Then the skipper ordered the ship wore around. Squared away, the *Glengorm* ran down the wind, zig-zagging back and forth over her own wake, all hands scanning the seas for some sign of the missing man.

At times, running free before the wind, with her yards squared, at others, reaching,

close-hauled, to windward, the ship quartered the seas until dusk began to draw a gray curtain over the sky. Finally, the Old Man ordered the yards backed, while he read the burial service.

"We've done all we can, men," he told the crew assembled in the waist. "Carry on."

SUPPER was eaten in silence. The pall of gloom that settled over the ship was deepened by the prophecy of one of the older men that one death on shipboard invariably was followed by two more. Peter shrugged aside the ancient superstition, aware that Doyle had been murdered, unintentionally, perhaps, but just as surely as if the killer had put a loaded pistol to his head and pulled the trigger.

Peter had an uncomfortable sense that he himself had been marked as the victim. Seeing him aloft, the murderer had cut through the hauling part of the upper topsail yard brace, perhaps unaware that Peter had finished work on the yard. Later, Doyle had worked on his tour of inspection down-



ward from the upper to'gallant. When he reached the upper topsail yard his weight on the spar, added to the already strong pressure of the wind in the sail, had parted the remaining strand of the severed rope.

"People think up new ways of committing murder all the time," Peter thought. "Right now I'm under the eye of a devilishly clever killer. Looks like I'll need to develop second sight, if I'm to go on living."

He passed an uneasy night, and was glad when the watch below was turned out for the morning wash-down. Mick Scully preceded him on deck. The old shellback looked aloft, closed his eyes and suddenly crossed himself. Glancing skyward, Peter saw a lone albatross hovering against the dawn.

Todd, one of the green hands in the starboard watch, loosed a derisive guffaw. Scully retaliated with a clip to the jaw that landed the younger man in the scuppers.

"That, me smilin' bucko," Scully growled, "will I'arn ye not to laugh at somethin' ye don't understand."

Ten minutes later, as he wielded his scrub broom, he led off with a doleful ditty:

"Oh, I dreamed I saw me own true love."
To which the others responded,
"Lowlands, Lowlands, away, my John!
"Oh, me true love lies neath the Lowland
sea," sang Mick.

"Aye, he's lyin' in the Lowlands low,"
affirmed his mates.

The mate came to the head of the starboard poop ladder and bawled:

"Belay that dirge! If you must sing, try something with a laugh in it." He looked directly at Peter and crooked his right forefinger. "Captain wants to see you."

Peter laid his broom on the hatch and went aft to the chartroom. The Old Man was seated at the table, a far-away look in his eyes.

"Come in, young man," he invited. As Peter stepped inside, the skipper continued, "I don't know a danged thing about you, young feller, except that you're a good sailorman. Y'see, I've bin keepin' my eyes on you. Where were you when Mister Doyle fell from the upper fore tops'l yard?"

"I was down on the foreyard, sir," Peter explained.

"I see," the Old Man nodded absently. "Well, you can bring your dunnage aft to the second mate's room, and be ready to take over the watch at eight bells."

Peter stared down at him in surprise. "So, I'm promoted from ordinary to second mate? Isn't that a bit unusual, sir?"

"I raised your ratin' to A. B. more'n a month ago," the skipper revealed. "I figured as good a sailorman as you turned out to be had no business ratin' as an ordinary, Mister—" "What in tunket is your right name?"

Peter grinned. "Believe it or not, sir, it's Breton—Peter Breton, just as I signed it on the articles."

The Old Man stroked his beard and studied him in slow appraisal.

"Danged if I ain't more'n half inclined to believe you," he twanged. "Something sticky about this mess. Mebbe that danged land shark in Mobile—" He broke off suddenly and waved Peter toward the door. "That'll be all, Mister."

Still groggy with surprise, Peter hurried forward to the forecastle, made his bedding and clothing into a roll and started aft again, pausing at the galley to return the

mess gear he had borrowed from the cook on sailing day.

"I won't be needing this any more, Doc," he told Ward. "From now on, I'll be eating aft. Thanks for everything."

Tom Ward stroked his gray handlebar mustache and grinned. "Ain't that somethin'?" he exclaimed. "An ordinary steps right into Paddy Doyle's boots! He emitted a crackling laugh and sang in a cracked falsetto,

"Oh, we'll heave-ho!
An' we'll sing—hey!
An' we'll pay Paddy Doyle for his
boots."

THEY made their first landfall on the South American coast through the uncertain light of a gale-swept dawn, with gray, wind-grooved combers surging up from the rim of the ice cap before a tearing wind that carried the clammy chill of melting snow.

Cape San Diego loomed over the starboard bow, a gray smudge along the western horizon, obscured at times by the williwaws which swept seaward from off the flat lands of eastern Tierra del Fuego. To the southeast, the snow-crowned mountains of Staten Land gleamed like silver spear points against the lowering gray sky.

The *Glengorm* was reaching southward toward the Strait of Lemaire, close-hauled under reefed upper topsails and courses, sheets of spindrift hissing like snow-flurries across her deck as she smashed through the huge seas marching up from the edge of the Antarctic ice. There was no work being done on deck that morning. Even the time-honored wash-down had been postponed. The watch below shivered in their bunks, while those on deck huddled in the lee of anything that would serve as a precarious wind-break.

Peter Breton walked the poop to keep his blood circulating. The Old Man huddled inside the companion, enveloped from neck to heels in an ancient sealskin coat, his head covered to the ears with a red woolen cap, which made him look like an ill-tempered Santa Claus. Occasionally, he would raise his head above the coaming of the companion and peer to windward, holding his whiskers bunched in a gloved hand to pre-

vent them from blowing back in his face and obscuring his vision.

"I tell you, Mister," he declared, "if this wind holds, we'll have to run to east'ard o' Staten Land." He sat down on the storm sill of the companion and continued, "We could save sixty miles by goin' through the strait. But only a danged fool would take the risk o' runnin' the Strait o' Lemaire on a southerly wind and a weather tide."

He turned and descended to the chart-room, shaking his head and muttering in his beard. Ten minutes later, he returned to the poop, walked to the wheelhouse and ordered a change of course.

"Due east, Mister," he directed. "That means we'll have to run to hellangone east'ard o' Cape San Antonio to dodge the tide rips." He watched the ship fall slowly away, taking wind and sea abeam, heeling as the sails took the full force of the half gale.

Peter ordered the lee braces slacked and the weather braces hauled aft, checking the yards. The Old Man watched the mainland fade out astern. From what Peter knew of him, he realized that the skipper would remain constantly on deck until his ship was safely around the corner.

"Better lose a day an' be safe, than gain a day an' be sorry," the Old Man philosophized. He took an old briar pipe and a tobacco pouch from a side pocket of his sealskin coat, sat down again on the sill of the companion and resumed, "I used to take chances. Once I took her half way through the Magellan Strait to the Barbara Channel, to avoid a rip-snorter east o' the Horn. Anchored for a night in Stokes Bay, an' then went on after daylight. Came out into the Pacific two hundred miles west o' the Horn."

"That," Peter agreed emphatically, "was taking a whale of a chance."

The Old Man lit his pipe and blew a cloud of tobacco smoke through his beard. "Ain't takin' chances like that any more," he declared. "I'm older now, an' one helluva lot wiser, Mister."

Peter nodded, glanced to windward and became suddenly alert when he saw something dark hover for a moment on the crest of a comber and then slide from view into the trough of the sea.

"Looks like a boat, sir," he declared, lifting the binoculars from the box inside the companion.

Raising the glasses to his eyes, he focussed them on the distant object. Like a picture set in a circular frame, he saw a gray horizon heaving up toward the lowering sky. Then a small vessel surged upward on the crest of a comber, her decks awash, men clinging to the broken and twisted stanchions which once had supported her bridge. By some miracle, her signal mast remained. And from it a stream of colored flags streamed stiffly in the wind.

"Well, Mister?" the Old Man twanged impatiently. "What is it?"

"A wreck, sir." Peter handed him the glasses. "Looks like a small steamer of some sort."

The Old Man trained the glasses upon the distressed vessel. "A killer boat—hunter from a whalin' fleet," he grunted. "Fast to a sea anchor. That's what's holdin' her head up to it." Lowering the glasses, he turned and shouted through the companion-way. "Oh, Steward, call the mate."

He raised the glasses again and grumbled, "We've got to take 'em off. They're sinkin'." Reckon we'll have to carry 'em all the way 'round to Iquique. That'll mean more mouths to feed. But we gotta do our Christian duty, Mister."

The mate came on deck, rubbing his eyes. "What's up, sir?" he inquired sleepily.

"Take a look." The skipper handed him the glasses and pointed to windward. "Point off the sta'board bow."

SKREENE surveyed the half-submerged whaler, shrugged and lowered the glasses. "They're not so bad off," he said. "She's fast to a sea anchor. Their factory ship will find 'em as soon as the weather clears."

The Old Man ignored the mate's veiled protest. Stroking his beard, he stared reflectively to windward and muttered: "Wind's sou-west by south. We'll work to wind'ard of 'em an' lay down an oil slick. As soon as we get her around, you can start gettin' the whaleboat ready, Mister."

"Hell's bells!" the mate snapped. "You know damn well no boat can live in that sea. I'm not going to risk my life for any gang of squarehead whale-butchers."

"I'll log you," the skipper threatened.

"Log and be damned!" Skreene blustered. "You have no right to order men to risk

their lives. And I'm not refusing, I'm simply declining to be a sucker."

The Old Man stared, as if unwilling to believe his own ears. He clawed at his beard and muttered: "Dang my hide, if that don't beat the bugs a-fightin'."

"I'll go, sir," Peter offered.

The skipper nodded. "Very well, Mister." Ignoring the mate, he stepped over to the wheelhouse and ordered the helmsman, "Put the helm down."

As the ship began her slow swing to windward, the Old Man turned to Peter. "Get the weather braces slacked off an' the lee braces checked."

Peter relayed the order to the men, who had mustered aft, unable as yet to see the whaler, but aware that something was amiss. They jumped to their stations, making the lee braces smoke over their block sheaves as they swung the weather yardarms sharp up. The yards were trimmed, the main tack boarded and the sheet hauled aft. The spanker was eased off and the head sheet hauled home. The *Glengorm* began her laborious head-beat toward the beleaguered whaler, with her yards braced sharp up, sheets of snowy spindrift hissing over her fore-castle head and spattering like buckshot against her taut foresail.

"Start gettin' the whaleboat ready, Mister," the skipper ordered.

Peter came off the poop. "Any of you fellows feel like taking a nice boat ride this morning?" he asked the men. "There's a ship out there to windward, sinking. We've got to take her crowd off. Who'll be with me?"

Mick Scully responded with his ready grim. "I wouldn't want to see a brass monkey left out on a day like this," he declared. "All right, now—no crowdin'."

All hands wanted to volunteer. Peter selected five more, Alec Frazier among them.

"Dang it, Mister," the Old Man bellowed from the poop. "You're takin' my best men. Leave me at least one real sailor."

"He can have this porridge-eatin' ool' baboon." Grinning derisively at Frazier, Scully pushed his crony out of line and beckoned to one of the green hands. "Come on, Waller, at least ye've got beef in yer shoulders, as well as inside yer head."

It took the *Glengorm* more than an hour to beat to windward of the stricken vessel.

Half a mile beyond her, the Old Man ordered the helm put down and the yards squared. When the ship's way was stopped, the carpenter dumped fish oil into the scuppers, which trickled through the vents and spread an iridescent film over the sea.

Standing on top of the forward house, Peter watched the oil slick creep down wind toward the little whaler which, he noticed, was sagging lower in the trough, seas sweeping her fore and aft, her signal mast swinging against the leaden sky like an arm being waved in mute appeal.

"God," Peter muttered apprehensively, "please hold her up a little longer."

The Old Man called from the poop: "Get the boat away!"

"Here we go, men," Peter warned.

THE boat's crew adjusted the lashings of their cork life-jackets clambered over the gunwhale into the boat and manned the falls. Block sheaves whined as the boat swung outboard, shot downward, landed on the crest of a comber and was headed level with the deck again.

"Cast off!" Peter barked. "Shove off forward! Out oars—give way together!"

The whaleboat lunged away from the ship's side on a sea, hung poised on its crest and then swooped down into the trough. Oar blades flashed, dipped and flashed again, heaving the boat up out of the watery hollow. Gripping the steering oar, Peter stood erect in the stern sheets and stared anxiously out over the desolation of heaving gray seas and lowering gray skies, feeling as if he and his boat's crew had suddenly been cut off from the rest of the world.

Down in the hollows between the huge seas, the whaleboat seemed pitifully small. Along the oily path which now stretched between the two ships, the seas no longer broke. But they were none the less dangerous, each succeeding comber threatening to slew the boat around and roll her under.

Peter no longer blamed the mate for refusing to command the boat. From the deck of the *Glengorm*, the seas had seemed bad enough; seen over the gunwhale of the boat, they were frightening. Visibility, too, was low, for the air was filled with flying spume snatched from the crests of the waves as yet untouched by the oil.

Despite the cold, the faces of the rowers

were beaded with perspiration as they timed their strokes, each man aware that a stroke missed would cause their craft to broach-to and be rolled under in the tumultuous sea. At times, digging in their oars, to allow a following sea to swirl under the stern, at others, stroking like mad to hold the boat's head down to keep the same wave from up-ending her as it rolled under the bow, they inched their craft down wind toward the beleaguered whaler.

Glancing astern, Peter saw that the ship had wore around and was now running to leeward, with her yards squared. He surmized that the Old Man would round-to at a safe distance from the derelict, back the yards and wait for the boat to run down to him. His grip on the steering oar stiffened when he saw a giant comber, its crest snapping white, leap out of the howling void astern and hurl itself toward the boat.

"Pull!" he shouted. "Strong-fella pull!"

The men saw the danger. Six oar-looms bent like canes. Backs arched, shoulders bunched, cork-jacketed bodies swayed fore and aft as the men dug in their oars and heaved. Peter swayed desperately against the steering oar as the comber gripped the stern of the whaleboat and slewed it to port.

"Port oars best!" he shouted.

Three backs arched and straightened again as the men at the port oars dug in their blades and heaved like mad, jerking the stern of the whaleboat from the grip of the comber, which swirled under the keel and tossed the craft skyward like a wind-blown feather.

"Brother!" Peter grunted. "A few more like that one, and I'll be needing hair dye."

A cheer sounded faintly above the turmoil of wind and sea. Wiping the spume from his eyes with the back of his free hand, Peter stared through the flying spume and saw the sinking whaler less than half a cable's length ahead. A few minutes later the boat rounded her stern and came up under her lee.

"Hold water!" Peter ordered. He looked searchingly over the intervening water, wary of floating wreckage that might stave in the whaleboat. Satisfied that there was no danger from that source, he stared at the woe-begone little group on the vessel's deck, which was now awash.

"How many men?" he called across.

"Sax men left." The reply came back in an unmistakable Norwegian voice. "Ve lose fife men oferboard. Ay ban skipper."

Peter studied the situation. Fast to an improvised sea anchor, the whaler was threshing like a hooked fish. To bring the whaleboat alongside, he realized, would be to invite destruction for all hands.

"I can't come alongside," he warned. "She's swinging too badly. You have to come on the end of a heaving line." He turned to his crew. "In a little closer, men."

Oar-blades dipped and flashed as the men urged the boat toward the sinking vessel. "Close enough!" He called across to the whaler. "We're going to throw you a line. Stand by!"

Mick Scully boated his oar, snatched up a coil of heaving line and sent it snaking through the air, to fall athwart the deck of the little whaler. A man caught the line, fastened it about his waist, then stepped overboard and was hauled like a fish across the intervening water and lifted over the gunwale into the boat.

Again and again, Scully sent his heaving line snaking over the deck of the whaler, each time dragging a man into the boat. The skipper was the last to leave the sinking vessel. As he was helped over the gunwale of the whaleboat, he counted his men, then nodded to Peter.

"Dat's all, mister. Ve can go now." He sat down on the bottom boards and huddled away from the wind, a tall, lanky man, with washed-out blue eyes and sun-bleached mustache and eyebrows. "By Yiminy! Dat iss de closest I efer vant to come to de pearly gates. Vat ship, mister?"

"Glengorm, Farland MacVeigh, master; Panama registry," Peter responded. "Give way all! You whalemens can bear a hand."

The rescued men took places on the thwarts beside the boat's crew and put more beef on the oars. When the boat was headed down toward the *Glengorm*, the whaling skipper declared:

"By Yiminy, Ay don't t'ank dere ban any ol' vindyammers left in de world. Ven ve see dat von come ofer de skyline diss morning, ve t'ank she ban de Flying Dutchman come to carry us down to Dafy Yones' locker, By Yiminy, yes."

"How happened you got in that fix?" Peter inquired, adding, "I always thought

you whalemén were a bit on the invincible side."

"Ve vass out from de factory ship ven ve found ve wass leaking," the skipper explained. "Den de blow comes. But ve can't make headvay. So ve sends out a call to de factory ship. Yust before de vireless vent dead, ve got a call she vas lying out de blow in Goree Road. Ay tall you, Mister, ve vere in von hellufa fix. By Yiminy, yes."

"Goree Road?" Peter said. "That's between Lenox and Navarin Islands, about a hundred miles or so north of the Horn?"

"Dass right," the skipper confirmed. "Some t'am ven ve gets separated ve rendezvous dere. Mebbe your skipper vill land us on New Island, at de mission station. De missionary fellers vill vireless de factory ship to send a boat for us."

"That'll mean devaiting from our course," Peter said. "But, at that, I believe the Old Man will rather make a deviation than find himself stuck with six extra mouths to feed all the way to Iquique."

Ten minutes later they came in under the lee of the *Glengorm*. The boat's crew fended off, while the whalemén were hoisted on board with a boat fall. Finally, the whaleboat was heaved on deck, after which the skipper ordered the yards braced up. As the ship moved once more on her course, he called forward:

"Well done, men!"

"'Well done,' says he!" Mick Scully drawled, his wide mouth stretched in a cynical grin. "Maybe we're all hayroes, at that." He looked at Peter and added solemnly. "I do know poor Paddy Doyle wasn't ashamed o' the man who's now wearin' his boots. No, bedad!"

AT SUNDOWN that evening, the twenty-second flash of Observatory Island Light showed over the starboard quarter. By dawn, the *Glengorm* was reaching southward along the eastern side of Staten Land, well out of reach of the dangerous overfalls which make the seas in the vicinity of Cape St. John a nightmare to mariners.

During the night the wind fell, and the dawn came up with a gentle whole-sail breeze from the west, heavy with the "land smell"; the scents of moist earth and growing vegetation and kelp drying on shingle

beaches. The Old Man hauled the wind, then ordered the reefs shaken out of the upper topsails and courses. With everything set, the *Glengorm* reached southwest by south, bearing down toward a landfall on Isla Nuevo.

Peter surmized that the castaways were to be landed on the island. On coming on board, they had been issued dry clothing from the slop chest, given a hot meal and assigned to spare bunks in the forecastle. Sorensen, their skipper, had been berthed aft. At the supper table the night before he had suggested to the Old Man that he and his crew be landed at the mission station on Isla Nuevo. MacVeigh, apprehensive of the inroads that would be made on the ships' stores by six extra men, had agreed with alacrity.

ALL THROUGH the following day, the *Glengorm* slashed through the turbulent seas southwest of Staten Land. With plenty of sea room, the Old Man crowded on sail, as if he were eager to be rid of his passengers.

At eight bells that evening a faint flash showed in the sky to northward. When the mate came on deck to relieve Peter, the Old Man said:

"That's Cape Pio light to nor'ard. If this wind holds, we'll be up on Cape Graham by daylight. We'll land them fellers then an' be on our way, without any loss o' time."

Peter went below, pulled off his boots and turned in. He drew the blankets over him and immediately dropped into a deep sleep. But it seemed to him that he had no more than closed his eyes when he was jarred awake by a feeling that something was wrong. He struck a match and peered at Paddy Doyle's watch hanging on the bulkhead, his uneasiness growing when he saw that the hands were pointing to twenty minutes past twelve.

He flung his legs over the edge board of his bunk and pulled on his boots. Relieving the watch twenty minutes late was a serious matter. He wondered why Skreene hadn't called him at a quarter of twelve, as was customary.

Opening the door of his room, he looked into the cabin. The light from the swinging lamp revealed the lanky figure and tousled blond head of Sorensen, who sat in

a chair, his head pillowed on his folded arms. Beside him, an empty whiskey glass rolled to and fro between the fiddleboards.

Stepping to the table, Peter looked up at the tell-tale compass set in the deckhead above the master's chair. The compass card showed that the ship was still standing southwest by south. Laying a hand on Sorensen's shoulder, he shook the whaleman.

"Hey," he challenged, "get to your room. The Old Man doesn't like to see anyone sleeping in the main cabin."

His only answer was a voluminous snore. Picking up the glass, he sniffed. "Whiskey. Now how in heck did he manage that?" He shook Sorensen once more. The whaleman sagged limp as a wet sack, prevented only by the arms of his chair from sliding to the deck.

Peter gave up trying to arouse the whaleman and walked toward the after companion. Climbing the stairs, he stood at the head of the companionway and looked over the poop. Except for the shadowy figure of the helmsman barely visible through the door of the wheelhouse, the poop was deserted.

"That's queer," Peter muttered. He stepped over to the wheelhouse and looked at the helmsman, whose face seemed to float atop a column of light from the binnacle. Peter recognized him as one of the mate's watch.

"Where's Mister Skreene?" Peter asked.

The man shrugged. "I wouldn't know, mister. I heard him pokin' around in the waist a while ago. Look, I want to be relieved. I bin at the wheel since four bells."

"Why hasn't the watch been relieved?" Peter wanted to know. "Why hasn't the bells been made?"

"Mate's orders," the helmsman explained. "Said no bells to be struck on account o' the Ol' Man havin' a headache."

"That's the first I heard about it," Peter said doubtfully. He glanced astern, frowning when he saw the whaleboat towing in the wake of the ship at the end of its painter. "And why the boat?" he wanted to know.

"Mate had them whalin' guys put her down," the helmsman informed him. "Just after four bells. Said the Ol' Man wanted everything made ready to set 'em ashore at sunup."

"Seems to me there's been a lot of things I haven't been told about," Peter grumbled. "I'll have your relief aft pretty soon. First, I want to have a talk with the captain."

He went below again. Tried again to arouse Sorensen, gave it up as a bad job and knocked lightly on the door of the skipper's room. Receiving no answer, he turned the ring handle and gently drew the panel outward. A rectangle of light from the cabin lamp slanted across the threshold, revealing a pair of booted feet sprawled at a wide angle, with toes pointing upward. Peter's slow gaze moved upward from the boots, up over the scrawny figure of the Old Man, who lay with outflung arms on the deck, his luxuriant beard matted with blood.

PETER struck a match and kneeled beside the Old Man. He saw now that the blood came from a gash high on the skipper's bald forehead, from which a red trickle was still spreading a little pool on the deck. MacVeigh's eyes fluttered open, and the bloodstained hairs about his mouth quivered as he emitted a feeble moan:

"My ship—my men!" The Old Man struggled feebly to rise.

"Take it easy, sir," Peter advised. Lifting the old skipper, he laid him gently in his bunk. "What happened?" he asked.

"Mate—gun," the Old Man mumbled. "Get Ilario—steward. See about ship—all hands."

Peter hurried to the steward's quarters off the forward companionway. He found the man, a small, lemon-hued native of Santo Domingo, fast asleep in his bunk.

"Come alive, Ilario!" Peter shook him roughly awake. "Break out the medicine chest and see what you can do for the captain. He's been badly hurt. I've got to get on deck. Hurry!"

He ran through the forward companionway to the waist and there paused to look over the deck. Not a man was in sight. Even the lookout was missing from the forecabin head. Overhead, a three-quarter moon played hide-and-seek among the hurrying clouds, its unsteady light occasionally touching the dark land mass lying along the horizon to westward, directly in the path of the ship.

"Good land!" Peter exclaimed in sudden panic. "Unless we can work her off on the

other tack, she'll pile up before another hour is past."

He groped in the side pocket of his coat for his whistle and piped a shrill alarm. There was no response. Now thoroughly scared, he raced forward to the galley, where the watch on deck should be standing by. When he halted outside the starboard door of the galley, he discovered that it was fastened by a "Dutch lock"—a length of dunnage wood jammed slantwise between the deck and the lower edge of the upper half door, a contrivance which prevented the door from being opened from within.

"What kind of damned skullduggery is going on here?" he growled, removing the obstruction with a savage kick.

Wrenching open the upper half of the door, he looked inside. The men of the mate's watch, three of the whalemens among them, were sprawled on the brick floor of the galley, one of them still clutching an empty whiskey bottle, while two more empties rolled to and fro on the bricks with the motion of the ship.

Swearing frevently, Peter set to work, trying to rouse the men. He shook them, slapped their faces, grasped them by their shoulders and bounced them on the deck, in a vain effort to arouse them. Finally he gave it up as a bad job and ran by himself to the forecandle.

There, he found both doors jammed from the outside. He kicked aside the "Dutch lock" of the starboard door, jerked the panel outward and stepped over the storm sill. A blast of fetid air rushed to meet him, a compound of human body odor, the tang of oilskins, damp clothing and the musky smell of rubber sea boots, underlaid by the sharp, acrid scent of alcohol.

The men of his watch lay in their bunks, dead to the world. Mick Scully was propped against his half-filled sea bag, which he used as a pillow, a vacuous grin on his broad face, a half empty bottle loosely gripped in his calloused right hand.

"Wake up, Mick!" Peter urged, shaking him violently. "Cape Horn's dead ahead, and everybody aboard is blotto. Come alive!"

Scully pushed himself to a sitting posture and tried to get out of his bunk. But the effort was too much for him. He sagged

back against his sea bag, closed his eyes and emitted a vibrant snore.

"Oh, Brother!" Peter groaned. "Here's a nice how-de-do. Skipper beaten silly and the crew dead drunk—and Cape Stiff coming up hand over hand. Oh, Lord!"

He stepped out on deck and stood there, shivering a little in the downdraft of the foresail, his ears filled with the soft rustle of the wind in the canvas and the wash of the sea along the ship's sides. He was about to turn aft again when he saw a light flicker for an instant in the cavernous darkness beneath the forecandle head.

Peter walked forward, moved in under the forecandle head and halted outside the carpenter's shop, the door of which was hooked back. Suddenly the white beam of a flashlight stabbed like a sword from the darkness forward of the windlass. From behind the light came the mate's grunted warning:

"I've got a gun on you, Breton. Don't try to be smart."

"So?" Peter turned his head and faced the light, blinking against its white glare. "What's coming off, anyway?"

"You'll find out," Skreene promised. He stepped from behind the windlass and shoved something hard against Peter's side. "Step into the carpenter's shop," he ordered.

Peter stepped over the threshold, followed by the mate, who kept the muzzle of his gun jammed against Peter's back. He asked:

"Would you mind telling a guy what it's all about?"

Skreene stepped around him, facing him now, and moved his gun until its muzzle was boring into Peter's chest. "I hadn't planned to let you in on this," he said, "but since you're here, I might as well give you the inside dope. You and that fuzzy-faced old hypocrite and his male chorus are all headed for the locker. Savvy?"

"Why did you beat the Old Man up?" Peter challenged.

Skreene's big teeth gleamed in the semi-darkness behind his flashlight. "I wanted to see him squirm," he confessed. "You know, he's always claimed he wanted to go with his ship. Didn't want her to survive him, for fear she'd be cut down to a coal barge, or broke up for scrap. Well, when I told

him he and the old tub were going together, he got tough and tried to tackle me. So I pistol-whipped him."

"You doped the hands, too," Peter accused.

Skreene chuckled. "Passed out a few bottles laced with chloral, with the Old Man's compliments. They thought he'd relented about splicing the mainbrace. Alec Frazier even tried to collect his bet with Scully." He laughed softly.

"It must have been very funny," Peter drawled. "But would you mind letting me in on what's back of all this?"

The mate shrugged. "There's no harm in that—not now," he said. "Well, that cousin of yours, Algard, figured it all out. He saw a chance to make a pile of scat out of MacVeigh and his old wind-wagon. He talks the old guy into selling him a half interest in the ship, by promising to keep him in cargoes from now on. MacVeigh fell for that, and agreed to insure his life in Algard's favor for fifty grand. To make sure this one doesn't reach Iquique with her cargo of railroad iron, he talks the Old Man into shipping me as mate. When you blow into Mobile on that new Breton boat, your dear cousin sees a chance to kill two birds with one stone."

"So he has me put aboard," Peter prompted, "thinking he'd step into my shoes as our uncle's heir, if I were lost with the ship."

"That's about the size of it," Skreene confirmed. "Algard not only collects the insurance on the ship and on the Old Man's life, but he automatically becomes old man Breton's heir. All of which means I'll be living in clover for the rest of my life."

"Why did you murder Doyle?"

Skreene laughed. "Got me figured for that job, eh? Well, I don't mind admitting I fixed things so he'd take a header off that yard. You see, I thought at first I'd need someone to help me in carrying out the job. And a whiskey-head like Doyle seemed a natural for that. But I should have known that a damned mick will promise anything when he's got a few shots under his belt, though I didn't realize that till later after we'd sailed, and Doyle got to thinking it over.

"He came to me a few days out of Mobile and asked about it. You see, I thought I

had him by the short hairs, because he'd helped me to shanghai you. But he was so worried about the whole thing that I had to kid him into thinking it was all a joke. But, it seems, the more he thought about it, the more he worried. After we picked up that lump of ambergris, I knew his conscience was bothering him, and was scared he'd spill to the Old Man. If you hadn't come aft to the wheel that night before we crossed the line, I'd have been rid of him for good."

"You were fixing to give him a passage over the side when I came along?" Peter suggested.

He peered past the beam of the flashlight and saw, lying on the carpenter's bench, what looked like a coil of signal halyard line. One end of the line stretched between the bench and the deck and dipped from sight through the open hatchway leading to the chain locker. Peter felt the palms of his hands grow suddenly moist as he identified it as a coil of fuse.

"Planning to blow her up, eh?" he queried, trying to keep the quaver out of his voice.

"That's right," Skreene admitted. "I've got a bomb planted below. The fuse will burn for half an hour, which will give me plenty time to go over into the whaleboat and be far astern before the bomb lets go."

Peter felt mingled anger and disgust flow over him in a hot wave. The man, he realized, was completely devoid of a conscience. He saw only a chance to make money by sending the *Glengorm* and her company to the bottom. In the whaleboat, he could make his way north and eventually reach Punta Arenas. Once there, he could take passage on a steamer for Buenos Aires, continue by plane to the States and collect his grisly fee. And none would be left to point an accusing finger at him. That, apparently, made everything right.

"Wholesale murder, obviously, means little to you," Peter accused.

"Why should I worry?" Skreene countered. "Why, at that, I reckon I'm saving those old fuddy-duddies from the poorhouse. They'll never know what happened to 'em. But you, Bright Boy, I want to hear you squeal. You see, I haven't forgotten that poke in the kisser you gave me sailing day."

Peter brought up a vicious left to the

face. "Here's another just like it," he snarled.

He felt the impact of his knuckles against the mate's jaw, struck the gun aside with a sweep of his right hand and followed with another left to the body. He heard the bel-lowing report of the pistol, felt a searing pain along his ribs as he staggered backward over the high door sill and landed with stunning force on the deck.

DAZED by the impact of his skull against the planking, Peter lay still, vaguely aware that he had been only grazed by the mate's bullet. Through a haze of semi-consciousness, he heard Skreene move to and fro, pause once to shine the light over him and then step over him to the deck.

Peter's brain cleared as he heard the mate's footfalls recede aft. Opening his eyes, he cautiously turned his head. Skreene was walking backward, slowly paying out the coil of fuse. Reaching the main hatch, the man halted, struck a match and applied the flame to the end of the fuse. A whiff of burning gunpowder drifted to Peter's nostrils.

Awareness of impending disaster brought Peter to his feet, drove the last vestige of fog from his brain. Ignoring the gnawing pain in his left side, he charged like an infuriated bull at Skreene, crashed into him and bore him to the deck.

Lying on his back, Skreene clawed at the side pocket of his mackinaw in a frantic attempt to draw his pistol. Peter heaved himself astride the mate's body, jammed his left knee down on the other's right arm and rained blows on his upturned face.

Skreene gave up the attempt to draw his gun. He grappled with Peter, clutched him in a bear-like hug. They rolled to and fro across the deck, from hatch to bulwarks and back again, locked together like a pair of fighting jungle cats, each possessed by an animal desire to rend and slay.

They came up on their knees and struck at each other, fighting terribly, brutally, clinched and again crashed to the deck, driving blows into each other's face, slashing blows that cut the flesh to ribbons. A beam of moonlight slanting under the arching foot of the main sail showed Peter's face bloody and determined, showed the growing panic in Skreene's eyes. And in

the darkness, a few feet away, the red spark slowly ate its way along the fuse.

They floundered across the deck again and came up against the hatch. Skreene clutched Peter's hair and tried to beat his head against the coaming. Peter tore loose, leaving a handful of hair in the mate's hand. He flung a tired left to the other's jaw. Skreene jerked his head backward to avoid the punch, which missed his chin and landed squarely on his "Adam's apple."

Skreene went suddenly limp. Releasing his hold on Peter, he clawed at his throat and gasped like a drowning man. Peter pushed himself to his knees, thrust his right hand into the pocket of Skreene's mackinaw and came up with the gun.

"Now!" he snarled, swinging up the weapon and slamming it down on Skreene's head, "I guess that'll hold you for a while."

Wiping the blood from his eyes with a sweep of his hand, he looked over the rail toward where the dark bulk of the cape towered against the sky.

"Too close—too damned close!" he muttered.

GRIPPED by a feeling of urgency, he searched Skreene for more weapons, but found none. Pushing himself erect, he staggered to the carpenter's shop, found a coil of heaving line, with which he bound the mate hand and foot. He ran back to the carpenter's shop, carrying Skreene's flashlight, and lowered himself into the chain locker. By following up the fuse, he found what looked like an ordinary thermos jug planted between the ship's side and a bight of the anchor chain.

He examined the makeshift bomb, tempted to climb back on deck and toss it overboard until he realized that it would be needed as evidence. He saw that the fuse passed through a hole punched in the cap. Unscrewing the stopper, he drew out the fuse and, with it, the little copper detonator crimped to its end.

Climbing out of the chain locker, he wedged the bomb in a corner of the carpenter's shop and covered it with a little pile of shavings. He wound the remaining length of fuse about the detonator and hid it in an empty paintpot. Later, they could be hidden more securely. But just then the safety of the ship was the greater urgency.

He ran aft, ignoring the mate lying beside the hatch, trussed like a chicken for the market. Reaching the wheelhouse, he looked in at the worried face of the helmsman and said:

"We're going to let her fall away."

The man ejected a stream of tobacco juice into the brass cuspidor beside the wheel and replied with the easy familiarity of a privileged old hand:

"If some o' the top-hamper don't carry away, an' if the cargo don't shift an' heave her down on her beam ends, I reckon everything'll be hunkydry."

"It's a chance we've got to take," Peter explained. "That or knocking a hole in Horn Island. Fortunately, the wind is light."

"Okay," the helmsman said resignedly, "I'm waitin' for orders."

Peter looked landward, his gaze moving slowly over the sea toward the phosphorescent glimmer of the surf breaking over the shoal which extends beyond the foot of the fourteen-hundred-foot-high cliff that is Cape Horn.

Turning back to the wheelhouse, he drew a long breath and passed the order: "Ease down the helm!"

"Down helm!" the man responded, easing down the wheel to starboard.

Peter held his breath and watched the jib boom swing through a short arc. The head sails slatted with muffled thunder, then filled, straining at sheets and tacks. Hanks rattled on their stays, spectacle irons clanked, parrels creaked softly as the yards strained at their braces. The ship heeled over to port as the full force of the wind struck her taut canvas. Then, slowly, she fell away, coming broadside to the land.

From the cabin below there came a deafening crash of broken crockery. The steward pattered through the companionway and bounced breathlessly on deck.

"What's matter?" he chattered. "Capitan send me topside to fin' out."

"We just changed course," Peter informed him with forced calm. "How is the captain?"

The steward shrugged. "He all right. Got cut on the head. I feex heem up hokay. You see."

"Steady!" Peter warned the helmsman. As the man steadied the helm, Peter turned back to the steward. "Tell the captain every-

thing is all right. We've got the situation well in hand. That's all."

As the steward ducked back down the companionway, Peter listened, his ears attuned to the rumble from below that would warn him of the shifting cargo. But all was quiet below decks. He looked nervously aloft, expecting at any instant to see some of the top-hamper come crashing to the deck. But nothing happened.

"Why ain't the watch turned out to trim the yards?" the helmsman wanted to know.

Not until then did Peter realize that the man was unaware of what had happened.

"There is nobody to help," he explained.

"Everyone, except you and me and the steward, is blotto." He went on to tell of the mate's plot against the ship. "Until the hands wake up, there's nothing we can do but let her run like this until we're clear of the cape."

He walked to the weather rail and stood there, staring toward the cape which rises like a sinister monument above the grave of countless ships. Because of the set of her sails, the *Glengorm* was barely crawling. Listing dangerously to port, she worked southward, broadside with the land, inching slowly away from the danger.

Despite their still precarious position, Peter felt suddenly at ease, as if a load had been lifted from his shoulders. Now that the mate's plan had been foiled, Peter no longer feared for his life. He thought apologetically of his former suspicion that the Old Man was party to the plot against him. Now he saw them as he really was; not as an old hypocrite who tried to make a profit by holding back the hands of the clock, but as an old sailorman who so loved his ship that he refused to retire for fear his vessel might fall into unsympathetic hands and come to an inglorious end.

PETER smiled grimly as he anticipated the consternation of George Algard when he learned of the *Glengorm's* safe arrival in Iquique. When the whole story was made public, he would be black-listed by every shipping concern in the Americas. And the matter wouldn't end there; insurance underwriters are not disposed to be lenient with people who plan barratry for profit.

Thinking of his own future, Peter dis-

covered that the prospect of an early return to his former comfortable existence as mate of a Breton liner left him cold. He had come to love the graceful old windjammer, which he had seen skim like a swallow through the Trades and buck her way through the Roaring Forties.

"Guess I've been bitten by the Old Man's pet bug," he decided.

Moisture stung his bruised face, wind-borne spray caused by the backsend from the shoal, which now shimmered darkly over the starboard bow, overshadowed by the dark mass of the cape towering against the sky. Breathlessly, he watched the shoal come abeam, crawl past until it showed over the quarter. Gripping the rail, he stared astern and waited, while the ship, lying almost on her beam ends, inched away from the menace.

In his mind's eye he studied their position. Diego Ramirez lay southwest of the Horn. If he succeeded in bringing the ship back to her former course, she would pass the North Rock with plenty of sea room. Beyond Diego Ramirez there was only open water all the way down to the ice cap. He looked astern, where Cape Horn was slowly sinking below the sea rim.

"This is it," he muttered anxiously. "Now, if she'll come up, we'll be all right."

He worked across the slanting poop to the wheelhouse. "Guess it's time we tried to bring her up," he told the man at the wheel. "Ease up the helm."

"Up helm it is!" the helmsman responded.

Peter's knees trembled as he watched the jib boom swing closer to the wind. Then, like a tired old woman rising from her knees, the ship came upright, her masts at a bare five-degree slant as she gathered speed and again reached southwest by south.

"Brother!" Peter murmured.

He looked through the doorway of the wheelhouse at the strained face of the helmsman and declared, "I'll bet this is the first time in history that two men took a square-rigged ship under full sail around old Cape Stiff. Now I'd better go below and see how the Old Man's making out."

The *Glengorm* lay at anchor in Iquique Road, the Blue Peter fluttering below her fore truck, her sails drooping limply from hank and jackstay, her courses hanging in their buntlines, in her hold a cargo of

bagged nitrate for San Francisco. On the forecandle head the men of the starboard watch were standing by the capstan, waiting to heave the anchor in.

Peter, now mate, lounged on the poop and waited for the return of the Old Man with the tugboat that would tow the ship offshore and start her on her long drag north. He thought of Skreen sweltering below. Since that night off the Horn, nothing of importance had happened. The Old Man was up and about the following day, apparently none the worse of his experience. Upon their arrival in Iquique, he had tried to turn the former mate over to the law, but the local authorities had denied jurisdiction. Now it seemed as if Skreene was due to become something of a problem.

Peter had telegraphed his uncle of his safe arrival, following his cable with a letter outlining his adventure. Now he was momentarily expecting orders to fly home to the States and take over his old berth. And he wasn't at all happy about it.

Glancing shoreward, he saw a red-funnelled tugboat making toward the ship. Walking to the break of the poop, he called forward:

"Heave her short, Mister Stearns," He ordered the new second mate, an old-timer whom the skipper had picked off the beach.

The men on the forecandle head began walking the capstan, pushing against the bars, the stamp and shuffle of their feet beating time to a lilting chantey:

"We're homeward bound for Frisco Town;

Good bye, fare ye well; Good bye,
fare ye well!

Oh, heave with a will, boys, and run
her around;

Good bye, fare ye well, good bye!"

The tugboat puffed alongside, with the Old Man balanced on the roof of her pilot house. The skipper sprang, nimbly as a goat, to the main rigging and swung to the deck.

"How's the anchor, Mister?" he bawled forward.

"In sight, sir," Stearns declared.

"Bring her to the board, then," the Old Man ordered. He came trotting aft and pattered up the port side ladder to the poop.

"Here, Mister—" He handed Peter a thin envelope, which bore the blue crescent em-

blem of the Breton Line. "If it's orders to fly Stateside, you can go back with the tug. Hate like hell to lose you. 'Twas a lucky day for me when you stepped into Paddy Doyle's boots."

Peter tore open the envelope and drew out the letter. It read:

"My dear nephew:

Your sudden disappearance caused quite a stir in Mobile and gave the local gendarmerie a man-size headache. But your letter makes everything clear.

You might be interested to know that George Algard has decamped for parts unknown, leaving behind many looted accounts and unpaid bills. I have made arrangements with the local receiver in bankruptcy to take over his share in the *Glengorm*. I plan to put her in the Philippine trade, as the hemp industry is coming back down there.

Judging from the tone of your letter, you seem to like the ship and her captain. Accordingly, I suggest that you remain on as first officer for a year or two longer. We can settle further details when we meet in San Francisco.

Please convey my respects to Captain MacVeigh.

Your uncle,

Hugh Breton."

"Short and sweet—like green apple colic," Peter declared grinning. He passed the letter to the Old Man. "Guess you'll have to put up with me for a while longer."

The skipper read the letter, his whiskers bristling in a pleased grin. "That's the best news I've had in many a day," he declared. "Good mates—in sail—are hard to come by in this degenerate age." He returned the letter and continued, "If we could get rid o' that feller Skreene, I'd be right happy. If it wa'n't that I want to see him pay for the killin' o' poor Paddy Doyle, dang me if I wouldn't just turn him loose and let him take to the beach.

"The authorities in San Francisco will know what to do with him," Peter suggested.

The Old Man nodded, started as the tugboat's siren let go with a deafening blast. "Man to the wheel!" he boomed.

A man came trotting aft to the wheelhouse. Forward, the men of the second mate's watch were heaving the anchor on

the billboard, while in the waist the rest of the crew were throwing the gear off its pins and clearing it for running. For the next half hour the ship was a bustle of activity as the tugboat shouldered her toward the open sea.

A few miles to seaward of the light, the towrope was cast off. Yards were trimmed and courses sheeted home. Then all hands came aft in a body and mustered below the break of the poop.

"Well, men?" the skipper twanged questioningly.

Someone tittered. The steward lifted his wrinkled, lemon-hued face above the coaming of the booby hatch and grinned expectantly. Mick Scully brushed the back of his right hand across his lips and smiled wheedlingly.

"Would ye be decidin' yet, sir," he coaxed, "to splice the mainbrace?"

"Aye!" Alec Frazier supported him. "Just a wee drappie, to speed oor departure, like."

"Same words, same music," Peter thought, turning his head to hide a smile of amusement, aware that he was witnessing a ceremony that had been observed down the years since these old fellows had come together, as young men, on board the ancient ship.

The Old Man looked down at them, a glint of humor in his eyes.

"Splice the mainbrace, is it?" he twanged.

"By tunket, I should think you'd never want to smell liquor again, after what it nearly did to us." He paused and raked his fingers through his beard.

The men shuffled uneasily. Some started to turn away, their faces suddenly grave. None had expected that he would order the steward to pass out drinks; but they had, at least, hoped to get a grin out of his reactions to such a request. But this time he wasn't acting like his old self. Instead of flying into a rage, he was looking down at them, much as an indulgent father might regard his wayward sons, as if well aware that he had touched a raw spot in their memories by his veiled reference to that night off the Horn.

Suddenly the Old Man grinned down at Ilario. "Steward!" he called—and his voice was strangely gentle. "Steward, splice the mainbrace."

GREETINGS FROM SOMBER MOUNTAIN



By **GEORGE BRUCE
MARQUIS**

*It Is Possible for Season's Greetings to Be Returned
Wrapped in Bullets*

DOC LEVITT, mellowed into mysticism by too many drinks raised a thin articulate hand impressively.

"Kris Kringle approaches," he

breathed in rapt hushed tones. "Hark to the tintinnabulation of the bells."

"Should you be meaning Santa Claus," thus Ahab Spratling, "he's sure due for some damned tough bumps out in these here

mountains. He'll have to skallahoot through drifts a hundred and fifty feet deep no less."

"That deep anyway," Milt Scougal, camp jokester chimed in heartily. "He'd make a sight better time tunneling under 'stead of topping them said drifts. Why I remember back in—"

But Doc Levitt was not to be shunted aside by towering drifts nor fabricated reminiscence.

"He does approach even now," he insisted gently, "heralded by the bells. Can you men not hear them?"

Someone in the room spun out the opening bars of a raucous laugh, then checkmated further emission with admirable prudence. But Jennison had turned to look hard at the author of misplaced mirth. No man in Jennison's presence could safely target a ribald ha ha at Levitt, when the kindly medico was in his cups. For Jennison knew as did the others what manner of mad machine was vilifying the happy cadences of Christmas Chimes to Levitt's deception.

Now Whispering Thompson rose, in casual way trod the earthen floor, laid giant hand upon the rattling door and thrust his two hundred fifty pounds out into the brawling night. He was on his way to abate the counterfeit chimes, tolled by the tireless forty mile per hour sexton. Three cabins down street deserted now for days stood the belfry, a ragged pine with shaggy out thrust limb. From it swung within toning distance of each other danced and chattered five battered tin cans, assorted sizes, hung so not for harmonies' sweet sake but rather for dissonance. It was the quaint concert of a fever ridden miner, put into action by an obliging partner. Among the creatures of fancy denning with him was the Devil, who played most wonderously on a stringless fiddle. Finishing out a wild fandango, he arose, neatly folded his magic fiddle and announcing casually that he would return anon, vanished. How to put space before that "anon," was the desperate problem. A counter irritant to the Devil's skillful bowing, discord, sheer rattling noise, that had been the answer! And now for Levitt's ease of mind Thompson swept the talisman into a snowbank, grunting meanwhile into the sub-polar wind.

"It maybe worked. Anyway Slim's sure alive and drinking hearty as per usual."

Shouldering his way back up hill through the snow drenched air, Thompson entered the room in time to catch the opening bars of Levitt's second movement, a plea for sweet charity as they approached the day sacred to Master of men.

"This camp don't harbor a single Christian," Old Bud Wiley, congenially superstitious assessed them collectively. "The Scriptures tells of witches and spirits and you don't believe in 'em. Why *even* Samson went to learn things from the witch of Engate."

"Saul not Samson, and Endor not Engate" Levitt corrected gently, "but no matter. Yes, weak sinful creatures that we are, yet in our heart of hearts we pay homage to the Prince of Peace, and still," he stressed their errancy, "on His natal day we will not have the christian grace to call greetings consonant with the glad day to our brothers just across a narrow trickling stream."

"Should we call greetin's and similar words," Jennison stated flatly, "we'd git 'em returned wrapped round bullets. Talk bridges was burned six months ago, Doc, as you know. Fur you helped heap up the kindlin's and light the fire. Let's have another set of drinks."

Jennison spoke by the book. As he so picturesquely phrased it, "talk bridges" had been burned six months ago. And because of that mutually agreeable conflagration, two groups of men in two camps, a matter of two hundred yards apart lived in satisfied incommunicado on this December 20th, 1864, far back in the bleakest wilds of the Somber Mountains, days distant from the faint shadow even of civilization. The War Between The States had its fierce partisans even here. More intransigent by far than the soldiers manning the fighting lines. And of the two score men, Levitt alone seemed troubled.

IN THE May just past one of these groups of men had left Pannikan City guided by Special Providence Junkins, ostensibly on a prospecting venture as were dozens of others. This was in solid fact an expedition to possess a veritable bonanza located late the preceding fall by Junkins, whose longitudinal roamings would have filled a big book. Only a man of Junkins' iron clad faith in a beneficent if somewhat whimsy,

Providence would have ventured where he had. For it was a wildly perilous region far back in the Somber Mountains, the pre-empted homeland of a peculiarly tough band of renegade Sokulk Indians. Yet Junkins had spied out this virgin placer, had collected ample proof of its richness and made his unscathed way back to Pannikan City. Here he wintered, and here he confided his secret to Jennison and other hand-picked friends. And the secret roll when completed comprised a full score of working men and one supernumerary. Levitt was that supernumerary for the beloved medico could not moil for gold, his fragile body did not permit it. Yet of the group, his contribution was perhaps the greatest.

They traveled on foot, driving before them a string of burros laden with impedimenta. An invoice would have disclosed, food, bedding, extra clothing, mining tools, cooking utensils, and ammunition, this sufficient to man an arsenal. They might stint on supplies, even liquor, but not on gun power. For they knew their Sokulk renegades. As to horses, no. A mountain goat, a man, a burro could travel these unmade trails, but not a horse. Besides, a burro could if necessity demanded live on next to nothing and thrive. Sometimes even, his raucous voice became a mixed pleasure, when essaying watch dog against skulking Indians. Early June and they reached The Seven Cities of Cibula, filmy myth made flesh by that tireless wanderer, Special Providence Junkins.

IMAGINE a flat bottomed rounded bowl, with a constant diameter of a scant mile, and you have the ground plan of their Eldorado. Through its center there went east to west a clear skylarking stream, not deep, twenty feet or so in width. Flat gravel beds snuggled its banks and on back perhaps for two hundred yards. Then in order, grass, bushes, trees, these to be penned tight by the bowl's steeply tilted sides. The sides of the bowl sloped on up to merge into buttressing mountains. Entrance east, and exit west had been rough hewn by a long ago glacier. The stream had simply preempted these parent V's. Nature had provided two slight variants from the sheer walls. On the left looking east and near the exit a flat topped mesa

about the size of a half dozen tennis courts could be reached by a hundred foot scramble up from the stream. Directly opposite, two hundred yards away was a duplicate mesa. Both had springs, though at first blush they seem showy superfluities.

Jennison had noted the first mesa the moment they entered the unique valley as they traveled in from the west. So now while the hosannahing Junkins pointed out the special providences that had landed them squarely in the promised land Jennison and Whispering Thompson clambered up the semi-path to view the spot. The level space, the flowing spring, the abundant straight stemmed trees, the castle-like setting, instantly approved itself to their practical eyes. Here they would build their communal club house as potential fort. Not for a moment had they forgotten the redoubtable Sokulks.

"Should they jump us," Jennison nodded comfortably when he had surveyed the wall like sides of the gigantic bowl, "they've gotta come at us per one or both of them two water gates. Injuns don't like night fightin' nor as a general rule night travelin'. We've gotta keep our weather eyes peeled with guards and so forth, but with this place to fall back onto even should the goin' git salty, we'd be safe. Yep, here's where we'll build it."

"Reminds me of one of them cities of refuge The Scriptures tells about," Thompson observed sagely. "But I'll bet they didn't have a gushing spring like this one, nor so cold. Let's go down, Bat, and see if Junkins did actually hit something. If it's only mica or iron pyrites, he'll be lucky if the boys don't lynch him."

"You couldn't fool that old pilgrim with pyrites," Jennison said confidently. "More'n that you saw them samples he grubbed out right frum under them Siwashes' noses. Nope. That'll be gold aplenty to git should them damned Sokulks give us time to dig."

If Thompson grunted down the trail a sceptic, he molted swiftly into a true believer. Someone, Steve Donaldson it proved, had unpacked a miner's pan and sampled the pebbly sand at the stream's frothing edge. He had just finished the final rotation and silently held the residue forth for their eager inspection as Thompson barged into the group. Thompson

prodded the wet detritus with a finger like a robust banana, then he lifted up his voice.

"Dust and nuggets both," he boomed, "and that at the first grapple. Gentlemen hush! We've sure struck it! Junkins shake."

Special Providence Junkins, fairly straining at the seams with suppressed pride extended his thin palm for its engulfing.

"I hope," he said modestly, "you boys won't be too disappointed."

Beyond that one initial panning the quest for gold was held sternly in leash while they set up camp. On the mesa rose a squat cabin of logs, twenty by forty, roofed with poles covered with sod. The south wall bisected the spring, against the east was a stone fireplace surmounted by a stick and mud chimney. The floor was dirt. One door, no windows, and it was done.

At the foot of the rugged trail, now semi-civilized by shovel and pick they built five rough hewn cabins, skimpy sleeping quarters for the men. Cheek by jowl with the cabins a pole corral for the night comfort of their burros. And now Ahab Spratling produced a wonder. From somewhere, Allah guard the mystery, he furthered forth a flag. Only thirty one stars, *that* dated it solidly before May 11, 1858, tattered grimy and creased, yet they gave it to the breeze with the solemn joy of a Crusader breaking out his silken banner before the walls of the holy city. For as Levitt phrased it.

"It is the epitome of our nation's glory, hyperbola upon hyperbola."

"Amen," mumbled Junkins, wooed indeed by Levitt's stately cadences, though rods behind their translatable meaning.

Because they were a picked group they had entered into an agreement unique in western mining annals so far as this narrator's information goes. For this was to be a communal effort. The general supplies were so purchased and held, the returns from the venture were to be so held and divided. Levitt was chosen as entrepreneur and general factotum. All of them had practiced it in groups of two to four. But this was on a grand scale in their experience. Yet with the necessity of being on constant guard, night and day, the plan seemed the only agreement consonant with success. And anyway it was to be an experiment for just a brief summer; under

the able captaincy of Bat Jennison, solid warranty of its iron clad justice. Two days intervened and an unwelcomed serpent glided into their Eden.

THEY heard them before they came in sight and from their language knew them for white men. They also were coming in from the west traveling, however, up the south side of the creek, rather than up the north side as Jennison's company had done. And because there was room here and to spare, their first reaction was pleasure at the evidently considerable reinforcements approaching. In fact, Whispering Thompson inflated his mighty lungs to sheerest capacity to give them hail when the head of the column tramped into sight. It was potential thunder merely, never to be reverberated. For Jennison had spied the lead man, and by an imperious gesture capped the impending eruption. Thompson looked, then let his pent breath out in a cavernous growl. He, too, knew that lead man and those who followed, nineteen someone had counted. If anyone in this new company saw the men just across the narrow stream they gave not the slightest sign. And they continued on a full three hundred yards before they evidenced the fact that they were all the time very aware of the other's presence and held it a matter for group consultation.

As the men and their burros filed by, Jennison had taken a stand and issued a terse order.

"Git your guns and set yourselves fur trouble. That's that Major Imboden and his bunch of rebels we had the run in with at Lewiston. The sheriff and his deputies stopped it you'll mebbe remember. But the Major said the next time we met we'd sure have it out. Looks like this is the time."

"Let us remember that they are also Americans," Levitt interposed charitably. "It may be that we can negotiate a *modus vivendi* mutually agreeable and certainly more healthful to both groups."

"What's a modun venom, Doc?" Ahab Spratling demanded suspiciously. "Sounded to me like something disfriendly."

"*Modus Vivendi*," Levitt explained patiently, "means a way of living or getting along together. I think the circumstances suggests a try."

"Mebbe you're right, Doc," Jennison conceded. "Let's gather round and talk it over. Also keep your artillery unlimbered."

At the end of twenty minutes Jennison arose, hitched up his worn overalls, and leaned his Winchester against a boulder. Levitt also rose, but Jennison shook his head.

"No, Doc," he declined his comradeship, "I'm goin' by my sole lonesome. I'm ignorant I know, but still I can talk a kind of English. Besides," he grinned suddenly, "you ain't in no shape to run. I am."

They watched the little man stroll away with emotions beyond cataloging. The shadow of a hostile moved toward him and the battle lines would have been shunted swiftly from the shores of the Rappahannock to the banks of this obscure mountain stream.

Yet as Junkins observed, "If they jump him, we'd be too late. Nothing but a special providence could save him."

"If they jump him," Pegleg Wimberley grated, "it'll take a whole passel of special providences to save *them*, by God."

But their anxiety had no base in solid fact, nor did Providence have need to work His wonders. For as Levitt had stated, these men, though Southern sympathizers, were also Americans.

When Jennison left his companions, a man likewise detached himself from the cluster across the way, and matching his pace to Jennison's approached along his side of the stream. Major Castic Imboden, he was, veteran of the Mexican War, gray-bearded, gray-haired, yet still ramrod straight with robust frame and dauntless spirit. Jennison knew the Major, Imboden knew Jennison, yet the ice was no mere veneer on their brief perfunctory simultaneous greetings "Howdy," "Good morning." For a long moment intrepid gray eyes and dauntless blue met and grappled across the narrow creek. Then Jennison broke the pregnant silence by asking almost casually, "Are you still glued to what you last said at Lewiston, or do you feel different now?"

"We are ready for anything," Imboden answered coolly.

Jennison considered the crisp remark, and replied in kind. "We are also." After a pause he added, "Should you wish fur battle jest give the word. We'll promise to not run away. Started, it 'ud be a battle that 'ud go

to a finish, the winners, if *any*, to take all."

Imboden glanced over his shoulder at the men under his care as chosen leader. Then his eyes wandered on down creek to Jennison's men. He knew their mettle as he knew the mettle of his own. Yes, as this gray-eyed man had stated so succinctly, "the winners, if *any*, to take all." If these two groups of indomitable well-armed men joined battle there would be no winners. As their chieftain there was food for grave thought in Jennison's statement. And as a very brave man he dared to stretch out his hand toward the hypothetical olive branch which Jennison's visit might presage.

"You have a plan?" he hazarded. "Of course, what you say about the result of battle between our men is true. All too true."

"Yep," Jennison nodded. "I've gotta plan, based on the fact that at bottom we're all Americans, and men of good sense. Should you be intrusted I'll unspool it."

"Yes," Imboden encouraged him, "I'm interested."

"All right," Jennison was agreeable, "we'll start frum scratch. I know you and your boys fur brave men, and you know my boys fur the same. But, we're *damned* Yanks to you, and you're *damned* Rebs to us. Bein' so to each other makes livin' side by each hard, but mebbe we can manage. I can make my boys toe the mark to what we agree onto. Can you handle your boys?"

"Rest assured," Imboden assured him "that my men will adhere to any agreement you and I make."

"Then we can go on frum thar," Jennison observed with sureness. "First we'll stay on our side of this crick. You'll do the same."

"Agreed."

"We'll pretend we don't never see you, won't talk fightin' nor slur words said loud fur your men to hear on purpose nor make faces et celery."

"Agreed."

"Here's mebbe a harder nut to crack," Jennison cautioned, "but she's sure gotta be cracked. My boys, I can't sing a note myself, knows some songs that 'ud sure rise your dander. Your boys is similar freighted. Say now our boys want to sing 'John Brown's Body,' 'Rally Round the Flag Boys' or similar risers. We'll move fur enough off so as you don't git the teetotal effect. Should you crave to sing 'Dixie' or

'Maryland, My Maryland', you'll also move back."

"A capital suggestion," Imboden okayed it promptly. "Otherwise there'd be war. And now I've a suggestion. You fly a flag, which is dear to you. We have a flag which is also dear to us. Let's fly them."

"All right," Jennison nodded, "we'll fly 'em though outen any unfriendly yells frum across the crick. That's understood. And now there's only one other thing I can think of, Major. We're right in the hunting grounds of the Sokulks Injuns. They're a tough bunch, as I know. Should they jump you we'll be over. So long."

"Mr. Jennison," Imboden promised, "if they jump *you*, we'll be over. Good day, sir."

And this pact, signed verbally by Jennison and Imboden was kept with unflinching literalness. Had the two score men been suddenly stricken with blindness, had they become instantly deaf, their self-imposed isolation could not have been more rigidly complete. Their eardrums were certainly assailed, yet they did not hear. Their optic nerves were titillated, yet they did not see. They were inhabitants indeed of alien worlds. The Union men lived on the north bank of Grant Creek, the devotees of a cause doomed to be lost, tramped the south shore of See Creek. The one thin cluster of hovels was Lincolnville, the other Davisburg. The mountain rearing its bulk to the north was Mt. Sherman to one, Mt. Joe Johnston to the other. Over the bulwarking foothills to the south smiled Mt. Sheridan to the Northern men. The partisans of the Confederacy bathed in the glory shed by Mt. Stonewall Jackson.

HOW many Sokulks there were under the able chieftainship of The Weasel, no white at least could say. Rumor and fear doubtless multiplied their numbers. Sane consideration set it at one hundred warriors with concomitant women and children, proportioned lower than with so-called civilized peoples. The rigor of their life made for a foreshortened birth rate and higher infant, yes, adult mortality. These Sokulks were free, had always been free and cherished and defended that freedom. Daring trappers had penetrated to their fortresses never to return. Dauntless prospectors had tinkered their way back along their gold-prom-

ising streams to die perhaps with a handful of nuggets spilling from nerveless hands. Only Junkins had entered their sanctuary and returned unscathed. His feat gave strength to his unflinching dogma that he was tucked under the wing of Providence. Why, Junkins never asked; to him the simple fact stood unrebuked. But Jennison, who did not believe in special providences pinned his faith to vigilance, thoughtful planning and armor furnished against the moment of imperious need.

Yet the month of June glided by without sight or sound of the Indians. But Jennison did not relax his watchfulness. He knew well the infinite capacity of Indians for patience, while they scouted the enemy, weighted chances, shifted their strength, as they waited for that most auspicious moment for launching the attack. For there was both cunning and fatalism in their methods. It was indeed pale dawn on the 2nd of July before the constantly observed kettle boiled over. The camp watch was Steve Donaldson, Bud Wiley, Milt Scougal. Donaldson was the up-creek picket, two hundred yards from the camp and near the point where the grass fleece merged into the encroaching bushes and trees. Twice within the hour he had sent word to Jennison at his cabin. The burros, whose hatred of Indians was a proverb in the West seemed restive and uneasy. At the second warning Jennison had left his cabin and was making his way toward Donaldson's post when the brooding silence was shattered. The snorting "woof" of a startled bear, a scurry and trampling in the bushes, three rifle shots spaced closely, then Jennison was running swiftly calling as he ran, "Steve!"

Out of the semi-gloom loomed the giant Donaldson.

"I got a bear, Bat," he explained, "and he got an Injun first. Them jackasses wasn't foolin' now was they, Bat?"

"Nope," Jennison panted, "and thar's likely more if thar's one. Keep an eye peeled whilst I take a look-see."

Jennison bent aside the fringe of encircling bushes and peered. The body of a black bear lay huddled there, eloquent argument for Donaldson's deadly aim. Just out of reaching distance of the outstretched paws the crumpled body of a man, an Indian, so attested by at least two senses. A

half dozen other men had now arrived, and under Levitt's direction the Indian was carried out into the light and laid upon the grass. Young and muscular, he was dressed, despite the cold, in but leggings, breech-clout, and moccasins. His only weapon was a bowie knife in sheath. His race-track attire, the paucity of weapons, proclaimed his mission. A scout, nothing less, who had blundered into a prowling black bear.

He had been fearfully mauled. The scalp hung down a fretwork, fashioned so by one murderous slash of a paw, his right forearm had been crushed to a pulp by the bear's vise-like jaws. And he bled as only a man with a mangled scalp can bleed. However, he was not dead though apparently unconscious. As to this Jennison entertained doubts. At time of need, an Indian could out-possum that famous Southern animal in simulating death or coma.

An enemy and a spy, yet they would not treat him as such, not now. On his feet and fighting, they would have shot him down without compunction but wounded and helpless they could not do it. So they carried him down to their cabin where Levitt worked his magic on the maimed body. If he felt at all the suturing of his lacerated scalp, or the wrestling into some order of his fragmentary forearm, he gave not the slightest sign. Again Jennison doubted.

"He was a spy," thus Junkins, "like them two Ishmaelites Moses sent up into Cana. Only he ain't taking back no bunches of grapes like they done. In fact if it hadn't—"

Ahab Spratling interrupted him impressively, "Junkins, if you're getting ready to gallop out a special providence, cork up your faith bottle. They just naturally don't work for an Injun."

"Just the same," Junkins maintained stubbornly, "it'll work into a special providence. It always does. Maybe not for him, but for somebody. Maybe us. As the feller says, 'Providence don't fire no blank cartridges.'"

Forty-eight hours later they discovered that the Indian was gone. Sometime that night, certainly after two o'clock, he had vanished. He had gone up-creek, slipping by the guards, a tribute to his cunning, and a back slap at their alertness. They tracked him as far as the water gap, marking his route by a few scattering drops of blood

and an occasional moccasin track. The reactions of the men were various. Dad Grasty, who as one of the guards had been patrolling the creek bank, cursed himself bitterly for what he conceived to be gross dereliction in duty. Junkins, had he been able to muster any auditors would have played a familiar tune on his one stringed instrument. Levitt marveled at the courage and resilience of the man. Jennison had one of his hunches. The day was the 4th of July, and on that majestic day, good not evil must surely come. It was a hunch due to strange fruition.

Because it was the 4th of July, they had laid off work, though they had planned no formal celebration. It was true, that by earnest request, Levitt had read from memory's pages the immortal Declaration of Independence and, Junkins with genuine humility had prayed with sincere fervor for their common country and the success of the Northern arms. Across the way Deity had likewise been invoked with equal sincerity in aid of the Southern cause. For they, too, were idle on this natal day.

IT WAS ten o'clock when Pegleg Wimberley sighted the horseman. He was just clearing the upper water gap when they first glimpsed him. Out of the water and up onto the bank, he halted while he seemed to be studying the lay of the valley and the camps. The statue in bronze pose, the set of the shoulders, the trappings evident even at that distance, marked him out with sureness. He was an Indian. Now he approached, riding down the north side of the creek, steadily, not hurrying, not even when the men across the way made considerable display of firearms. So on without halting he pressed, while Bat Jennison laid aside his rifle and walked out to meet him—The Weasel, chief of the feral band of renegade Sokulks. Now he dismounted with the lithe grace of the superlative horseman and dropping the reins of his hair hackamore to the ground advanced to meet Bat Jennison. When they halted, an outstretched hand could have bridged the space between.

A big man was The Weasel, lance-straight, granite-featured, with deep-set somber eyes, high-arched indomitable nose, impregnable jaw. And though he spoke faultless English there was threaded through

his speech a tinge of the poetry innate in any Indian. Once he and Jennison had met before when Jennison had won from The Weasel the freedom of a white woman captive, won it under highly dramatic and desperate circumstances. The chief had not forgotten it, as his first words disclosed.

"Bat Jennison, I gave you back the woman, and you have given me my son. He was a spy yet you did not slay him! He was wounded and you mended his hurts. He hungered and you fed him." He raised his hand impressively. "And because of these things, so long as the sun shines, you and the men in this, my country, will suffer no harm. By The Great *Manitou* I swear it you."

Bat Jennison felt a strange tugging at his throat muscles. A singing in his heart at the other's words. Here indeed was the fruition of his "hunch" the all but apodictic confirmation of Junkins' "special providence."

For a long moment they stood there while Jennison fumbled for words that would not come. Now he made the imperial gesture. He held out his hand. Their fingers met, gripped, then fell apart. No need for words now. Each had spoken. Bat Jennison stood in mental salute, while the Indian mounted, then he turned about slowly and slowly returned to the camp. Here he translated the Indian's resonant words into plain every-day speech.

"Since he says it," he ended confidently, "we're as safe now from them Sokulks as we'd be in the middle of New York City."

"I'll tell you what *I think*," and Ahab Spratling glared round the circle searching for a possible dissenter, "I think that Siwash is an eighteen-carat he-man, by God."

"Amen!" Whispering Thompson said cavernously. "I mean," he amended, "that I'm amening the notion *not* the cuss words."

"When Whispering speaks disrespectful of cuss words," Milt Scougal the camp wag averred piously, "I know the millennium has done arrived, which it damned near has if there's to be more night guarding."

"No more night guardin, Milt," Jennison nodded. "Which makes me think, Doc. Since we ain't holdin' no gab with them gents across the crick mebbe you'd best write out the nub of what's happened. We'll

wrap it round a rock and heave it their way."

"Let me send it." Lefty Steffins, one of the camp's intransigents volunteered promptly.

"Not much Lefty," Jennison grinned, "you'd wrap it round a tomahawk."

And this pact, as the other would stand inviolate. Absolved from the menace of an Indian attack, the two camps hummed with activity. For time was short. Far from them to be marooned here when Spelya, fabled god of the north wind blew his congealing breath over the shivering land. The ultimate limit Jennison set was November 1st. Yet Spelya did not tarry that late, though his first fitful exhalations could only have hindered their exodus, not embargoed it. For before he had even strutted his cheeks for the first icy puff, they had been chained to their isolated camp.

On the 21st of October the first man was taken sick. On the 24th of October the first snow fell. So far as that went, it worked no shift in their moving plans for by that time three more men were down. And though they did not know it the disease had struck the other camp two days before their own. It was a fever. Yet Levitt would hazard no diagnosis other than to state emphatically that it was not typhoid. It ran a course of about three weeks and it took the men serially not in group formation. Just three men escaped, Levitt, Jennison and Dad Grasty. Milt Scougal asserted with a cracked-lip grin, that they were so steeped in sin that the Devil wouldn't angle for them now. He had them already, boots, socks, and britches. As an aside, he remarked that no one died in either camp, and that convalescence was rather rapid.

By the time three men were sick, it was appallingly evident that they would be immured for the winter in their lonely camp. Already the snow lay two feet deep, and it might reach twenty. Of course, their primary problem was food, and it must be garnered and warehoused now. Fortunately, the timber circling the valley teemed with game, deer, elk, even an occasional bear. Immediately the hunt was on. To store the meat they built a lean-to against their communal house, a nudge of wisdom to which they were later to accord unstinted praise. The men across the way followed their

method to their later undoing. With the meat stored they attacked their next problem, fuel. A dead pitch pine, two or three dead firs, a span of tamarack seemed enough. They labored it into fireplace lengths, this all axe work, and stacked it by the lean-to.

Snow had fallen intermittently and by November 10th it blanketed the valley to a depth of forty inches. Jennison had been up all that night, for two more men had taken to their bunks. At chill dawn he had climbed up toward the community cabin. At the top of the trail, where the ground leveled off to form the roof of the mesa he turned about for a glance back over the valley. Somber it was under the cold leaden skies, empty of life, terrifying in its silent solitude. Wearily, he shrugged it off, half-turned toward the cabin, then halted abruptly. His eyes widened, his pulse quickened. The mystery of beneficent instinct was being unfolded before him. The wild life was fleeing the frost beleaguered valley, seeking food and security in less snowless regions. First a bull elk, gallantly breaking trail for two does, and a span of yearlings. Two hundred yards behind minced timidly a half dozen deer, assorted lots. *Then*, the burros, slogging steadily in the rear. And Jennison would not have halted them if he could. Starvation here, if they remained, or some chance of survival down in the lower friendlier reaches of the foothills. They were wiser than their masters, who had tarried too long. And though he did not know it, a like *begira* down to its last burro detail had already taken place from across the creek. Barring rabbits, the potential food supply of this walled-in valley had been reduced to zero.

Drearily, steadily the snow flakes drifted down till an eight-foot strolling giant would have been buried to his ears. This was December 1st. This was the day when they abandoned their flimsy cabins and climbed bag and baggage up to their common cabin atop the hill. The men across the way had moved a day earlier, but in reverse order. They had moved *down* from their cabins on their mesa to their clubhouse on the floor of the valley and almost opposite the abandoned cabins of Jennison and company.

Those twenty by forty foot cabins had not been built for bunkhouses, but what would

you. This chronicler cannot refrain from an idle speculation anent the emotions of a modern sanitary-minded fresh-air fiend breasting that niagara of mephitic odors once the door had swung inward. His quivering nostrils would have been stormed by the mingled reek of sweaty socks and wet leather, all tied up into a neat bundle by the fumes of shag tobacco. Yet strangely enough the convalescents grew daily stronger and the well remained miracles of abounding health.

CAST a bridge of silence across the next nineteen days. It is now December 20, 1864. At daybreak they discovered that Spelya, malicious god of the north wind was at work. A forty-mile gale, cold as the heart of the polar zone grappled with the mesa's ten-foot snow level, gouged it away and hurled it down into the more-sheltered valley. A cold no clothing could deny iced its way impishly into the cabin through badly chinked walls. And when the door was opened to admit a wood carrier he seemed to be wading in steam up to his waist as the frigid air met the hot breath of the roaring fireplace. How they managed not to burn the cabin down is a marvel past imagining. Night brought little change in either storm or temperature. Yet it was on this bitter night, that Levitt chose to remind them of their countrymen shivering in the snowdrifts just across the narrow creek, and to invoke the Christmas spirit of charity and good will. Tonight it fell on deaf ears. They were intractable, "Damned Yanks." The men across the way, "Damned Rebs."

They would only hazard a guess at the temperature. Yet they had a trusty thermometer at hand. For according to Western tradition, good whiskey would not freeze until 40 below zero was passed. Yet they dare not risk it. Whiskey was becoming scarce and there would be great need of Christmas cheer. For as Bud Wiley put it:

"Suppose some damned galoot's been nipping out of that said bottle, and hiding his tracks by filling it up with spring water."

They would not take the temperature.

Two days later Jennison awoke automatically with a muttered curse on his bearded lips. The wind still blew. He hunched the blankets up toward his ears,

hunched then halted the ear ensheathing. The wind did indeed blow, but *not* that wind. For there was in this wind the drowsy note of a droning lullaby. It sighed and rustled softly about the chimney, a fluted "who-o-oo," rising, fading, swelling, bearing a soft caress in its gentle tones. He was listening in rapture to a well-mannered Chinook, the almost fabulous warm wind of the Pacific States, gift according to Indian legend, of the good god Chinook, lord of the south wind, eternal enemy of Spelya, lord of the frigid north wind.

"Turn out you mud skates," Jennison yelled. "A Chinook's done hit us."

Sometimes a Chinook blew itself out within a few hours, sometimes it blew for days and nights without pause. Often it would raise the temperature 50 degrees within the space of two hours. Long continuing Chinooks were almost always accompanied by warm rains, so increasing vastly the danger of flood and avalanche, ever a hazard in regions of heavy snow fall and roof-like mountain slopes.

At Jennison's yell, the hozannahing men pelted outside to luxuriate in the balmy air. What mattered it that the roof leaked like a riddled sieve? Nothing at all. The blessed Chinook still blew. Already the trees had shaken off the burdening snow. A turbid trickle of water crept out from under the wood pile. The top of the mesa, almost denuded of its snowy fleece by Spelya's devastating puffing now showed muddy earth. Blue-black clouds were marshalled behind Mt. Sheridan-Jackson, holding in their ample bosom the promise of rain and the threat of storm.

The men across the way were likewise making holiday for they had deserted their cabin like a chrysalis deserts its outmoded cocoon. As he watched their skylarking Levitt sadly shook his head.

"Three days until Christmas," he mourned, "and we are enemies, not friends."

"Still and anyway," Jennison said philosophically, "we ain't *shootin'* enemies. Not now at any rate."

To those who have never observed the blow-torch effect of a genuine Chinook, its bare recital is like revamping a tale of magic from the Arabian Nights. Its melting power is prodigious, doubly so as in this case

when abetted by a warm rain. By noon of December 24, the ten-foot level of dry snow that had blanketed the floor of the valley had withered to four, a mushy layer, almost as liquid as solid, unstable, yet still in place, held so by the grass, the boulders, the bushes and fringing trees. From this jellied mass Jennison cast an anxious and speculative eye up the giant causeway that extended north to Mt. Sherman-Johnston, then up its companion ramp south to Mt. Sheridan-Jackson, and drew no comfort from the twin inspections. The distance up each slope from valley floor to these compound-denoted peaks, was roughly a mile, the lateral spread half as great. The snowfall had been heavier up there, and the gradient of each ramp near 45°. And the surface of the slopes was bare of trees and bushes. It was a perfect setting for an avalanche. Why it had delayed was the sole wonder. Especially from the north, which had borne the full brunt of the Chinook from the beginning. Yet, an avalanche down either side meant two. Its thundering jar would release the trigger like mass on the other slope.

Still, nature in capricious mood had seemed to raise her aegis over each tiny mesa. A giant hogback ridge, its snout the mesa itself, ran its bulwark upward to the mile away crest. It would chute an avalanche in toward the valley. At least so it appeared to Jennison's men counseling gravely outside their cabin. And they could not retreat, not now. To attempt to descend to the valley and so reach the trail was to dare disaster. Besides, that worm-like trail was impassable now, blocked already by minor snowslides which they had heard grinding their way into the narrow creek valley below them.

The men across the way, with no genuine mountain man among them appeared less conscious of the threatening peril. On occasions they studied the snowy slopes before and behind them, idly it seemed to the anxious watchers across the way. Yet the danger of the Southern men was imminent if the threat of an avalanche became reality. For their communal house lay at the foot of their mesa, their cabins topped it. The cabins would be saved but the other lost together with its lean-to which held their precious *cache* of frozen meat. Why did

these Northern men not warn them? Not from inhumanity certainly. Had they known that there was not a mountain man in the Southern group would they have called to them? Maybe. But call it pride or whatever, the pact of silence held them fettered against their stirrings of conscience. At 3 o'clock that afternoon it no longer mattered. Yet in justice to Whispering Thompson be it recorded that he *did* yell. But as Milt Scougal loved to relate it, Thompson's heaven-shaking bellow, precipitated the avalanche rather than foretold it.

Dad Grasty saw it first. At the extreme upper verge of Mt. Sherman-Johnston a bare spot suddenly appeared. A handkerchief for size, no a rug, a carpet, a tennis court. Split-second recording those successive measurings. Then the upper slope was crumpling up and moving, gaining momentum and acreage from moment to lesser moment. The avalanche was on. It was instant discovery to the eye, plodding realization to the eardrum. Then they caught it, a dull rustling grumble, swelling and deepening in monstrous way till it mimicked the combined roar of a thousand trains. And now the jarring thunder of the first had loosened the potential avalanche clinging precariously to the southern ramp. It too was moving. They crashed the valley with their burden of snow and a freightage of boulders, trees and dirt, ripped away as by countless battalions of mighty shovels. The two crests met near the thread of the creek, their fronts spread, sending down two long fingers that bridged the narrow canyon between the two mesas. Their common Eldorado was lost forever, buried under a mountain of debris.

The men across the way had escaped as Jennison quaintly put it, "By the thin thickness of a gnat's heel."

Whether Thompson's stentorian bellow had motivated their flight was food at the moment for speculation only. At any rate they had fled. And they had observed a curious thing. One man, Jennison thought him Imboden, had halted his flight, dived back into the cabin, then emerged balancing on his galloping shoulder a something that did not yield its identity now for all their guessing. But barring that unknown bauble their loss seemed complete. Their communal cabin, their food, and probably blankets and

arms were buried beneath a towering wilderness of debris-packed snow.

Lefty Steffins, the stern intransigent looked across the way at this group of dispossessed men scuffing their feet rather aimlessly about their cabins, then he turned about slowly.

"They're licked," he stated, "but you bet they ain't admitting it. Their nerve is still okay, but what'll they eat tonight?"

"And tonight is Christmas Eve," Levitt said softly.

"And if it hadn't been for a special—" thus Junkins.

"Hell, I'm goin' to ask 'em over fur supper and after," Jennison overrode Junkins' dangling phrase.

"And, Bat," Levitt put in, "ask them to bring the flute that someone of them plays so divinely."

"I'll so do," Jennison agreed. "Only personal I don't think it stacks up so much agin Steve's fiddle. Still I'll name it."

"Wait, Bat," Ahab Spratling stayed him. "I just figgered out what that feller, Imboden you say, was lugging. That was a keg of liquor, peach brandy more than likely. For me, you can forget about that flute, but don't come back without that keg."

The Shooter's Corner

(Continued from page 65)

Hornet caliber we have four fine varmint rifles, the first two also being very good for deer.

The rifle itself is very pleasing to the eye. Here is a brief description: round barrel, good stock that fits the average shooter very well, low bolt handle for low scope mounting, good arrangement for gas escapement in case of a blowback, speed lock, good safety, good sights optional at extra cost (no one seems to understand why the open rear barrel sight is not thrown out!). The magazine holds five cartridges in all calibers except .300 and .375 H and H Magnum which takes four, comes with 1-inch sling swivels, weighs in the neighborhood of 8 pounds, depending on the wood.

Yes, the Winchester Model 70 is a fine rifle!



CAVE OF THE PERINTIE

By RUI CHESTOR

AUTHORITY at Darwin detailed Steve Warbie to the Mogadan Gorge cave with orders to do nothing but watch and report what transpired below. Being high up in the north wall and overlooking the sea as well, the cave was ideal for the assignment, particularly as no one apart from the police—and the perintie—knew Warbie was there, or, for that matter, knew there *was* such a place as the cave.

Besides his usual gear, Warbie had a battery-operated transceiver for use when necessary, and large naval binoculars which he suspended from a sapling jammed across the roof of the cave. This arrangement saved him considerable arm and back ache.

And for company there was the perintie, though quite unofficial. The big lizard holed up in a crevice on the left hand side of the cave's mouth, and he was **very old**, according to Warbie, **very wise**.

Warbie discovered the perintie's existence the first morning when, peering on hands and knees down the 400-foot cliff, he heard a rustle and something landed with a clump on his shoulders. He turned left and saw three feet of scaly tail draping his arm. He hurriedly turned right and looked into the perintie's black, yellow-lidded eyes.

"Hell!" said Warbie, somewhat perturbed. But the perintie regarded him calmly, benignly, like an old friend, about it a look suggesting it had done this sort of thing before. Warbie remembered then the blacks who had formerly inhabited the Gorge were the Perintie tribe and the cave had been their place of magic. Their crude symbols, handprints, totem signs, figures of men and animals, including that of the perintie itself, were still on the walls, done in white and red ochre. He had a vision of an old black-fellow kneeling where he now knelt, with the perintie on his shoulders too, while, down in the Gorge, sombre tribesmen stared up and watched their witch doctor dealing in magic. And he pondered over the influence upon human destiny once wielded by the perintie, and the pain and sorrow and death that had been meted out in its name.

"You've been a whizzer in your time," he said, gazing into the beady eyes. The perintie acknowledged the compliment by poking out its pale pointed tongue.

Warbie backed away from the edge and cautiously straightened up. The perintie slid off his shoulders to the small ledge in front of its den and stared up at him, flicking its tongue in and out. Warbie guessed at the next act and laughed. Naturally, the witch doctor would reward the perintie with food after each bout of magic. So Warbie opened a tin of beef. The lizard ate till its stomach bulged, and then waddled along the ledge to bask in the sun.

"It's years since the tribe dispersed," mused Warbie. "Yet you remember. You'll be someone to talk to, perintie."

HE REPORTED the perintie's presence when next using the transceiver, but received no official commendation for the extraneous information.

On the fifth day, Warbie used the transceiver extra-judiciously. That was

the day the truck went out on its second trip. The first time, Bolivar had been accompanied by Jim Leheney. This time, the big red-headed Egan was the spare driver, but the truck was loaded as before with gas and oil and the paraphernalia of desert travel. They went in the early morning. Warbie duly reported the departure over the transceiver, after which he had breakfast out of a tin, fed the perintie, sat down on the boulder he used as a chair and pulled the binoculars to him.

In five days, Warbie had developed a routine of inspection. First the launch, the ninety-foot, drab-colored vessel lying close inshore. It had been a naval patrol boat during the war, and Marquis, that urbane, smiling crook, had bought it through Army Disposals. Warbie swung the glasses on to it and saw a sleek black head bobbing up and down in the engine cockpit—Marquis tinkering with the motors as usual. Presently, he would take the launch for a cruise. Usually he went along the fiord to where it turned sharply south in the first twist of its zig-zag course to the Timor. Marquis believed in keeping the motors running sweetly. "And so would I," Warbie said to the perintie, "if I had his game on."

Bolivar and Egan being away, he looked for Jim Leheney next and located him on the rocks at the far end of the beach. Fishing today. Yesterday, he had gone cliff climbing, fortunately not near the cave. The day before, he had been away with the truck. Warbie noted the discontented scowl on Leheney's face with some interest. "Hell," he thought, "is beginning to boil in that boy. It can boil."

The tents under the south wall came under scrutiny then. There were four of them. Furthest from the shore was Moira Leheney's tent, standing a little on its own. Next was the small marquee where they stored their rations and ate their meals, and where the old model pedal radio sat on the end of the trestle table. Next again was the tent shared by Marquis and Jim Leheney, and the last belonged to Bolivar and Egan.

MOIRA LEHENEY sat at the radio and on her Warbie's binoculars lingered. That was why he always left her to the last. She wore a headset and she pedalled

industriously, listening. Warbie knew she never transmitted. She was facing the cave almost directly, and the glasses brought her close as though she were alongside him. He could see the long lines of her figure tightening and relaxing under her shirt and slacks with the movement of her feet. She had dark hair that curled under the head-set, brown eyes, a steadfast chin, and a limpid clarity of expression that was with her even when she was alone.

That expression had puzzled Warbie. At first, as he watched her from the cave half a mile away, he had talked to the perintie about her.

"She's got me guessing," he would say. "What's she doing with that bunch of crooks, perintie? Doesn't she see what the lurk is? Doesn't she know Consul Bar's only 300 miles away and there's a lot of gold in the Government battery there? Sometimes 3000 ounces or more. That's worth £90,000 on the Singapore black market—if you get it there, perintie. That's why they're surveying the route and putting down dumps—getting ready for a fast run across the desert. And why they've got the launch—to waft 'em across the Timor. But doesn't she guess that? Lord, perintie, she belongs to the country. She *ought* to know they're crooks. She's only got to look at Bolivar—"

At this point, Warbie would break off, his hazel eyes holding a deep glow, like the glow in the perintie's eyes when it heard the scream of its hereditary enemy, the big hawk. Thought of Bolivar always made Warbie's hackles rise. Bolivar was cold malignant wickedness. Bolivar was short, but his body was huge, his arms like clubs and his legs like chopped off tree trunks. His face was broad and swarthy and his hair grew low down on his forehead as if he had no forehead at all. And the way his black eyes would creep over Moira Leheney made Warbie grind his teeth.

After looking at Bolivar, Warbie would scan his own big frame and wonder how he would go along with the squat giant. He went 200 pounds and was built like the bullwaddy tree, and the Superintendent called him the toughest blade in the North Australian police. It would, he thought, be something of a fight and the odds in no-body's favor.

But his job in the Mogadan was to watch only. There was no mention of fighting in his orders.

Remembering this, Warbie would shake himself and again direct the binoculars at the girl. "The Leheney's of Castle Hill Station had a good name, too," he would grumble. "Yes, perintie, I *know* her brother's in the bunch. I know all about *him*. I know all about *all* of 'em, except that girl. Maybe Marquis has got her in—he's a slick smooth kind of gent, the sort to catch a woman's eye. But God help us, perintie, she's got no sense."

But Moira Leheney, knowing nothing about Warbie, would go on listening at the pedal set, as far as Warbie could ascertain by listening himself, to nothing at all. Which she was there to hear. If, in the occasional gossip between other pedal owners, there were mention of the party in the Mogadan, there would be panic in the Gorge. And, in the cave, bitter grief, thought Warbie.

BY THE morning of the truck's second trip, however, Warbie had modified his opinion of Moira Leheney. Marquis left her cold and Bolivar's prying eyes tormented her and she ignored Egan. There was hostility between her and her brother, and, during spells from the pedal set when she was alone, her hands would clench and her shoulders droop, and sometimes there were tears. Warbie had seen all this, and he knew she was lonely and frightened.

He thought, it's not fair to let her worry herself sick; she ought to know she's not unfriended in spite of all the brass at Darwin. Besides, he had a nebulous kind of hope that Moira Leheney in any case would like the idea of an upstanding fellow like Steve Warbie around.

Therefore, that morning, he switched on the power, donned the phones and, his eyes hard against the binoculars, started to turn his frequency dial. He turned slowly, stopping often, and each time he stopped, he spoke.

The girl's face told him when he had locked into her band. She was suddenly alert, leaning forward, dark eyes intent. "Hullo!" he repeated softly, for the range was only half a mile. "Hullo! Who's there? Come in."

He could see she was deciding whether she should reply or not. Her hand reached out to the panel and poised there doubtfully. Her pedalling rate slackened; she glanced quickly outside; her brother was still sitting on the rocks, and Marquis was getting the launch under way. That decided her, apparently, for her feet picked up speed again and her wrist turned. Warbie knew she was pushing the switch from reception to transmission.

Her voice was low, clear, deliberate. "Who are you?" she said. "Where's your call sign?"

Warbie waited till she switched back. On the old fashioned set, she had to push the switch over for every exchange. "Where's yours?" he retorted.

"I haven't got one," she said.

"That's a coincidence," said Warbie. "Neither have I. Who are you?"

Her lips tightened. She said, "Gentlemen first. Who are you? Where are you?"

They've never heard of *me*, thought Warbie, so what the heck? "I'm Steve Warbie," he said, and stopped. She'd asked not *what* but *where* he was. That was a distinction with importance. Anyway, he couldn't tell her. Or could he? He said, grinning, "I'm at Perintie Cave. Is that north, south, east or west of you?" That, he told himself, was subtle.

"I wouldn't know," she replied. "How do you get there?"

Warbie's glance through the binoculars was sardonic. If you're already in the Gorge, it's merely a matter of climbing the cliff—provided you've got a head for heights. But if you're a policeman, you come from Darwin by patrol boat; you land three miles down the fiord in the dark of a stormy evening, and you hump your gear most of the night till you get it to the scrubby, wet ravine which is the way into the cave from the plateau on top, and you curse the Superintendent who handed you the job. Though it does make a difference when there's a girl down there among the thieves.

"Best way is to come in by plane," he said feelingly. "But to pin it down, where are you?"

"Would Hogan's Inlet mean anything to you?" she asked.

Warbie's lips thinned out. Hogan's Inlet was seventy miles to the south, and a deso-

late hole, too. Worse than the Mogadan. But you couldn't expect her to confide everything, not at first time of greeting. He said, quite truthfully, "I'm less than sixty miles from you."

Was she disappointed? Or not? Warbie could not tell. "Which side of Hogan's?" she pursued. "North or south?"

"North," he said. She was certainly not dismayed at that. "Fair's fair," he went on. "Who are you?"

She waited longer than was necessary to switch across. She could have been watching the launch now moving down the fiord and kicking up a neat bow wave, but more likely she was asking herself should she answer the question.

She took a deep breath. "I'm Moira Leheny."

"Is *that* so?" said Warbie, his tone exhibiting surprise. "I've heard of you. You belong to Castle Hill Station. You're a long way off your run, aren't you?"

She ignored the implied question. "I can't say I've heard of you, Mr.—er—Warbie, isn't it?"

"Then," said Warbie, "let me introduce myself so you'll know me when you see me." And he launched into a description of himself which the late M. Bertillon could have scarcely improved. That, he thought, would show her there was someone at hand to offset Bolivar—*especially* Bolivar.

"Am I supposed to retaliate the same way?" the girl asked.

Warbie saw a chance for more subtlety. He said, "Let me tell *you*. You've got honey color hair, blue eyes, skin to match, and you're small, and you wear jodhpurs, and you're nice to look at."

Her lips twitched a little at that. "You're a remarkably good guesser, Mr. Warbie." Then she was serious again. "But there's one thing I can't understand. How did you come to tune into this set?"

He was ready for that one. "Easy. I'm all alone here, save for an old perintie who isn't very talkative. So I sit here sometimes, turning through all the bands, calling on the off-chance of getting someone. My luck was good this time, Moira."

She pondered for a moment, then asked, "What do you do when you're not seeking conversation?"

He was prepared for this one, too. "I'm interested in gold."

"I don't like gold," she volunteered, and fell silent.

Warbie, waiting for her, saw she was looking towards the beach. He deflected the binoculars and found Jim Leheney moving towards the tents. His shoulders were hunched, and his feet dragged and his face was sullen. He was not in a happy mood. Warbie was not surprised when the girl said, "My time is up, Mr. Warbie. Over to you."

"Just a moment," said Warbie. "Are you always on the air at this time?"

"Occasionally."

"Then I'll be calling you again, Moira. I like your voice and I like your gold hair and blue eyes."

"You talk too smoothly, Steve Warbie," she retorted sharply. "Over to you. Good-bye."

THAT was the end of it. Jim Leheney was nearing his tent. The girl removed her phones and hurried out to intercept him. Warbie was interested to see he showed a sulky reluctance to talk. He had the same general features and coloring as his sister; a good looking lad, thought Warbie, if he could rid himself of his perpetual scowl.

"Now, perintie," said Warbie, watching closely through the glasses, "this is interesting. What's she going to tell him? Is she saying anything about Steve Warbie? . . . He's staring down at the ground and scuffling his big feet. . . . No, Warbie's not in this, perintie. She's laying into him. Look at the set of her head and the way she wags her finger. Boy, he's getting it. 'You low down hound,' she's saying—bet you that, perintie—'You low gold snide, you. It's enough to make your father turn in his grave. A good thing he's dead.' Yep, perintie, that's my guess. She's quoting the law and is he sweating!"

Jim Leheney suddenly made a violent gesture and flung into his tent. The girl followed him and he grabbed her by the shoulders and pushed her out. She left him then and went off to her own tent and dropped on to her camp bed. Her face was hidden, but Warbie could see her body shaking.

"Poor kid," he said, and didn't look long.

The brother and sister stayed in their tents till Marquis brought the launch back to its moorings and rowed ashore in the dinghy, looking for lunch.

"Poor kid," said Warbie again. "Still," he added, "a satisfactory morning, perintie."

But he said nothing about it in his next official report.

WARBIE spoke to Moira Leheney the second time the following morning. Her brother was again fishing off the rocks, and Marquis, of course, was out on the launch. Her unsmiling face ringed by the binoculars, Warbie said, "Good morning, young woman. Nice to hear your voice again. I've been thinking about you."

She switched over. "I've been thinking about you, too. Where is Perintie Cave?"

Warbie studied her face. "I thought I told you that. North of Hogan's Inlet. Why?"

"Nobody here seems to have heard of it," she replied.

So she *had* said something. "And I suppose nobody had heard of Steve Warbie?" he probed.

"I don't remember your name coming up," she said.

Excellent, commented Warbie to himself. He said, "There's any amount of unknown corners in the Territory, Moira. You ought to know *that*. Why, there's not many ever heard of Hogan's Inlet. That's a terrible, forsaken spot, Moira. What are you doing there?"

"You're inquisitive," she said, her expression taut.

"I am," he admitted. "And here's why. There's only one reason why anybody should go to Hogan's, Moira. Gold. As I've been told, your father did a lot of prospecting round here before he started raising cattle at Castle Hill. And you've got a brother who's done considerable prospecting. What's more, he knows this area. I smell gold. I told you I'm interested in gold."

She bent towards the set. "I'm not. I—I hate the stuff." She caught herself up and went on in a bantering tone, though her face was still tense, "You've disappointed

me, Steve Warbie. I thought it was my voice you wanted to hear. All you want is information. Steve, I'm hurt."

She's not ready to talk, thought Warbie. Anyway, she dared not talk—not with her brother involved. He could read her mind. Her worry was to get Jim out of the mess. "It is your voice, Moira," he said. "And your golden hair and blue eyes. . . . Moira, I'm thinking of hiking over to Hogan's tomorrow."

Her eyes opened with dismay. "I hope you don't," she said hurriedly.

"Wouldn't you welcome me?"

She smiled wryly. "Frankly, no, Steve."

Warbie smiled, too; he knew why she smiled; he was not the only one to play with double talk. "That settles it," he said. "Expect me tomorrow, Moira."

"Steve," she cried. "You leave Hogan's alone."

"Why?" he demanded, not missing her desperation.

"Because—because I ask you."

Huh, the old feminine wiles! "Why do you ask me?"

"Because—because, Steve, you'll make things hard for me. Because—well, nobody knows about you, Steve. They don't know you've been calling me. And it wouldn't be—be good for them to know. You're good company—on the air, Steve. You won't be if you go—come to Hogan's." She paused and stared seaward for a moment or two; then she resumed urgently, "Maybe I can explain some other time, but, please, Steve, promise you won't go near Hogan's."

Warbie angled the binoculars towards the beach and picked up Marquis making quickly for the tents. It was long before his usual time. Further over, Jim Leheney was also making a hasty return. What's happened? Warbie asked himself, and spoke into the mike. "I promise, Moira." It was the easiest promise he had ever made.

"Perintie," said Warbie to the lizard somnolent on the ledge, "she knew if I went to Hogan's I'd find I'd been fooled. But what's the betting her reason is if I did, I'd be seventy miles from here? Work it out, perintie."

The reason for the hurried return of the two men to camp was soon appar-

ent. The truck came tearing down the Gorge, raising a long funnel of dust. It pulled up near the marquee and Bolivar and Egan climbed from the cabin, beating dust from their clothes. They had travelled long and fast and they were tired. Egan fell asleep over the meal hastily prepared by Marquis and the girl, and, when Marquis woke him up, staggered off to his tent and collapsed on his bunk.

But Bolivar was tougher. Warbie trained the glasses on him, and, watching the stubby jaw champing and the play of huge muscular arms and the black cold eyes following Moira, felt the surge of vicious hostility.

"Pertintie," he said, "there's an animal. But he'll get it, perintie, don't worry."

Bolivar finished his food. He made some remark to the girl and swung round to where Jim Leheney and Marquis were waiting. Leheney began to talk. Still watching, Warbie slipped on the phones, tuned into the official band and pressed the buzzer. Presently he got a response. "Hullo! Is that the caveman? Perintie eaten you yet, Warbie?"

"Yair, and this is the perintie talking," snapped Warbie.

"Funny man, aren't you? All right, what's doing?"

"Truck's just got back, smothered in dust. Cargo's been dropped, so I guess everything's set for the big act. Egan's in bed, a physical wreck, but Bolivar's alive, and right now he's reporting results to Marquis and Leheney. And—no, is he?" Warbie broke off, staring through the glasses. "By gosh, there's a shemozzle developing down there." He was silent while he watched.

"Come on, Warbie. What goes on?"

"Yes, there's trouble," said Warbie. "I can't make out what it's about, but Jim Leheney's started a debate with Bolivar. They're out in the open now and waving their arms and looking annoyed. Yep, Leheney's asking Bolivar questions and Bolivar's apparently telling him to go to hell."

"Case of thieves falling out?"

"I wouldn't know. I wish I did . . . Jim's prancing up to Bolivar and yelling in his ugly mug, and Marquis is fluttering round, looking perturbed and trying to shoo 'em apart. . . . Yair, there she goes. Jim

hauls off and heaves a wallop. Stupid of him. He's not the boy for that gorilla. . . . Bolivar smacks back. Now they *are* getting heated. Marquis jumps in between and Bolivar pushed him off so gently he only rolls back into the marquee and comes to rest under the table. Marquis is out of the fight.

"But Jim isn't. Not yet. But he hasn't got a hope. Bolivar's belting hell into him . . . Ooh! One in the stomach that bends him up! A swipe to the jaw that nearly lifts his head off! He's got no defense. Bolivar's strength just smashes through. Jim can't stand much more . . . A knee in the groin! Now a kick on the knee. Bolivar's a dirty fighter. I can see I'll have to go down and deal with him."

"Listen, mug," came in agitated tones. "You stay where you are. The boss'll break you if you leave that cave."

"And Bolivar's breaking young Leheney right now," retorted Warbie. "They're down on the ground and Bolivar's savaging him. He's an animal for strength. He's got Jim draped over his knee and he's yanking back on his neck and hips . . . Hell!" Warbie's voice was harsh. "He's breaking the kid's back! Jim's face—Damnation! I can't watch this and do nothing. A rifle shot will stop it—"

"For God's sake, Warbie! You *can't* interfere!"

"Can't I? Bolivar's killing him! He's—no, by hell, he *not!* He's changed his mind! A real sudden change and no hesitation—"

"Cut the frills, Warbie. What's happened?"

"Moira Leheney with a double-barrelled shotgun," said Warbie, heaving a deep sigh and becoming aware his face was running sweat. "She walked up behind Bolivar and fired a shot into the ground right behind his pants. Bang—it went and that's the end of it. She's got another shot left and Bolivar knows that's enough to rip him inside out . . . I've changed me mind. It's a good thing she *is* here. That girl will do me, all right."

"Here, Warbie, don't you start getting starry-eyed. You've got a job on hand. What's happening now?"

"Marquis has come to life and so's Egan. And they're dragging Bolivar off to his tent, trying to beef sense into his great thick

head. But there's only one way to do that, and I'm the man—"

"Enough of that, Warbie. You know your orders."

"All right, take it easy . . . Jim's pretty sore, but I don't think he's seriously damaged. Moira's looking after him. Gosh! Blood's thicker than water. Yesterday, they were rowing. Now—I'd fight ten Bolivars for a reward like that! . . . Well, that's that. Tell the boss the next trip's the real thing. They've got their dumps down and they've worked out their route. Say Warbie says so and the perintie concurs, and he'll know it's O.K."

"You yob, you, Warbie. All right, I'll pass it on. Anything else?"

"Only I feel in me bones I got to go down and belt the Christmas bells out of Bolivar," said Warbie, and prevented caustic comment by switching off.

The next time he used the transmitter was fifteen hours later, in the early morning. The truck was just pulling out. This time there was no heavy load; only Bolivar and Egan and their guns.

THERE was tension down in the camp, revealed in Moira's strained manner, in the way Marquis would stop whatever he was doing and stand staring at nothing and then suddenly eye the girl, in Jim Leheney's savage scowl. Warbie could feel the tension in himself. Even the perintie seemed restless.

Moira was at the pedal set, but Warbie did not call her because Marquis, instead of going out to the launch, spent the morning looking over equipment. Preparing for flitting, Warbie opined; deciding what to take and what to leave behind. Most of the stuff, he guessed, tents, truck, and so on, *would* be left behind. Why bother about that kind of thing when you've got £90,000?

But, after lunch, Marquis rowed out to the launch and Jim Leheney, still sore and stiff, went to his bunk. Warbie, the glasses on the girl, saw her lips move. He whipped on the phones, twisted the dial and heard her voice. ". . . Steve Warbie. . . . Calling Steve Warbie. . . . Come in, please. . . ."

"Hullo, Moira," he said. "How are you today?"

"Steve! Oh, what luck! I never thought

"I'd get you so quickly." She paused, breathing quickly. "Steve, I didn't tell you we were at Hogan's Inlet, did I?"

"No," replied Warbie slowly. "You didn't, did you? You merely asked if Hogan's Inlet meant anything to me."

She was anxious, eager, so that she could scarcely wait for him to finish before switching over. "We're not at Hogan's, Steve. We—we're at Mogadan, right by the sea. Wait, please, till I finish. I'm sorry about that, Steve. But there's a reason for it. How far is Perintie Cave from the Mogadan?"

"Come to think of it, not far," he replied gravely.

"Near enough for you to come quickly if—if I should want you?"

"Moirá," he said, "I've promised myself a view of your blue eyes and—"

Her hand darted at the switch and her voice broke in on him, terse, impatient, annoyed. "Please don't. I asked you something."

"I'll come as soon as you say the word," he said contritely, thinking the time was just about due when she should know *where* the cave was. "Is anything wrong, Moira?"

"Something I'm not strong enough to put right," she said sombrely.

"I think," he returned, watching her carefully, "I ought to know more than that."

Her feet slowed up and stopped, and she was still, so still the glasses picked up the pulse beating in her throat. He saw resolution harden in her face, and she started the pedals again. "Steve, you mentioned my brother . . . Jim Leheney. He's here, and, Steve, I don't know how to say this, but he's been terribly foolish. I want him to go out—now, at once, and take me with him. But," her voice quivered, "he won't go, Steve. . . . And there's a man here. A beast. He. . . ."

Her voice died away as though she couldn't force herself to say what she wanted to say. She stopped pedalling again and sat with her head propped up by her hand. And then it came to Warbie why Jim Leheney had gone for Bolivar. Bolivar *was* a beast. He thought, this has gone far enough; I'll tell her now; she's not going to take any more.

Suddenly, he was sweating. The binoculars cut off his vision outside the circle covered by the lenses. In that circle Marquis appeared; Marquis, who should have been out on the launch, but was at the side of the marquee, moving slowly, stealthily, his white teeth gleaming, but not in his customary suave smile.

Warbie cursed himself for not having kept an eye on Marquis. He wanted to shout at the girl, to warn her, but she sat there struggling with her thoughts, her switch still on transmission. And even if it had been set for receiving, he was still helpless, for her feet were still; the generator was out. Warbie squirmed and twisted and swore fiercely to himself.

Then her feet started to move and she spoke. "Steve, you will come, won't you?"

Marquis stood balanced on his toes. It seemed an age before she switched over. "Moirá," said Warbie. "Shut down, girl. Marquis outside listening to you!"

A look of utter amazement showed on her face. She gazed all around, then stared blankly at the set. Her astonishment would have amused him but for Marquis, still crouching at the side of the marquee.

Then she took control of her features, ironing out all expression. She stood up, removing the headset, and wandered casually outside. She turned and saw Marquis, who had also assumed a casual attitude. She said something and Marquis grinned and shook his head. Warbie imagined the brief exchange.

"Hullo! Thought you were out on the boat."

"No. Finished out there."

"I see."

She walked away. Marquis stared after her, his face thoughtful. Then he shrugged his shoulders, entered the marquee and sat down at the pedal set. Warbie thought, he heard her last words at least, her "Steve, you will come, won't you?" and he's going to try and find out who Steve is; I'll hear his voice in a minute.

But Marquis did not call. He looked at the set and went on looking at it. "Yep, you're in a spot, too," reasoned Warbie. "You've got the girl on your mind. And the gold. *And* Bolivar. You're scared of Bolivar too, Marquis. You *ought* to be scared."

He swung the glasses around, seeking the girl, and found her sitting in her own tent. The rear flaps were down and he could not see her clearly, but there was something odd about her appearance. He got it after a minute. She was holding binoculars to her eyes and the binoculars were lined dead on the cave.

He was taken aback for a moment. Then he laughed and waved his hand. She put the binoculars down after a while without giving any indication she had seen him.

"Now she knows," Warbie said to the perintie. "From now on, we've got to watch Mr. Marquis all the time." But he knew the danger would come when Bolivar and Egan returned. He would have to go into action then, like going down the cliff quickly and efficiently.

WARBIE didn't have to go down the cliff. The girl came up to him in the dawn while the Gorge was still gloomy, though the highest peaks were already catching points of rosy fire. She came up and spoke to him from the cave's entrance, bringing him out of his sleeping bag in an astonished leap. He could see her head and shoulders silhouetted against the faint light, but, when she began to climb in, he prevented her, and pulling on his boots, he went to the edge and knelt down.

The perintie came out of its lair and jumped on to his shoulders. "You'd have got a shock if he'd landed on *your* neck," he said. "Come on in."

He proffered his hand, but she ignored it, squirming past him unaided. He stood up and the perintie returned to its den. He rolled his sleeping bag into a seat for her, but she ignored that, too.

"How long have you been here?" she demanded.

He felt resentment leaping in the question. "A week," he replied.

"A week!" Her voice was unsteady. "A week of peeping and spying and playing around on your radio and—and talking about gold hair and blue eyes! A week of wonderful fun for you! The superior being! Sitting up aloft, unknown, unsuspected! Watching me squirm and twist and wriggle! Pretending you knew nothing and all the time—"

Her voice broke.)

"You're a policeman?" she shot at him.

"Right," he said.

"Then," she cried scornfully, "what are you going to do about the eighteen bars of gold taken from Consul Bar? Sit up and talk on your radio about gold hair and blue eyes? Or how interested you are in gold? You've got a lot to be interested in. Twenty-eight hundred and eighty ounces! Three leather bags. Six bars in each. What are you going to do about it? Promise you won't go near Hogan's?"

She's not missing a trick, Warbie thought ruefully. And game, too. "How long have Bolivar and Egan been back?" he asked.

"I don't know. An hour, perhaps."

"Earlier than I thought," said Warbie. "It makes no difference, though."

"Would anything *you* think make any difference?" she flared.

He said nothing to that. He could see her now, for the light was stronger. She faced him stiffly, defiantly. Climbing had smeared her clothes with clay; her hair was ruffled; there was dust on her face, and her eyes were bright with anger and contempt. He thought she was very lovely.

He reached for the binoculars. The Gorge was still shadowy, but the tops of the cliffs were bright and the water was like green velvet shading into deep brown. He could see the launch like a black shadow on the water, the truck down on the beach, and Marquis and Egan standing by the dinghy, Marquis jerking around uneasily and Egan smoking a cigarette. He could not see Bolivar or Jim Leheney.

He sat down at the transeiver, fitted on the phones and pressed the buzzer. "Hullo, Warbie here," he said.

"Oh, yes, the perintie king. What's to do, Warbie?"

"Bolivar and Egan arrived back an hour ago. They have the goods. The launch will move off any time. Better start in."

"Right, Warbie. We'll be on our way."

Warbie switched off, removed the phones and turned to look at the girl. Some of the defiance had gone out of her attitude.

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"In about fifteen minutes, or twenty at the outside, you'll see a patrol boat come round that bend. And *it* will take care of the gold." His glance was wryly deprecatory. "Not that there's so much gold, Moira.

Two of the bags are filled with lead bars—or should be. We couldn't risk *too* much on the throw."

She sat down on the sleeping bag then. Her legs seemed to give under her. Her eyes were dilated. Warbie thought she was going to cry, but she didn't. "So you've known all along," she said. "Well, that finishes it. Poor Jim. I thought I could still get him out of it. But now—"

"Yes," agreed Warbie. "We've known all along—right from the time Jim Leheney told us."

It didn't sink in right away. Then she was on her feet again, her lips quivering, her eyes wide open. "Steve Warbie, what's that?"

"Jim's all right," said Warbie. "Marquis wanted someone with him who knew these parts. Someone young, reckless, who wouldn't mind taking a risk. He reckoned Jim fitted the bill. Jim came to us, let me see; yes, three months back. We wanted Marquis and Bolivar and Egan badly, so we told Jim to ride along with them. We'd do the rest. And—well, it's been done."

"Couldn't I have been told?" she asked.

Warbie smiled a little. "You were a confounded nuisance, Moira. Of course, you can't be blamed. You must tag along, thinking Jim was up to no good. But he couldn't tell you. He was sworn to secrecy. More, we left him entirely in the dark as to what we would do. You can see why, can't you? The less Jim knew, the less Marquis could find out. No wonder Jim got hot and bothered, wondering what was happening. . . . But I did try to let you know you weren't *altogether* alone."

But it seemed she did not hear him. Her face paled so that her eyes looked extraordinarily dark and large.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"Jim," she said, almost in a whisper. "He doesn't know I'm up here. He won't know where I am. I came away before Bolivar could stop me. Jim will go after Bolivar. I—I'm afraid."

WARBIE grabbed the binoculars again. He lined them on the tents, steadying them on the third tent. Jim Leheney was there, sprawled on his bunk, and Warbie's

heart gave a great thud. Then he saw the ropes tying Jim down, saw the convulsive heave of Jim's body as he strained at them.

He turned quickly to the launch. Marquis was on board now and blue smoke was coughing from the exhaust, but Egan was still on the beach, standing by the dinghy. There was no sign of Bolivar.

He swung back to the tents. Then it seemed as if the glasses were out of focus. The tents, the yellow cliffs, the sunlight, were blotted out by a dark amorphous shadow that refused to coalesce into definite form. He heard the girl gasp, turned to look at her—and there, incredibly, was Bolivar, his head and shoulders gigantic in the mouth of the cave, one hand resting on the edge, the other jutting a gun at Warbie.

There was hot, furious silence. Warbie tightened up, steel-taut, his mind judging distances, estimating chances. His rifle rested against the wall eight feet away, his revolver was on the ground beside it. The heavy binoculars, swinging from the sapling, might just reach Bolivar's face. But, at the back of his mind, in the fume of dismay, was a wonder, a half-formed doubt, as he stared at the mighty chest and bulging muscles, if he *could* travel with this man in a fight.

Bolivar spoke. "Thanks for leaving your tracks, girl. An' thanks for the warning about the patrol boat, trooper. . . . There's sure to be a back way out of this place. . . . I'm coming in, an' you go with me, girl. But first. . . ."

His gun hand tightened. Warbie hurled himself sideways. Moira screamed. And the perintie came out of its den and jumped for Bolivar's neck.

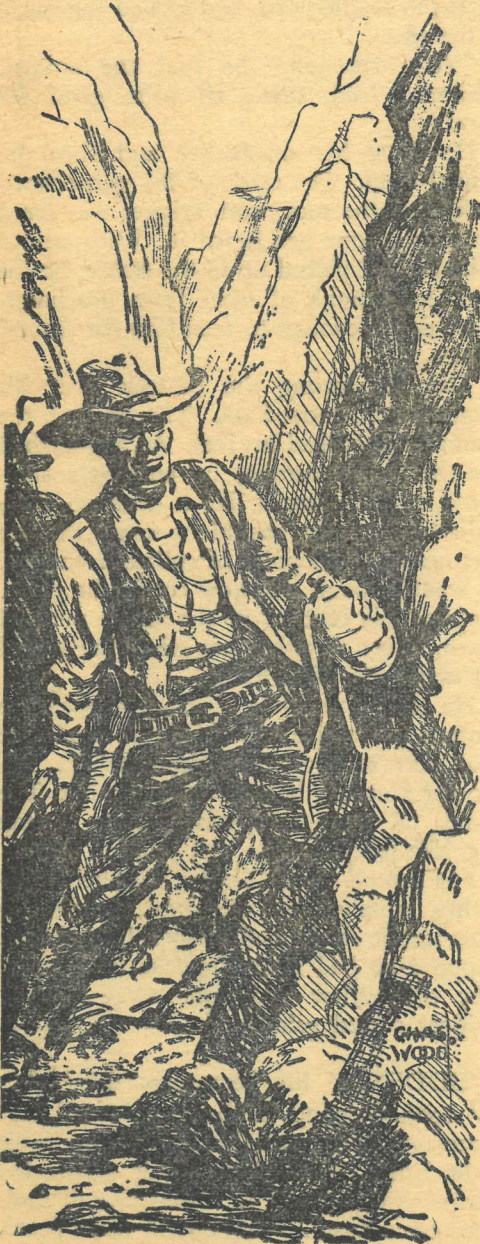
Bolivar threw up his hands, bellowing curses. The gun exploded, bringing down a shower of grit from the roof. There was a frantic scurry on the edge of the cave; then the perintie, surprised and indignant, was scrambling back to its ledge, and Bolivar—They heard a shriek, a crash, a bump or two, and the rattle of gravel cascading down the cliff.

And away down the fiord, the patrol boat came around the bend, the water arching at the bows in white ribbon wings with the turbulence of its speed.

*“ . . . Maybe You Could
Fool a Jury, but You Can't
Fool Buzzards*

DESERT WISE

By GENE VAN



TRIGGER SLOAN was a cold-blooded killer, contemptuous of the law. He paused in the doorway leading to his cell in the small sheriff's office where he was to await the jury's verdict. Trigger was charged with first degree murder. He glanced back over his broad shoulder at Deputy Alex Cross who was pulling a key ring from his pocket.

In a flash, Trigger whirled upon the deputy, smothering him within the grasp of his huge arms. Cross kicked and clawed with his teeth, trying to free himself from his prisoner, but Trigger was desperate. He flung the small man across the room, against the wall, and before Cross could make a move, Trigger was into him, pounding hard with both fists.

Cross tried to yell for help, but his voice was weak, and his knees buckled. Trigger stepped back and let the deputy fall to the floor. With murder in his heart, Trigger Sloan picked up a chair and deliberately pounded the defenseless deputy over the head until the chair came apart.

Trigger found his gun in the sheriff's desk, fastened on his worn cartridge-belt, and went to the front door where he looked out onto the main street of Cannonville. Everyone seemed to be at the courthouse awaiting the verdict of the jury. Trigger smiled crookedly as he started for the rear door. A picture on the wall caused him to stop and give it a second glance.

Sheriff Mike Rand's picture was framed next to that of his lovely wife Marie. Trigger swallowed hard as he looked at Marie's photo. The one time during the trial when he had spoken came back to his mind. Speaking softly, barely loud enough for the jury to hear, he had said:

"Me an' him loved the same gal five years ago. He got her by lyin' 'bout me. He's scared I'm goin' to make him pay for them lies so he's tryin' to get me hung."

Trigger rubbed his nose thoughtfully as he turned and left the office, using the rear door. He went directly to the sheriff's stable out in back, selected one of the sheriff's finest horses, took an enormous canteen off a peg on the wall, mounted and rode out of Cannonville, using the alley until he was out of sight of town.

Trigger Sloan was free now, well mounted and armed. He rode at a fast pace

until he came to Marshville, ten miles west of Cannonville. This time he used the main street. Men recognized him, but they kept back out of his way.

At the Diamond O ranch he stopped, watered his horse and filled the canteen. There was only one cowboy at the ranch at the time and he didn't know that the rider was an escaped prisoner until the sheriff arrived several hours later.

Trigger Sloan was in no hurry. He knew where he was heading—the worst spot in the desert, a section where rain never falls, where there are no water-holes, where the blackened rocks are like uncooled lava. Heat waves shimmered and danced before him as he rode toward the vague line of broken hills.

MILE after mile he rode, scourged by thirst, but refusing to touch the precious fluid in his canteen. He knew that his horse would die, but he wanted to reach those hills before taking to foot travel. He knew of a single water-hole miles and miles beyond the hills; and he knew that the one canteen of water would enable him to make it on foot. From there another full canteen would take him to a ranch where he would be safe for a while.

Trigger had a sinister purpose in making this trip. He knew Mike Rand very well indeed. With his only deputy dead, Mike would ride alone; and Mike Rand rarely failed to get his man. It would have been a simple matter for Trigger to hide and ambush the sheriff, but he wanted a more satisfactory revenge.

That night he made a dry camp in a clump of ocotillo. After riding almost to the clump, he turned right on a back-track for some distance, swung to the left in a wide circle and came to the clump from almost an opposite direction. If the sheriff followed his tracks in the sand, he must first ride up close to the killer's place.

Trigger left his weary horse saddled and tied. It was only a few more miles to the broken hills. The fugitive had no food, but it didn't worry him. Once in the hills, he would be able to kill a rabbit or something. He had eaten buzzards and rattlesnakes when hard pressed.

Sheriff Mike Rand didn't come along that night, because the sheriff was traveling slow,

saving his mount. Shortly after daylight, Trigger Sloan mounted his horse and rode on. The heat was almost unbearable now, and Trigger had long since ceased to watch his back trail, because the eye strain made his head throb. He drank sparingly of the warm water, cursed the sun and heat and lashed the stumbling horse with a rope-end. It seemed ages and ages before he reached the broken hills. The heat was stifling. The horse was weaving drunkenly. Trigger dismounted, unfastened the heavy canteen from the saddle-horn, and kicked the horse in the ribs.

"Yo're through," he told the animal. "Buzzard feed, that's all yo're good fer now."

He drew his six-shooter and shot the animal dead. The crack of the gun echoed back from the rocks and Trigger wondered whether anyone had heard it. With an old knife he had picked up in the stable, he cut a generous hunk of meat from the horse. It would be enough to feed him for several meals.

Then he swung the canteen over his shoulder and moved on. The heat of the sand almost cooked his feet. As he searched for the right opening, he purposely staggered, making tracks like a drunken man, indicating to any possible pursuer that he was nearly at the point of collapse. Finally, he went through a narrow cut in the rocks, dropped his canteen in the shade and sat down. Here was the spot where he would get even with Mike Rand.

He took a generous drink, recapped the canteen and waited. Even in the shade the heat was terrific. He examined his six-shooter gingerly, because it was so hot. The chunk of horse-meat was already getting dry, like jerky.

For several hours Trigger sat there, suffering acutely from the heat, wondering whether the sheriff had really followed him. Suppose he had not? Suppose he guessed why the outlaw had gone away openly? Trigger cursed grimly.

SUDDENLY his keen ears detected a sound—sound of boots in sand! He froze against the rock, his cocked gun in his right hand. A shadow struck across the narrow opening, and the crunching of footsteps came closer. It was Sheriff Mike Rand,

hunched, watchful as a hunting cat. Trigger blended well with the rocks; and perhaps the sheriff's eyes were a little blinded from the glaring light. He was carrying his six-shooter tightly in his right hand.

Then Trigger Sloan, as deadly of aim as a striking rattler, fired the first shot. Mike Rand's right hand jerked, his six-shooter fell to the rocks. As quick as a flash, the sheriff dropped flat on his left side, twisting as he fell. His clawing hand found the gun.

Trigger managed to swing his head and shoulders behind a rock while the sheriff, shooting left-handed and from a bad position, fired five shots at what he could see of Trigger. None of them took effect, and when Trigger knew the sheriff's gun was empty, he came from behind the rock.

The sheriff looked at him through red-rimmed eyes, and Trigger laughed insanely at him. He forced Mike Rand to his feet, took away from belt and gun. Then he took away the sheriff's nearly empty canteen and drank it dry, flinging it far off in the rocks.

"Yuh fell for my trap, didn't yuh, Mike?" he chuckled. "I've always said I'd git yuh some day. Yuh thought you'd send me to the gallows, eh? You was wishin' me plenty hell, wasn't yuh? Well, I trapped yuh out here to give yuh a little taste o' hell. I could have shot yuh—easy. But that ain't revenge. No livin' man can walk back to the Diamond O ranch—an' that's the nearest water. The buzzards will finish yuh. Me, I'm goin' the other way. I've got food an' I've got water. Yo're thirsty right now."

"Yeah, I'm thirsty," admitted Rand. "But why didja kill Alex Cross?"

"Why? Yuh fool, I had to kill him to git away. They can't hang yuh any higher fer two killin's."

"Then you admit murderin' Buck Hill?"

"Admit it? Of course, I admit it."

Rand's split lip twisted in a curious smile as he said, "I was pretty shore of it—but yuh never can tell about a jury."

"What about the jury?" asked Trigger hoarsely.

"They'd found yuh not guilty. The foreman had just told me of their decision when I learned you had killed Alex."

Trigger's face twisted queerly and he

licked his dry lips before speaking again.

"Not guilty?" he whispered. "Not guilty? I'll be damned!"

He backed up a few steps, staring at the sheriff. Not guilty! Why, he didn't have to have killed Cross. He could have been free had he waited a few minutes longer. A black shadow passed over the glaring sand and he glanced up at a huge buzzard, moving about on motionless wings. He shifted his burning eyes to Rand and laughed queerly.

"Yuh can't tell about a jury," he said. "Yuh jist . . . can't . . . tell . . . about . . . a . . ."

"Yore canteen's leakin'," said Rand huskily.

Trigger Sloan started to look, jerked back, his cocked gun covering the sheriff. He was wise in the ways of gunmen and their tricks.

"No, yuh don't," he whispered. "I'm no damn fool."

"Look at it," urged Rand.

Trigger snarled wickedly as he backed toward the canteen. His boot heel struck it and it rang empty. As quick as a flash Trigger half-turned and swept it up from the sand; but in that flash, Rand stepped behind a rock, leaving Trigger standing there dangling his empty, bullet-riddled canteen in his left hand.

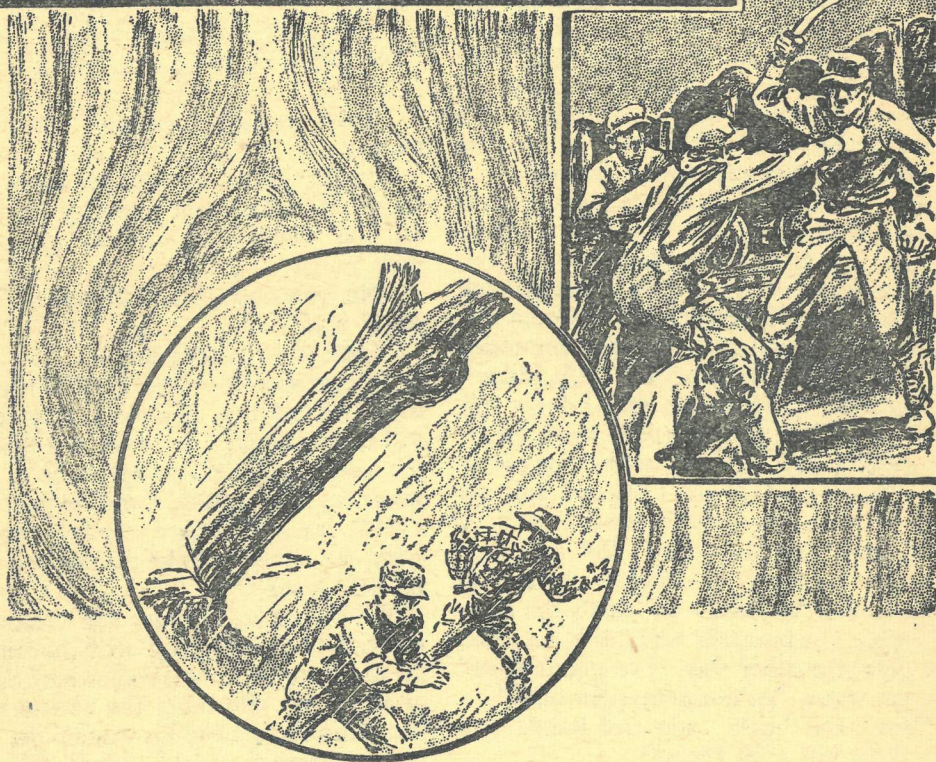
With a curse, Trigger ran erratically to the tall rock, searching with burning eyes for the sheriff, who was somewhere out there in that glare. He flung the useless canteen from him and clawed his way up the rock to the top where he could command a view of the desert below him. Far down the rocks he saw a small figure, making his way toward a horse which was staked out. Trigger rubbed his eyes and cursed as the figure stopped and waved back at him. Through the glare, he saw Mike Rand pick up something from among the rocks, and from the actions. Trigger Sloan realized that the sheriff had cached another canteen.

He swallowed hard and scanned the sky above him where there were several buzzards circling.

"Yuh can shore fool a jury, but yuh can't fool buzzards," he sighed.

PRIME CUT SUCKER

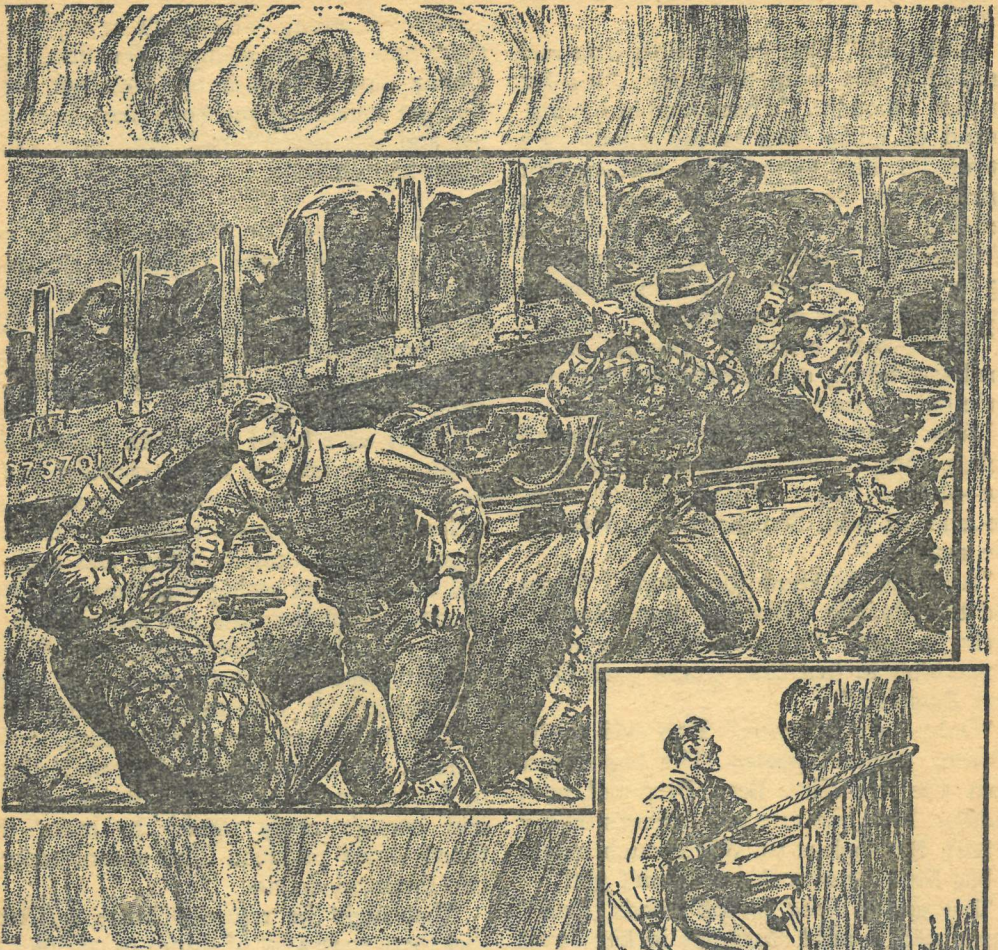
By LYNDON RIPLEY



THE charm of the bright May afternoon was lost on Don Malone as he walked slowly through the yard entrance of the Greenbaugh Lumber Company. Gone was his bookkeeping job of four years. No longer would he be cooped up in a small, stuffy cubicle. He was dully glad, in a way, that kindly old Doc Jorgenson had said, "Get back in the woods, son. You need plenty of fresh air and sunshine. It's mostly nerves and strain. Maybe it'll be a tight financial squeeze, but for Karen's sake—and Junior's—you've got to make the change."

Don chose to walk the four blocks home, hoping to leave glum discouragement behind. He was perspiring by the time he reached the yard of the company-owned cottage on Seward Heights. At the gate he stopped to rest. His tired brown eyes glanced back over sprawling industry.

Redwood lumber was stacked for almost half a mile, along the shuttle road to the dock. A gray freighter was loading. To the left a finishing shed emitted undulating shrieks and whines. Sparks rose from an incinerator dome near bay shore tide flats. Saw-dust spewed into the swelling Pacific breeze.



Burl — There's Real Dough in Marketing the Stuff If a Fellow Does It Right!



Don finally shrugged, turned and weakly mounted ash-dusty steps. There was real money being made down there in Sandgate Harbor but it by-passed him at every turn. He'd been a pen-pushing slave. Now he was almost a worn-out cog.

A golden-haired and aproned young woman rushed out of the kitchen, bringing with her the pleasant odor of baking bread. Vague worry rode cerulean eyes as she was swept into eager arms.

"What brings you home so early, dear?" she asked, looking up. "Is it your stomach again?"

"Yes, Karen, my stomach," Don said through a tight smile. He tried to loosen it with a kiss. "My week's notice came to an end today. I couldn't stick it out till five. Thanks to Doc, I'm through."

"I'm so glad," Karen said brightly. "You're going to be outdoors now, aren't you? Going to make grape stakes for Howard?"

"No, I'm not sawing and splitting redwood, even for a friend," Don said, his lean face setting doggedly. "How much ready cash have we?"

"Why, seventy-five dollars and some-

thing, after buying the play pen for Donny. Why?"

"Is that all?" Don dropped his arms and slumped to the worn davenport. "It's far less than I thought. I'd been kind of hoping. Instead of going back to the woods as a sawyer I'd like to get into business for myself. From what I've seen, every time a crew logs off a few acres plenty of burl is left behind. There's real dough in marketing the stuff if a fellow did it right. But to start! Heck, a guy needs capital!"

"That's that beautiful, crinkly, heavy wood that bowls, candlesticks and trays are made out of, isn't it?"

"Sure. Tourists dote on it. I'd need small tools, a truck, cat with winch and blade, drag saw—even a helper. Wood turning shops use a lot of burl. Somebody has to supply raw material."

"And you *do* know the woods," Karen said thoughtfully. "Besides, people instinctively like you. You wouldn't have much competition in that line, would you? Only Curt Bussman."

"Only Curt Bussman," Don said tartly. "Breezy, clever Bussman. The big broker from Crescent City. Beau Brummel in a Cadillac. He's one sure proof there's money in burl. But look at us! Not enough moola to buy tires for a truck we haven't got!"

"But you've *lived* in the woods, Don," Karen said, a mild sharpness in her direct gaze. "Bussman merely buys and sells. He hardly ever gets out of his car. A man who really knew burls, knew coastal country, would have a read advantage over a hotel squatter. But are you well enough and strong enough? Virus-X certainly didn't help your stomach disorder. After all, health comes first."

"I was okay until I went indoors for more dough that we needed badly," Don said and shrugged. "I admit it would be tough sledging, bucking the grade against Bussman. Well, maybe I'd better forget about it and take some kind of an outdoor job with a sure pay check. I'll look around. Maybe go out to Bridgeport and see Hinkley about that cat job."

"If a man really thinks he can do something—he can," Karen said pointedly, studying her man with loving disapproval. "Rely on your own judgment. If it's burls, it's

burls. To get outdoors is right but to get on a tractor is wrong. You aren't in any shape right now to buck stumps. You better get Donny now and wash up. He's out back. I've got something you both like—beef pot pie and salt rising bread. And your milk. Come and get it."

THE next day Don Malone drove his rattly roaster north, through Buckton, New Fortune and Loma Cove, for a survey of business possibilities. Dapper Earl Ellison, proprietor of the Log House in New Fortune, expressed the same opinion as other novelty makers.

"Offer us a better deal than Bussman is handing out and we might consider you," he said cockily. "But we'd want quality burl at less than five cents a pound. We'd want a guarantee you could deliver and keep it up. I don't mind saying that Bussman slips in cracked flitches now and then. Yeah, I know you, Malone. Local boy. Okay. When you get some good stuff, come back again. I'll take a look. Like to see you make it."

Thus heartened, Don started looking for a truck. At an equipment place in Buckton he found everything he needed—if only he had enough ready money to make the fourth down payment. That meant around two thousand dollars.

That night he returned home realizing that there were a lot of things to consider in this burl business. It would take cash to start with. Careful operation after that. Sure, it looked easy, without a little arithmetic, the way Bussman laid it on, but that very ease was deceptive.

IT WAS nearly a week before Don received the first glimmer of encouragement. With Karen's reluctant approval he drove out to Bridgeport and looked up Superintendent Hinkley on the South Cutover. Hinkley had once been mill foreman at Greenbaugh Lumber. He nearly ruined Don's hand, shaking it.

"It's sure good to see you, son!" the short, husky woodsman boomed. "Got an almost new cat you'll like. Still thirty acres to be cleared."

"That's not why I came," Don said, ill at ease, sitting down on a stump. "I'll be frank with you, Tom. I came to see if you'd

care to be a partner in a burl business I have in mind. Let me tell you about it."

Hinkley listened. Don felt himself being weighed while he gave facts as he saw them.

"There's only one thing more that I'd like to know," Hinkley said finally. "It sounds like an ambitious program. Do you think you're well enough to follow through? Can you stick out days of diggin', sawin' an' truckin'?"

"Yes, I'm sure I can," Don said, "if I take it slow at first. It has been more jangled nerves than anything else. I'd hit the ball gradually. But I'd really hit it, believe me."

Hinkley belched lightly and pushed stubby fingers through rough black hair.

"I'm sure you would," he said in a fatherly tone. "By Judas! You know I once considered this very thing. That was before I went free lanchin' for plywood veneer mills that pay plenty good. Look. Let me tell you what you're up against."

Hinkley was specific. He told Don how he would need an unusually sturdy drag saw and several lengths of saws. One, at least twenty-four feet in length, would be a special order in itself. He'd require a four-wheel-drive truck to get where burl was cut—there were several kinds besides redwood—and sometimes in hard-to-reach country. And he'd need a tractor too, equipped with winch drum and bulldozer blade.

SINCE he'd have Bussman to compete with he'd have to search for the best quality and grain. He'd have to know bark and leaves by color and texture, the lay of the land, sub-irrigation, soils, seasons and temperatures, in order to find top stuff.

Just because this burl remained behind after log-off and burn-over, he pointed out, was no reason it was extra hardy, although heavy. Strange as it seemed, these big growths, like wood tumors, were easily ruined. Once they were dug they had to be sawed rapidly. Then the burl had to be loaded and shipped promptly—or else.

This "or else" business, Hinkley explained, meant that the burl, unless sold to coast novelty men—who might have too much rough stock on hand at the time—would have to be marketed to some southern

California or eastern veneer mill, which was an even better market than shops that lathed out tourists specialties.

But even with fast delivery from forest to railroad, the burl might arrive at the purchaser's mill completely worthless. Burl brought nothing if water-soaked or moldy; it was useless if dried out and cracked; no good if frozen and precious grain popped open; valueless if disfigured by blemishes or ingrown bark.

"Yes, son," Hinkley advised dryly, "you're pickin' yourself a headache by the ton if you go after burl. I admit the stuff's as beautiful as a prima donna. But it's also as temperamental as one. You hardly know what you've got until you get under the surface."

"But the novelty market uses any size chunks," Don countered.

"The novelty market is peanuts," Hinkley snorted. "Men like Ellison use scrap for lamp bases, book ends an' jewel boxes. Raise your sights a bit. It's the veneer market you'd want to go after. But there, too, you'd still be buckin' Bussman."

"As I've already told you, you'd have to try for choice burl, even long stuff called 'prime cut'. This cut includes the stump, trunk an' lowest crotch, all in one piece. From this the finest, longest veneer panels are made.

"On the brighter side, Don, there is a standing market for all the good burl that can be produced. Bussman don't begin to supply the demand, although to hear him tell it you'd be inclined to think so.

"Therefore my advice is: go home an' think it over. Sure I'd loan you a down payment. You're a lad after my own heart. I think you have the ability to handle the ball once it's rollin'. You'd do well—mighty well if all went smooth. Notice I said 'if'.

"No, I won't take your decision now. Look at all the angles. If you still think you can cut 'er after a few days consideration I'll be ready to go along with you. An' I won't demand any agreement or contract. Your word, Don, is enough for me."

A WEEK later—the last day of May—Don took Karen and Donny and drove south toward Falkville, in the newly purchased but second hand quad truck. Don

felt good, physically as well as mentally. Hinkley had written a check for twenty-five hundred, which allowed five hundred for beginning operating expenses after the two thousand down payment had been made. There was, of course, a balance of six thousand to pay off to the Loggers' Equipment Company in Buckton. But that, assuredly, wouldn't take long.

It was balmy and sunny and ideal for cruising. Don knew just the place to begin looking for redwood burl. This was familiar country, close to Sandgate and home. He knew this locality like a book.

Around three in the afternoon he parked the truck near a fence cattle guard and strode uphill to a farm house. As he knocked he wondered idly if Alf Wendell still owned the homestead.

A red-faced fleshy woman whom he didn't know came to the door. The tall, skinny man, whom she summoned, was a stranger too.

"Do you mind if I look back in your timber for redwood burl?" Don asked courteously. "My name's Malone. I'm in the burl business."

"What yah payin'?" the fellow barked.

"Cent and a half a pound where it stands. I do all the work. If I have to cut a tree, you get all the firewood."

"Bussman pays more," was the surly retort. "Bin dealin' with him fer two year."

"Would you be interested if I paid you two cents a pound?"

"Now, don't know's I would. Should a' said so in the beginnin. Won't do you no good to go lookin', either. The lot's skinned clean. Everybody round here's sold to Bussman. Shut the gate when you go out."

Back at the truck Don grinned ruefully and reported results to Karen. "Well, I broke the ice, anyway. Say, there used to be water cress under the old trestle there. Be right back."

When he returned with two dripping handfuls he found a big glittering blue sedan parked at an angle ahead of his battered green truck. A big soft-looking man, in an expensive-appearing slack outfit, was lifting a picnic hamper out of the luggage compartment. Two noisy boys spilled out and a chattering, plumpish woman followed. When the black-haired fellow turned around

Don saw that it was youngish Curt Bussman, chewing on an unlit cigar.

"Well! Well! If it isn't the Malone heir!" Bussman said heartily, the smile easy on the beefy face. "Thought I recognized the rest of the family. How you making it? Lined up much burl?"

"Who said I was after burl?" Don said cautiously.

"Oh, I get around," Bussman said in expansive sureness, fingering his shoestring mustache as he gazed up the valley. "I like to make friends. Friends are useful. Why don't you see Swartzoff, in the house here? Maybe he's got some madrone burl left over from last month."

Muscles swelled in Don's cheeks and the lines of his square jaw grew lumpy. "Much obliged," he said quietly. "Haven't seen much madrone around here."

Bussman's gray eyes grew hard when they swung back like a gunbarrel.

"Nuts—there's plenty of it," he said, voice cordially hard. "Redwood and maple too, if you know where to look. Just trying to be helpful. If you're going into the burl business I'd like to see you start right. I wouldn't want you to wind up a prime cut sucker. Well, toodle-oo."

THE advent of June seemed to bring better things—at least at first. Don told Karen that he was going to try cruising for a few days, for it was high time he began producing in one way or another. He drove south on the 101 Coast Highway to Shore Acres, where Greenbaugh Lumber had logged off considerable land along Salmon Fork.

Near this location he scouted property belonging to a Sid Zwick and found considerable sooty redwood burl down in burned-over draws and hard to get out. He was dirty with charcoal when he drove the truck farther south to Cuten Corners.

Securing permission from another landowner, he parked near a barn and hiked off across a stubbled field. He was approaching the barbed-wire fence on the west wooded end when he heard thudding hoofs behind him. One quick glance and he took out headlong. The big tawny bull nearly hooked the seat of his gabardine pants as he leaped for a high gate and scrambled over.

With a wrenched ankle he limped on into rising ground. He saw that here and there stalwart sempervirens had been cut down and burl sawed off. The huge redwoods had been left to rot. It brought up wrath within him to see these giants, hundreds of years old, sacrificed for minor warty growth around their roots. This growth, which was burl, could have been carefully cut away, leaving the tree intact. The tree in turn would have grown more burl—perhaps one in a thousand—not in his lifetime, possibly, but in somebody else's. At least these redwood giants would have been left standing for another generation of human beings to enjoy. Yes, in spite of the fact that he was trying to cut out a living in burl for himself. A lot of it could be done without waste.

As he started back for the highway he considered briefly this burl product which he was searching for. It was remarkable material. Jed Killarnay, the office boss at Greenbaugh Lumber, contended that burls were formed on a tree when roots sent up too much sap after being damaged by fire, windstorms, lightning or sawing. But it was what Hinkley had once told him that seemed to be even more reasonable.

"In my estimation burls are arrested bud growth," the former foreman had said. "A burl is actually a lacy pattern formed around 'eyes' which are the buds, usually located around the trunk base. Burls frequently sap all the strength from a tree much as a tumor does from a human being. They can sometimes be spotted because of scrubby or undersized trees. Burls are always about twice as heavy as the wood of

the tree itself an' the wavy, buckly grain is many times more attractive."

The second morning of his scouting trip Don stopped near Shively and talked with a Mr. Lacy about a pepperwood tree in his front yard, near the highway. The tree had a big burl mass at its base.

"It ain't doin' no harm where 'tis," Lacy said laconically. "Bussman's bin tryin' to git it fer two year."

"Possibly so," Don said affably. "Personally I'll give you fifty dollars. Maybe you have heard how well Bussman does at it and you want a bigger cut out of it yourself."

"Mebbe.

"Now look, Mister Lacy. Burl does bring a good price in the proper market but it takes years to build that market up. This here tree, I'd like to point out, is of little value to you. About all the good it does is to stand still while your cows scratch their hides on its bark. Maybe later you might get some firewood out of the trunk and branches after I cut it down and leave it handy for your axe. But look at that hard burl there. You can't split it. You can't burn it."

"Yeh, I admit you can't burn burl so good."

"All right. Now I won't be back this way again. Fifty dollars is reasonable, for it's easy money to you but a gamble for me. I think you'll agree it's a real gamble when I have to dig, saw, clean, truck and ship this burl and hope even then it arrives in a marketable condition. Any kind of a delay can ruin it. Well, what do you say?"

"You sure try hard, son," Lacy said, tak-



ing a pinch of snuff. "I like you, but—wal, mebbe some other time."

Considerably crestfallen, Don drove on south. A couple of hours later he was in a grove east of Dyerville. It appeared that burl had been sawed out and trimmed in the vicinity, for several trees had been cut. Near Larabee Creek, from the vantage point of a hillside, he spotted a large mass in a redwood. When he walked down to level ground, however, and attempted to locate the burl from below in thick undergrowth, he couldn't see a sign of it.

Going back to the owner's house, he asked the loan of a rifle. The farmer, Littleton by name, was suspiciously reluctant until Don explained what he wanted to do. Then the fat fellow produced a 30-30 Winchester and eagerly accompanied his young visitor.

Littleton took up a position on the flat under the trees while Don again climbed the hill. Don peppered away at the gurl that was located above the first croach of the tree. Where bark fell, Littleton moved to the spot, marking it. Don paid fifty dollars and made his first buy. It appeared agreeable on both sides.

"That's the only burl I got left," Littleton said, round face in a wide smile. "Bussman's got all the rest a'ready. He didn't want what you jest bought. When I told him 'bout it in the hotel he said it'd take too much time gittin' out. Thanks, bub."

THE following afternoon Don located small lots of maple, walnut, madrone and eucalyptus burl. He found that his knowledge of the woods was worth real money now for, in all cases, the burl was almost hidden away. Bussman, apparently, had cleaned up everything out in the open.

Don drove nearly to Santa Rosa, then turned back. He was near Healdsburg when he took a promising side road toward Monte Rio and saw the thick-bulged madrone near a garden fence. He finally located the owner and stated his business.

"Glad to meet you, Malone," said the little fellow. "My name's Tramwell. Sam Tramwell. My brother, Art here, is visiting from Australia. He knows quite a bit about burls. Let's go out to the tree."

It proved to be a bigger madrone burl

than Don had hoped to see. Apparently the knotty grain would make beautiful veneer. He used a small mattock he had brought with him and dug down below ground level. He circled and thumped at the bark, listening intently. The reverberation seemed to indicate thick grain.

"Looks like it's solid enough," Don said, straightening up, his stomach aching a little, for he had put off eating lunch. "I'd like to buy it for just the burl. Wouldn't want the wood of the tree. What'll you take?"

"Fifteen hundred dollars," said Tramwell.

Don started and stared. Yes, Tramwell was serious enough.

"Fifteen hundred dollars?" Don repeated slowly.

"Holy hemlock, Mister Tramwell! I couldn't go over a hundred bucks! You're kidding!"

"It is *you* who are kidding," said Tramwell good-naturedly. "Bussman has wanted this tree for over five years. Art here is in the veneer business in Sidney. He says this madrone is unique. Tell him why, Art."

"Glad to," said the short, untidy-looking middle-aged man.

ART TRAMWELL pushed the blue cap back on thick, salt-and-pepper hair, hitched up baggy gray tweed pants. He helped himself to a crumpled cigarette from the pocket of his green shirt. When he exhaled and edged over, his wrinkled, brown face peering up, he reminded Don of one of the dwarfs that were in the movie, "Snow White."

"All burls vary, one from another," said this little fellow in a dry, professor's voice. "This is due to specific conditions of soil, climate, growing location, rainfall, humidity, and so on. No doubt you know, Mister Malone, that no two burls are alike."

"Well, this particular madrone is one that came from Vancouver Island. Other species are found in mountainous inland country of Southern Oregon. This madrone burl, I am definitely sure, has a marvelous quilted design. Perhaps I am wrong in calling it madrone, as they do in Oregon. Here in California it is usually referred to as laurel, pepperwood or myrtle. Do you follow me?"

"Of course," Don said, saving his wind. "I have much to learn about burls."

"Burl veneer is one of my specialties," Art Tramwell went on. "My plant is known as the Coakley-Tramwell Veneer Works, Limited. I don't mean to tell you about your own business or to sound boastful. Merely getting around to show you why Sam wants his price.

"You see, right now a large pipe manufacturing concern here in the States is advertising Monterey madrone as 'Monterey briar'. Sam has been offered a thousand dollars for this tree, just to make pipe bowls out of the burl. I keep meeting any price for I want the burl for my own plant. Selfish, perhaps, but strictly business. I don't want to be favored just because I'm a brother."

"Well, that let's me out," Don said, forcing a wan smile. "This madrone, in the slang of the moment, is—'she's too fat for me'."

The rumple-looking Tramwell laughed. "I guess you know how this burl is made into veneer, don't you? As I said, or I guess Sam said, it's my business."

"I've got a general idea, of course. Smaller pieces or fitches are cut with knives. The bigger chunks are peeled like meat on a spit."

"That's right, but in Australia, as well as in European countries, it is done much thinner. Cutting knives are kept razor-sharp, of course. American veneer is cut around one-twenty-eighth of an inch thick. Down Under we cut it one-forty-eighth of an inch. For wallpaper it is even one-hundredth of an inch thin. Consequently we 'stretch' material, making it go much further, getting more veneer out of it.

"And we finish it by hand, not with machines, as they do here in America. We sell to contractors who specialize in costly veneers for mansions, banks and boat salons. We get three to four times the price that veneer makers here could ask. The prime cut will bring almost any price we care to ask, providing it is beautiful and unusual enough."

"You certainly know your stuff," Don said. "Heck, I've got to be getting along. I can see now why you're holding out." With sudden speculation in his eyes he added, "By the way, where do you buy your burl,

if I may ask? I imagine you use quite a bit of it."

"I do, Mister Malone, I do," said Tramwell pleasantly. "I buy all the better burl that Bussman can supply. Well, glad to have met you, young man. Maybe some other time we can get together."

Always some other time, Don mumbled to himself as he headed for his truck. *Bussman! Damn that Curt Bussman anyway!*

DON MALONE returned from his scouting trip with stomach pains. He had been so intent on finding burl that he had not eaten properly. But while assembling his sawing equipment and working on the cat, Karen fed him things that Doc Jorgenson had suggested—milk, quick-cooked vegetables, fruits in season and "shotgun" vitamin pills.

Five days later Don felt well enough to set out again, this time to begin cutting. This time he took along a husky young cousin of Karen's—Ev Rushing—whom he had hired. Rushing had been discharged recently from the Navy. Don liked him, for he was easy-going and not afraid of work. He told the fair-haired, tanned young fellow that if, by chance, this business prospered, he was in on a good thing.

The next few days were busy ones. They cut redwood burl on Zwick's land, near Salmon Fork, fighting heat, mosquitoes and sooty charcoal. Then they worked on small quantities of eucalyptus and maple burl south of Weott.

As they bathed one night in cool waters of the nearby Eel River, young Rushing was especially enthusiastic. "Jiggers, Don!" he exclaimed, "I'll take sweet water instead of salt any time! Say! This's the life!"

Don was inclined to agree. By day he was perspiring in the sun and watching his diet more carefully. By night he rested in a sleeping bag beside Rushing, under the stars, and kept winged pests at a distance with a smudge fire.

Proceeding with the task in hand they cleaned moss, stones and earthy debris from sawed burl chunks, then trucked the heavy material north to New Fortune. Ellison, at his Log House curio shop, was the kind that haggled. He offered only three cents per pound. Don was disappointed, for he had heard that Bussman received six cents. How-

ever, he accepted the sale, not caring to argue. He was paying expenses and making a little profit, which was something.

"This big chunk of redwood should turn out a nice bowl," Ellison said, before Don left the shop. "A political committee in Oakland wants one to present to the new governor."

After getting a few supplies in Sandgate and several dishes that Karen had prepared, Don and his helper returned south. This time they tackled the redwood burl that Don had bought from farmer Littleton.

A light rain set in when they began clearing away underbrush and Himalya vines. Don wanted to dig down and use a low saw, low on the thick base. Shortly they were slogging in a heavy downpour. Twice they slipped in mud and muck, shifting drag saw position. Don throttled the gasoline motor, under a stretched tarp, to a slow, steady pull. Wedges had to be moved in deeper, in order to give the extra long blade free play.

"Take it easy," Don warned finally. "This burl up above the crotch makes it extra top heavy. The trunk will fall almost due west but the base may jump and skid back. Get from behind plenty fast when—hey—look out . . . TIMBER!"

Don leaped and knocked Rushing flat in the mud. There was a crackling roar and mighty swoosh. The butt whistled backward. Branches raked their backs. The ground shook with giant impact. Chips and sawdust jumped on the naked, reddish stump.

"Whew!" Don exclaimed, forcing a laugh as he got to his feet. He scraped mud off his scratched face and out of his brown hair. He felt gingerly of his left arm. "You can truthfully say you nearly lost your shirt in sawing burl."

"That's nothing," Rushing said, grinning.

"Do all the big ones kick like that?" It clawed your skin a little."

"Just a scratch," said Don, hunching bulky shoulders, squinting in the rain at the fallen tree. "Looks like we've got a prime cut here. We'll saw above the crotch, then use the winch and boost it on the truck. This is too valuable to cut into blocks for Ellison. I'm going to try for a veneer mar-

ket this time. Say, remind me to get some rain togs."

IT WAS a real job for two men. Don saw that he really needed a crew, at least two more huskies. Rushing could operate the cat. Possibly he could cut in two locations at the same time. It was quantity that would make the venture worth the effort. Peddling chunks at three cents a pound to a picky curio dealer was, as Hinkley had said, a matter of peanuts.

The next day they hauled through heavy rain into Sandgate. Don phoned the Thomson Veneer Company in Burbank and received a come-on invitation. They could use the prime cut all right, also any walnut and maple burl that he could include in the shipment. At six cents a pound.

Elated, Don loaded aboard a car on a Sandgate spur. In the next three days he sawed and hauled more burl from Zwick's acreage. The rain abated for a few hours, then started in again. It continued until the end of the week, when Don had finally loaded nearly a carload of valuable burl. He saw it started south, late one afternoon, in an odds-and-ends lumber train.

That night Don bundled into a blanket, feet in a tub of hot water. "Holy hemlock!" he exclaimed thickly to attentive Karen. "Our first carload gone to a real veneer outfit! Worth at least two thousand! We're on our way!"

It was hard to keep from phoning the depot office, to keep track of the freight train on its way south. News dispatches in the *Evening Bulletin* told of the unusual Pacific storm and gave cause to Don for worry. Twice foothill washes delayed coastal trains.

Later, during the temporary layoff and in better weather, Don's cold improved. He drove north, up the coast toward Crescent City, cruising. As he came back through New Fortune, the slim, dudish proprietor of the Log House hailed him. He was anything but cordial.

"What's the big idea of selling me brittle redwood like you did?" Ellison complained loudly. "Come around into the shop."

Back beyond woodworking machinery the curio dealer stopped beside a long, rugged table. On it rested a big bowl. It

was beautiful reddish burl, superbly machined and finished with velvet-rubbed varnish.

"What's the matter with that?" Don asked. "It looks okay to—"

"Turn it over," Ellison urged, ominously calm.

Don did so. He stopped breathing for a moment when he saw the long ragged crack. It extended from near the rim to beyond the bottom center.

"How could this happen?" he gasped. "That was good burl, cut fresh and hauled to you right away!"

"That's it! That's it exactly!" Ellison shrieked. "It was green—as green as you are! A five hundred dollar bowl completely ruined! My prospects in the Party ruined too! I demand my money back, or else! Oh—get out! Get out and never come back!"

It took the starch out of Don. He was numb, his stomach gnawing painfully, by the time he got home. Very likely he would have to pay back money that now he didn't have.

Days dragged into a week, into ten days. It was all screwy. Surely the storm hadn't disrupted all coastwise rail shipments. Phone calls to the Thomson veneer outfit got nowhere. No burl had arrived.

Don worried and stewed. He kept the unwelcome news about the Ellison deal from Karen, something he seldom did, for they had no secrets from each other. He could see that she was already as deeply concerned as he about their snail-like railroad deal with Burbank.

On a Monday morning Don's exasperation was under thin control. Finally he snatched up the newly installed telephone.

"Long distance!" he shouted just as the front door bell rang.

"It's a telegram for you!" Karen cried happily.

Don dropped the receiver, eagerly tore at the envelope. His eyes raced through the message, then sharply re-read it again. Finally he raised a stricken look to Karen's eager gaze.

"Good lord!" he said weakly, and sank into a chair.

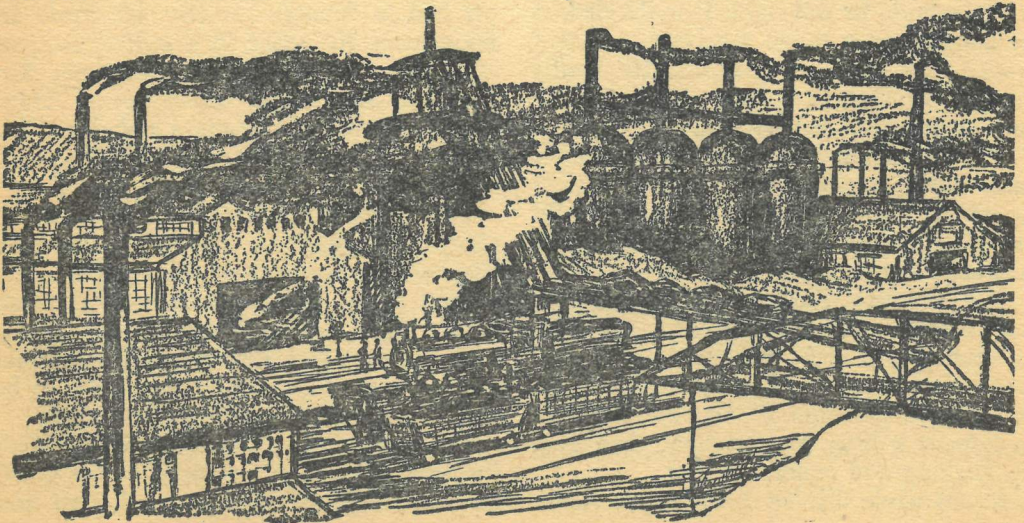
Karen took the crumpled paper and read in trembly, subdued tones:

KINDLY WIRE HUNDRED DOLLARS TO COVER UNLOADING CHARGES. ARRIVED SPLIT WATER SOAKED MOLDY. USELESS FOR VENEER. NOT INTERESTED IN FURTHER SHIPMENTS

THOMSON VENEER

Don plunged into more work to try and take his mind off failure. He was half-tempted to call it a day and quit cold. Then he thought of loyal little Karen, of Junior, of his debt to trusting friend Hinkley. No, that would be a coward's, a traitor's way out.

Before he started north, to go farther up the coast, hopeful that a new spot of activity would be more fortunate, he wired a freight inspector to double check on Thomson Veneer's report. It proved to be only too true. He wired the money. An-



other hundred went on refund account to Ellison.

Don didn't reveal to Karen that supplies, gasoline for the ravenous drag saw and burl deposits to land owners had taken nearly all ready cash. Ev Rushing tried to help by letting his salary ride. He took a temporary job at a chain grocery until Don spotted enough burl to make another "sawing circle," as the youngster humorously put it.

The following week was one of the toughest Don Malone had ever spent. His stomach had improved somewhat. It didn't bother him as much as did the hot, muggy weather following the rain. When he used climbing irons to locate high-growing burl, insects swarmed out of disturbed foliage and settled on blistered skin. Once he shouldered into a wasps' nest and paid the penalty.

All the way up to Crescent City and beyond, close to Fort Dick, he kept meeting the same answers from farmers, homesteaders and loggers: "Sorry, son. Sold out to Bussman."

Growing tired of this exasperating competition, he cut inland toward Patrick's Creek on Highway 199. He half hoped that in rougher country he would have better pickings, that the comfortably operating Bussman would prefer the coast. It meant tougher, longer and more expensive hauling. And if there was economy of operation to be had, Don felt Bussman would be all for it, for it would naturally mean more profit.

Apparently he was right, Don decided, as he bumped up a rough northerly road that wound into Siskiyou foothills. He finally stopped in Oregon's Curry County, close to a settlement called Dasher.

It was here, behind a small ramshackle cafe, that he found the redwood burl, high up on a big trunk, that he estimated would cut close to ten tons. It was the biggest he'd seen in a long while.

His discovery seemed to be the forerunner of better things. In the next few days he spotted and made arrangements to purchase enough assorted burl to more than fill two railroad gondolas. It was now necessary to borrow a little more money, then pick up Rushing and another helper.

It was while driving down to see Hink-

ley for an additional loan that Don had an inspiration. He wondered why he hadn't thought of it before. He drove to the Tramwell place to make sure the Australian, Arthur Coakley-Tramwell, wasn't there. Sam, his friendly brother, assured Don that Art had flown back to Sidney the day following their conversation.

In Healdsburg Don sent the cable.

It was when he stopped in Crescent City, after putting Rushing and another lad, by the name of Durant, to work, that he received Tramwell's answer. The message read:

ALWAYS INTERESTED QUALITY GRAN
OFFER FIFTEEN CENTS POUND BURL
ANY QUANTITY ARRIVING FINE CONDI-
TION

TRAMWELL

THINGS seemed to be shaping up. It was the best price he'd ever heard of. He could see plainly enough that if his shipment went through he really had a bonanza. From what little he had seen of the Australian he felt confident that Tramwell wouldn't try to chisel.

And from Hinkly he received a five hundred dollar check which would tide over nicely. The stocky woodsman, however, reluctantly revealed the fact that he couldn't furnish any more funds. He was contracting for more veneer logs, had to use what ready money he had for his own operations.

Don set to in earnest now, for he simply had to connect—or else. He made arrangements for space in a lumber freighter's hold and a shipping date from San Francisco some four weeks hence. There would be wharfage, loading and unloading costs. Yes, and insurance, for the Thomson Veneer deal had taught him a lesson.

He saw to it that railroad cars would be ready at Sandgate, at the end of the spur line coming north from the Golden Gate, around thirty days from then. With these details taken care of it meant only cutting and trucking, but that was plenty. Train and boat schedules would now have to be met, regardless of crew and weather.

Feverishly he started field work. With Rushing and Durant, stripped to the waist, they cut redwood burl along Rough and

Ready Creek, from dawn to dusk. They produced chunks of maple burl from open draws in a heavy conifer forest. Dry creeks, once peopled by hardy prospectors, yielded stunted walnut from their banks.

They were busily at work near Baldface Mountain one afternoon when a big young fellow rode up on a small pinto. He tumbled rather than got off and walked over rather unsteadily.

"Howdy, boys," he said in a friendly nasal voice as he shoved back a sweat-stained poplin hat. "Came 'cross the ridge an' headin'—hic—for Grants Pass. How 'bout a li'l drink with me? My name's Farnsworth." He produced a bottle and pulled the cork as he sidled closer.

"No thanks," said Don, scrubbing his scarlet face. "Spring water is better for us right now."

"Okay—okay. No offense, Malone," said the lantern-jowed newcomer. "Jest bein' sociable. I'll mosey along onless mebbe you kin use some extry help."

"How come you know my name?"

"Oh, I listen even if I'm half-drunk most a' the time. Heard you inquire in Crescent 'bout burl. Once I see a guy I don't fergit 'im, specially with yore hefty build."

He seemed straightforward enough, Don figured, and rather likeable, except for the alcoholiz fizz. He could use another hand right now. Holy hemlock! He could use half a dozen!

"Hobble your horse and peel the shirt, then," Don said, grinning. "Dollar an hour and victuals, though I'm not much of a cook. Job's good until we finish hauling all cut stuff to Sandgate."

"Us'ta be a cook," said Farnsworth, "besides diggin', sawyerin' an' gen'ral labor. Count me in."

The new man—about Don's age—twenty-six—proved to be a good worker. Sawing went on apace in August heat.

Farnsworth took over the cooking. Meals improved. Don didn't mind his hitting the bottle now and then as long as he left Rushing and Durant alone. After the job was finished they could go on a bender if they chose. But not now.

It was the third night, after work, when Farnsworth returned from a ride into Dasher. He was singing in a high falsetto when he came into camp. Don rolled over

in his sleeping bag and saw the stocky, weaving figure in the moonlight.

"Quiet down, chum," Don warned, sitting up. "Let the lads sleep. This is the only cool part of the day. They're tired."

"So'm I, pal, so'm I . . . S-s-s-sh!" Farnsworth approached on tiptoe. "Glad yore 'wake, Malone. Thish's good fer secrets."

"What's the idea, secrets?"

"You gave me a job," Farnsworth said in a low raspy voice. "You pay me ever' day, like I want. Nothin' fairer. Yore a good Joe, Malone. Nuthin' like that Bussman."

Don pricked up his ears. "You know Bussman then."

"Know 'im!" Farnsworth snorted and belched. "The chiselin', lilac-stinkin' polecat. Had me 'rested in Trinidad fer quitin' as caretaker a' his warehouse. He never once paid me all my wages. Said I stole a spar tire a his'n I never saw."

"Quite a character," Don said. "He dominates the burl supply."

"He's goin' to dom'nate *you* too, Malone, if you don't watch out. He'll never share no business with nobody. Yore askin' fer trouble right now, tryin to hurry this stuff yore workin' on."

"Come sit down on the rock here and tell me about it," Don urged. "If you keep walking around you'll step on somebody's face."

Farnsworth obliged. He appeared glad to unburden grivances. Bussman, he said, knew Don was up in the mountains getting burl for San Francisco delivery. He had found out somehow. After all burl was hauled out of the woods, Bussman was going to see to it personally that the shipment never reached Sausalito for ship loading.

"An'," Farnsworth went on, "if you give me a week's wages in advance, I'll tell you somethin' important. Why that shipment to Burbank was refused."

"Very well," Don said quietly, icily calm. "It's a deal. Spill."

"Bussman agin," the young alcoholic said, gesturing toward the south. "Bussman had yore car shunted onto a sidin' at Fir Point fer a whole week, to stand out in the rain. Then it was shoved into a nearby lumber dryin' shed in a lot a' heat. An in-law a' his'n by the name of Slawson owns the place. I heard 'em talkin' in a bar. The burl jest natcherly split all over."

"Thanks," said Don. "Thanks a million. I only hope this isn't a figment of your imagination."

"An' if it is?"

"I happen to know Bussman. It all sounds very possible." Don's voice held good-natured indifference yet it was very near contempt. "But if you're giving me a cock and bull story, I warn you. After I get through with Bussman I'll look you up, wherever you are. So help me I'll see that you're never able to wag your tongue in the same way again."

Farnsworth's chest thickened. He sat up, jaw thrust forward. Finally he eased back.

"Yeh, Malone, guess you would," he said tightly and belched again. "Yore diff'rent than Bussman. Yore steady, an' at times—what's the word?—intense. Jest write me down as meanin' well. I'm no 'count but I like justice done. Heck, I'm drinkin' too much, thinkin' too much an' talkin' too much. I'll stunt my future shore. See you in the mornin'."

WORK in mountain heat went on. There was a spell when Don was again bothered with his stomach. One night Farnsworth noticed his employer's symptoms of discomfort.

"Stomach, hey?" he said, taking a nip from his bottle. "You should try some a' this here rye. But since you don't I'll git some garlic when I go into town. Garlic's a great thing."

Evidently it was. Don had very little stomach trouble after he used it liberally with his victuals.

Finally sawing was completed. The four-some began loading and hauling into Sandgate. It was on one of these trips that they stopped at Crescent City for lunch. They were coming out of the cafe when Farnsworth, who was fairly sober and in the lead, bumped into a big bruiser who was lumbering past with Curt Bussman.

"All right, dope," growled the fellow with open intolerance. "Watch yer clumsy feet or I'll—"

"Well, well, if it isn't the busy bees," Bussman said with suave assurance, grabbing his companion's arm. "Easy, Goff. Hope your drunken staff, Malone, gets you safely loaded."

"Why you dirty—"

Farnsworth lunged and swung at Bussman. Bussman's mobster intercepted. He grabbed Farnsworth's arm and started twisting. Don leaped and grabbed Goff's near arm. He did a similar but quicker and more efficient job.

"That's enough of that," Bussman said, intense dislike glinting in his smoky eyes. "Come, Goff. There's always a time and place to deal with every prime cut sucker. Don't make a scene."

Don pushed Farnsworth on down the walk. He didn't want any scene either, for it meant delay right now. But he wasn't agreeing with Bussman, damn him! Irritation fought for release in its shallow bed. Gusty, ripping words rode his tongue but he fought them down.

"That's right," he said through compressed lips. "There's a time and place for everything. Be ready when it comes."

After that Don half expected trouble in the hills, but none developed. His watchfulness on the highway likewise was in vain. They hauled and loaded, with sunny weather favoring them for a change. The day came when all cumbersome burl chunks were safely aboard railroad cars with plenty of time to spare.

Don paid off Durant and Farnsworth but kept Rushing to accompany him on the trip south. He intended to see the burl safely in a ship's hold before relaxing one iota of vigilance.

"Let me come along fer the ride," Farnsworth pleaded. "If there's any excitement I got a score to settle with Bussman, in case he shows. An' if I know the lugger, he'll damn well show."

"Okay, if you insist," Don said, grinning. "And you can come along too, Durant, if you want. I've got to watch finances though, so I can't pay you two just for this guard duty junket. Later on I'll make it up to you if things work out."

"Great!" Durant agreed with coltish vitality. "I'll bring along some axe handles. I learned a new wrinkle in the Pacific."

Don and his companions took their sleeping bags and made themselves as comfortable as possible in one of the loaded gondolas. Each had an axe handle handy, just in case. Farnsworth asked to bring along an old Russian .44 that he owned but Don would have none of it. He might be pio-

neering in his own way but he wasn't packing guns.

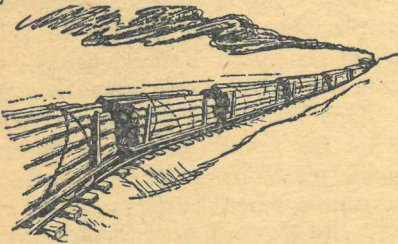
Shortly the freight train got under way. It rattled slowly southward through Scotia and Willits, on toward Hopland and Santa Rosa. Only one of Don's crew left the train at a time to get lunches or secure a thermos of water or coffee, sometimes cigarettes. He was gradually getting closer to his objectives without interference. It was too good to be true.

They pulled on past the Sebastopol depot late one starlit night and stopped near a siding. While the engine took on water near a flickering arc light, Farnsworth hopped off "for a coke." Don knew what that meant. The young boomer hadn't had much liquor on the trip down. He seemed to be improving.

THERE was a good half-hour wait and a little commotion up near the engine, some four freight cars ahead. Then things quieted down until two men crunched gravel beside the train as they tapped boxes on wheel trucks. One of them stopped and lit a cigarette. In the flare Don saw that they wore overalls, railroad caps and kerchiefs around their necks.

"When do we start rolling?" Don asked.

"Soon's we finish checkin' fer hot boxes," one of the fellows growled. "You in a hurry?"



Don made no reply for the voice sounded vaguely familiar. Then recognition snapped into place. The guy was Goff, Bussman's Crescent City companion!

He was reaching for his axe handle when he heard Bussman's smooth voice behind him, on the other side of the car.

"All right, Malone! Raise your dukes and get down! I've got a forty-five Colt here. Okay, boys. You know what to do. Cut the freights front and behind the burl cars. We're parking them for a little needed seasoning. As Malone said, there's a time and place."

As Don climbed down weeks of pent up anger swelled into fury and burst its bonds. In dim light he stepped slowly toward Bussman, then lunged in spite of the gun. Rushing got in the way. Bussman's automatic roared. Rushing grunted, whirled and went down. Two men beside Bussman came in flailing with flashing metal. Don leaped sidewise, stumbled and fell flat.

He bounded up in a blind red rage. Young Durant was beside him then, using his length of hickory in the manner of upward backhand chops. He ducked as the gun again spat orange flame. Copying Durant's tactics, Don brought up a whistling undercut to Bussman's forearm. The pistol went skittering.

Then it seemed a whirling free-for-all. Something whammed Don's back, bringing pain and tears, taking the breath out of him. His wooden weapon thudded on flesh, producing yowls of pain. There was an explosion of stars against his head and he went down again. When he struggled to his feet Bussman was spraddle-legged a few feet away.

"Get over in the rocky ditch, damn you!" the disheveled broker ordered harshly, breathing heavily. "You'll never get in my way again. Make one move and I'll use this Mauser. You didn't think I had only one gun, did you?"

"Drop that gat or I'll drop you," ordered Farnsworth's nasal voice from the rocks behind Bussman. "Once a skunk, always a skunk. I got scores to settle. Now—"

Bussman whirled. Don saw his chance and leaped. Durant was right behind him, charging what looked like Goff. Don crashed against Bussman as two heavy reports reverberated in the rocky wash above his ears.

Then he was using burl-hardened fists that had long sought this opportunity. He slammed reckless blows to Bussman's luxury-soft body, took vicious punishment in return. He ducked Bussman's gun as it exploded close, almost in his face. A quick chop to the wrist and it sailed away. Then he realized in blurred fashion that Bussman's men were off to one side, with Farnsworth in control.

He really tore in then. He worked Bussman over from face to midriff and back again. His fists grew numb with fierce

abandon but jetting pain jolted his arms. Finally he wiped blood out of his eyes, spat warm, salty liquid. He stepped back, chest heaving. Bussman staggered, put out a groping arm, then fell on his pulpified face.

"I'm wathin' these jackals, Malone," Farnsworth said from near the ground. "See now why I wanted my ol' Roosian forty-four along? Sorry to disobey orders. Say, Durant's damned clever with a shillelagh! I'm plugged in the side but it's only leadin' alky. Sheer waste, sez I. An' geez, man! Have yah done a job on Bussman! Am I glad I di'n't jump yah the night I was tellin' secrets!"

WHILE awaiting to hear from his Australian customer Don tried to cruise for more burl. It was a half-hearted attempt, however. If the cable brought bad news he was through. If the burl arrived safely, without drying out, deep in the freighter's hold, or didn't get soggy and moldy from moisture while passing through the tropics, he was in the money. It was the suspense that was the worst.

Personally he wasn't so bad off. A creased forehead, maybe a few pounds lighter. Rushing would be okay after a while, luckily having stopped the slug in the fleshy part of a shoulder. Farnsworth had a punctured intestine but the attending medic felt he was too tough to worry about.

As for Bussman, he wouldn't be bothered with him again for some time. He was recovering in Sebastopol's handy jail. Farnsworth's big bullet had nearly ruined an ear. Sheriff Whitmore was gladly detaining Bussman for judicial action for several reasons: carrying a concealed weapon without a license; masquerading as a railroad employee; piracy on the high iron; interfering with international enterprise. He had a few more dollar words joted down in a thumb-worn notebook, just in case they were needed.

It was nearly four weeks later when Don heard from Arthur Coakley-Tramwell in Sidney. He was almost broke when he went home, late one afternoon, and Karen ran out on the front walk to meet him.

"It's a cable from Australia!" she exclaimed, beaming. "I—I just had to read it!

I couldn't wait! It—it's wonderful! Here! Let me read it to you!"

Don couldn't wait either. They read the words out loud together:

"BURL ARRIVED SATISFACTORY EXCELLENT GRAIN FIFTEEN CENTS POUND LETTER CREDIT FOLLOWS CUT SAMS MADRONE BURL DEPEND ON YOU LETTER FOLLOWS TRAMWELL"

"Now you see, Don, Karen whispered with repressed excitement, "why I said you should rely on your own judgment? I knew you could do it!

The letter that arrived some time later proved equally interesting:

Sidney
4 Sept.

Dear Mr. Malone:

I have waited a little before writing since I wanted to report the culmination of a sale that strikes me as rather unusual.

Mrs. Malone wrote about your difficulties in shipping, possibly without your knowledge, for apparently she appreciated the fact that you were not the kind to complain. She explained how your shipment to the Thomson Veneer plant in Burbank arrived ruined, how you had a complete loss—and the reason.

Last week I shipped redwood and maple burl veneer panels to this very plant, Thomson Veneer, using considerable raw material purchased from you.

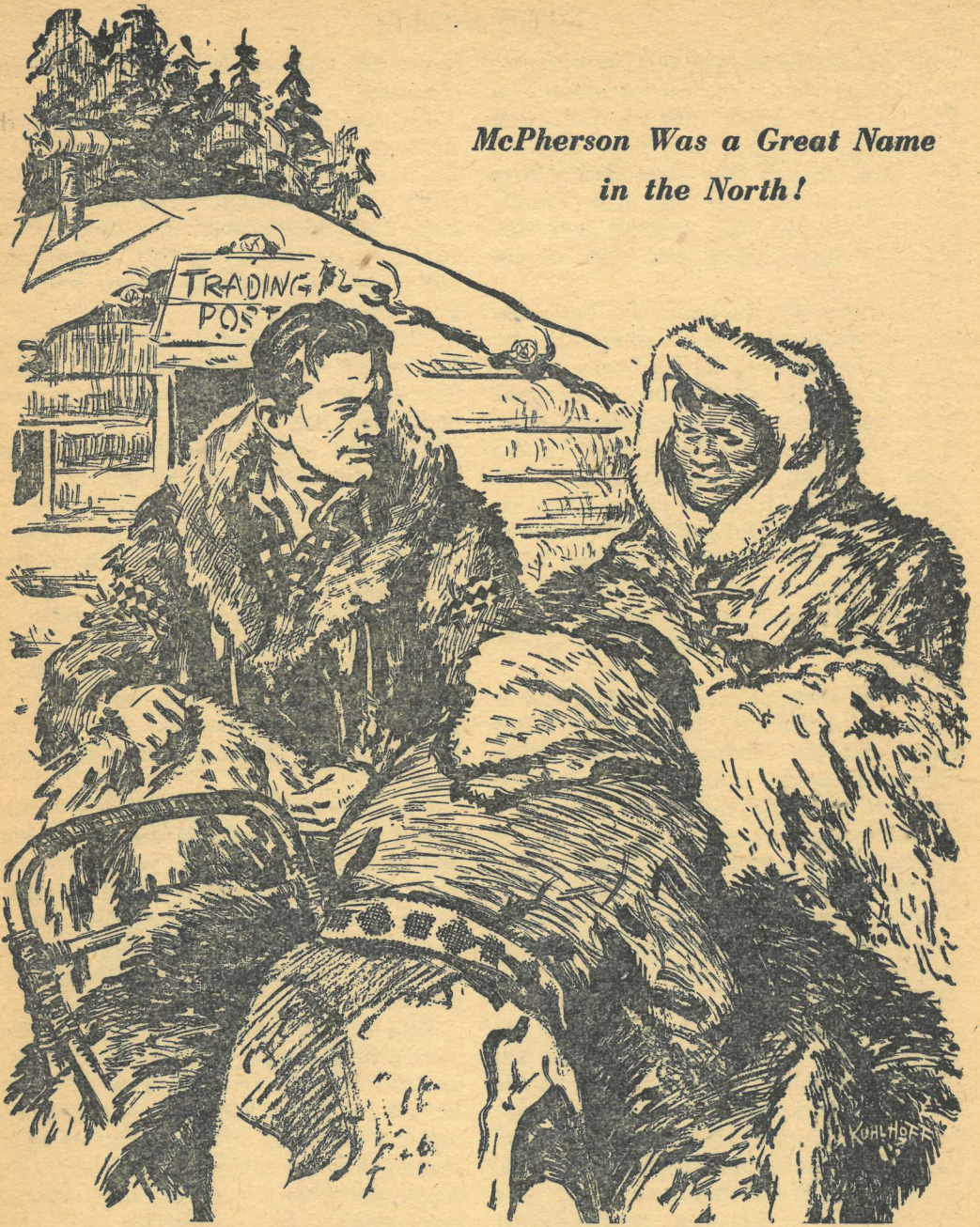
This Thomson paid me over ten times what he would have paid to you and made his own veneer. We hand finish, of course, where he uses machine sanders. We also try for a finer quality product.

Aside from this I might assume that Thomson had a special order for costly inlay work. Possibly—and this is the main reason for my letter—*Thomson may be intrigued with the glamor of a foreign market.* Who am I to say?

At least let us keep this little matter to ourselves. From now on please consider me first, for I deal with you exclusively. You seem to have instinctive feel for quality burl. Much success—and all the usual rot. Please keep in touch.

Art Tramwell

*McPherson Was a Great Name
in the North!*



IN THE BLOOD

By H. S. M. KEMP

THE McPhersons of Medicine River were legion. There were Joes and Dougs and Henrys; Petes and Jacks and Bobs. And when they began to overlap so that nobody knew one from the other, the names took a Biblical turn. Thus, there appeared a Matthew McPherson, a Jacob McPherson, with the ultimate being reached in the arrival of Zebedee McPherson.

Of course, the Biblical ones were reared in moss-bags and were carried around on their mothers' backs. They cut their teeth on hunting knives and their staple diet was fish. And though they were darker than the rest of the clan and, later, had difficulty with their English, they were all descended from old Angus McPherson, late of the Orkney Isles.

Old Angus was the typical Hudson's Bay man of an earlier day. God-fearing and upright, he believed in the honor of the given word, the wholesomeness of good Scotch whiskey, and the omnipotence of the H. B. C. Soon after his arrival on the upper Churchill, he married one of the dusky princesses, followed the scriptural injunction to be fruitful and multiply; and so good a job did he make of it that when he was laid to rest about the time of the Boer War, his sons and his grandsons and great-grandsons could have captured Mafeking alone.

Some of them did see Mafeking; and in the wars that followed, others visited Vimy Ridge and the Normandy Beach. They were a strapping, sturdy race; and while some of the family, those with a fondness for Biblical names, gravitated towards the trapline and the teepee, those around the settlement bred back towards old Angus. So some of them remained dark, but handsomely dark, while others like Doug McPherson and young Pete were almost red-headed.

Another McPherson, however, saw no virtue in this. Young John McPherson was of a different line of descent. His people had their background in Ontario; they were solid Empire Loyalist stock. Down there, McPhersons married McDonalds, and the Wallaces the Burns. And when, as a callow youth of nineteen, this particular McPherson found himself apprenticed to the H. B. C. at Medicine River and met the northern branch of the family, he was somewhat less than enthusiastic about it. In fact, when one of the other clerks introduced him to Henry McPherson and suggested that they were cousins, first-or second-generation removed, the McPherson from Ontario became really sore. He scowled at his kinsman, saw only the high cheekbones, the sloe eyes and the well-worn moccasins, and decided, then and

there, that the situation would have to be corrected.

His first move was to change his name. At least, he gave it a different twist. A down-to-the-heather, Scottish twist. Glowering scornfully at the clerk, he said, "My name ain't 'McPhurson'. It's 'McPhairson'. And there's a burr to the 'R'." He rolled it out, haughtily. "McPhair-r-son. John McPhair-r-son—like that!"

The clerk shrugged. "Anything you say. McPhurson or McPhairson." He added, "But the McPhursons around here are good enough for me."

That was only the beginning of it, but young John McPherson ran into his peeve at every turn of the trail. Newcomers asked him which particular family he belonged to—old Joe's, or Big Jack's? Sandy-haired as he was, others figured he was a relation of Red Doug's. Painstakingly, stiffly, he told them he belonged down in Ontario; that he came of the pure Scottish stock. Like the Pharisee of old, he found inward spiritual satisfaction. He was not like other men. There was no Indian blood in him.

Quite the snob, young John McPherson; but he had other qualities. He was diligent, and he was honest, and he was bullheaded. He could have got out of it all by asking to be transferred to another post. But he preferred to stay, to see it through, to show these lesser mortals how a true McPherson prospered.

And he did prosper. So much so that after a few years he quit the Company and started trading on his own. Few liked him; he was too tough, too dour, too domineering; but they dealt with him because of his honesty and his straightforwardness. You might not love a guy, but fifty cents on every muskrat or another two bucks on a mink were matters for consideration.

Ten years later and with the post going well, John McPherson decided to get married. He took six months off, went south and east and teamed-up with a girl of his early youth. Unlike that other McPherson—old Angus from the Orkney Isles—John McPherson gave no sign of being a family man. In fact, he'd been married five years before he started with a family at all. And the start was the finish. He had one son, young John. And young John,

he let it be known, would carry on the pure strain and the sullied blood of the real McPhersons.

BUT one thing the youngster didn't carry on was the name of John. Everyone in the settlement, every Indian and halfbreed on the trapline knew him as Jack. The old man winced. There were too many Jack McPhersons around the place already. Too late now, he wished he'd called him Stuart, or Gavin, or Lachlan; but he swore that once the kid was big enough, he'd ship him out to civilization and see that he grew up the way a white man should.

In the meantime, young Jack lived the life of any youngster in the North. He roamed with the Indian kids, learned how to handle a bow and arrow and kill chickadees, and discovered that bannock and fish in a teepee tasted so much better than anything that his mother provided at home. He talked Cree like a native and squalled loudly when the old man told him the honeymoon was over and that come Fall he'd be going out to school.

But to school he went; and although his advancement was as good as the average, he proclaimed that it was all a waste of time as he intended spending his mature years in the North Country.

The old man said he'd see about that; but in the meantime, the war intervened. The kid was eighteen then; and one day his folks received word that he was in the Air Force. Luck was with him; for he got a commission, earned a name as a good fighter-pilot, and four years later found himself back again at Medicine River.

Old John, once the reunion was decently attended to, had the kid in his office for a man-sized powwow. What were his plans for the future?

Well, young Jack didn't know yet. He hadn't got around to thinking much about 'em. He'd sort of hoped that Dad and he would be in the fur business and all its issues together.

Old John, grizzled now and a bit too heavy around the shoulders, put a damper on the idea. Trading, and the northern life, wasn't for a feller with any brains. Man might make money, a bit of money, but the market could go haywire any time and then he'd be broke. It was a mug's

game, a headache; and what was in it, anyway?

"What I figured," old John went on, "is that a boy like you, smart and wideawake, should get into one of the professions. The legal profession, mebber; or go in for a doctor."

Young Jack said, "No thanks, Dad. That stuff doesn't appeal to me."

"Well, how about engineering?"

"No, nor engineering." A frown crossed Jack's face. "You don't seem to understand, Dad. Look—I went out to school on your orders, and I stuck it to please you. I went into the Air Force and took lots of orders from the Heavy Brass to please them. But now I'm free of all that, I figure it's time I started pleasing myself for a change."

Old John frowned. "Well—I'm only thinking about your future."

"I know, Dad; and I appreciate it. But don't let's start worrying about it yet. Good lord, I've only just got home!"

But the old man continued to worry about it. And to talk about it. The boy's mother, too, in a gentler manner, put on the pressure. He had brains, hadn't he? And a good education? Surely he wouldn't want to bury himself in the North when all the world was open to him? Young Jack shrugged; and just about the time he was getting fed-up on it all, old Cockeye McDonald happened along.

Now Cockeye McDonald, that acid-tongued, big-hearted little runt of a prospector who'd made more than his pile out of the North, sat in the McPherson house and listened to all the arguments. He'd known old John McPherson for many a year; and liking him, needing that tough hide of his and finding a man beneath it, he stayed at the McPherson post any time he was in that part of the country.

He was in the country now, on intriguing business. He'd got wind of something good in the mineral line a few miles down the river and he wanted to look into it. He might stake, he might buy; he'd certainly make a dollar or two out of it for himself.

Sitting in one of old John's big chairs and listening to Jack's arguments in favor of the North, he nodded slowly in agreement. Nodded, that is, till old John caught his eye.

"Come to think of it, Cockeye," old John broke in, "I got something I want to show you down at the store." He stood up. "Let's go."

THEY went out together, to the store, where old John waved Cockeye to a seat on the steps outside.

"What I got to show you ain't nothing you can handle," old John began. "I want to show you what I'm up against with the kid."

Cockeye gave a grunt and began to fill his pipe.

"It's this—" old John continued. "This craze of the kid's to stay in the North." He launched into the matter by comparing the lack of opportunities in the North Country with the wide-open futures in town.

"Oh, I know all the old guff," he went on. "Minerals, the fur-trade, hydro-development. Tell me," he demanded of Cockeye, "how many guys make a clean-up here? How many come out with the price of next year's grubstake? For every one that does make a clean-up, ninety more go in the hole."

Cockeye nodded; they talked on. Cockeye finally said, "But you can't blame the kid, John. You're his father, and the love of the North is in his blood. He was raised in this country; it's home to him." Cockeye waved a hand towards the river—to the sun going down behind the spruce; an Indian paddling out to his net. To a pair of loons, whistling-winged and screaming, as they passed. "Born in him. Right in his blood."

Old John grunted. "I know it's in his blood. But he's got to work it out. And I don't want you, Cockeye, to mess with him. What I mean, I know you. Put you in civilization for more than a couple of days, and you ain't fit to live with. Well, that's all right. You're an old rockrat that don't know no better. And you've been lucky. But a youngster like that, with all his life ahead of him— Well, Cockeye, if you can't discourage him, don't go backing him up in his fool ideas."

Cockeye agreed, slowly. "Yeah, well— That's okay. Mebbe we'd better let the kid work 'em out for himself."

And the kid did work them out. That is, if he hadn't had them worked out

all the time. For at breakfast a couple of weeks later, he asked his dad when he could report for duty.

Old John frowned. "For duty? What kind of duty?"

"You know," grinned Jack. "I've loafed long enough and I'm rarin' to go!"

Old John gave a grunt. "You're crazy, that's what I think. A feller with your brains and education—"

"Never mind that old line," Jack went back at him. "Brains and education come in just as handy in the fur-trade as anywhere else. So when do I use 'em?"

Old John began to hedge. "Things ain't like they used to be. And the way the business is now—"

"That's all right then, Dad. I don't want to crowd you. If there's not enough for two in the business, I'll strike out on my own."

With a blink, old John straightened. "What's 'at? On your own? You mean, trading on your own?"

"Why not? I've got a bit of money put away, and I've still got my reestablishment credit. And what I'm short in stock I can darn soon get on terms from the wholesale houses."

THE old man stared. He hooted at the idea and tried to pass it off with a laugh. But young Jack wasn't laughing. He was deadly in earnest. And after a steady look into the set face of the youngster, he suddenly seemed to realize that he had dynamite on his hands.

"Okay, okay!" he said. "No need to spoil your breakfast over it. All I want is to be sure you know your own mind." He stared at his son again, as though seeing him in a new light, and then advanced a cautious proposal.

"You say you want to report for duty. Well, looks like it's out of my hands. But if reporting for duty means I got to hand you over a chunk of the business, that's something else. I may be your old man, but I got a right to know what I'm getting for my money."

"In other words—?"

"That you'll start in on a salary basis. That way, if you get fed up with it and want out, no harm's done. But if at the end of the year I can see you're going to

stick, we'll figure out some sort of a partnership then."

Jack was agreeable. "Fair enough. Pay me what you think I'm worth."

So for the rest of the summer and well into the fall, Jack toiled in the store, the office and the warehouse. Old John, always the businessman, told Cockeye confidentially that the youngster was worth double the money he paid him, but that he had to learn things the hard way.

"He should know 'em," old John pointed out, "being raised right here. But school, the Air Force and one thing and another kept him away from 'em too long. Still, he hasn't forgotten his Cree, and he gets along well with the natives."

"Don't worry about him," counselled Cockeye. "He's got the business at heart. Moreover, when you want to retire, or the time comes for you to hop th' twig, you'll know the old post has been left in good hands."

Old John agreed, a bit dubiously, that mebbe Cockeye had something there.

But then a fly appeared in John McPherson's ointment, though a very lovely fly it was. Molly McPherson, a daughter of Big Red McPherson and the teacher in the newly-erected government school, was reported to have awakened something in young Jack's being. They had played together as kids; like others of his well-wishers she had written to him while he was in the service; and now that he was back, they seemed to have found certain interests in common. In fact, old John was given to understand that these interests were so absorbing that they kept young Jack over at Big Red's nearly every night in the week.

Jack himself could scarcely be blamed. Molly was educated, and had poise; and though she was dark, no one meeting her for the first time would suspect that her great-great-grandmother first saw the light of day in a teepee. Molly could have been Latin, a southern senorita; and even in hardboiled Hollywood, folks would have looked at her twice.

But loveliness meant nothing to old John. For him, the worst had happened. If things ran their indicated course, the pure-bred McPhersons were endangered.

But he wasn't Scotch for nothing. That canny streak in him told him that young

Jack, a chip off the old block, had to be handled with gloves. Try shoving him, crowding him, and Jack could be as bull-headed as his old man. Strategy was required.

So along towards freeze-up, while the two of them were packing a trading outfit in the store, the old man launched his scheme.

"Burntwood," he grunted. "That always was a tough proposition. Never had a man in there that was worth his salt." He went on to speak of the fur-catch of the Burntwood district, the debt he lost amongst the natives, the business to be had if he could only get a live-wire to run the winter outpost. Then he straightened slowly, frowned at Jack as though sudden realization was seeping through him. "Now I wonder—" he began. "I wonder—"

Jack wondered what.

"Wondered how'd it be if you went up there? You got everything, the natives like you, and you could work the business up into something worthwhile."

This was flattery, of the most subtle sort. Jack said he didn't know; it *might* be okay; and before fifteen minutes had gone by, the arrangement was complete.

Old John could afford to smile. "You know, Jack," he confessed; "I believe you and me are going to hit her. This Burntwood proposition, now— For years I've been trying to find the right man for the place. The fur's there and the people are willing to trade. But the tramps I hire either do a Rip Van Winkle for the winter or gyp me right and left. But with you, now— Tell you, son, we're sitting on top of the world!"

Hooked, there was little Jack could say. But the upshot was that instead of spending the long winter evenings down in Big Red's front room, he put in longer evenings at the isolated outpost, ten days north. Either there, or in front of a campfire under many a spreading jackpine.

BUT as one of old John's compatriots could have told him, the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft a-gley. Wherefore, this particular scheme ganged so much a-gley that it definitely backfired. And the knowledge of it came to old John when his son came down to the post at

Christmas with three strings of dogs and a big jag of fur, and said he was cheesed-off with Burntwood.

It was over the supper-table, with Cockeye McDonald there as a Christmas guest. Old John looked up with a start.

"Cheesed-off?" he echoed. "What d'you mean?"

"Fed-up with it. You hardly see anyone from one week's end to the other and you begin talking to the shadows 'on the wall."

Old John frowned. He glanced across to his wife, back to his son. "You mean," he suggested, "that you want to quit?"

"Quit? Lord, no!" And then, with all the casualness on earth, Jack dropped his bombshell. "I figure on getting married."

Old John gaped. The boy's mother said, "Jack!" Cockeye frowned.

"Sure," the youngster continued. "Man doesn't have to be a hermit because he trades for a living. I saw Molly just before supper and I asked her. She said sure, only she'll have to give the government a month's notice. Which'll just give me time to get the place fixed up before Tommy McNeil flies her in."

For a moment or so there was an appalling silence. Jack seemed to realize that something was amiss. He looked from one to another as a flush spread over his wind-burned face. Then in a voice that was chilly as a tombstone, old John asked, "Might we ask who is this Molly?"

JACK caught the tone. He glanced around the small circle. "Molly McPherson, of course." He added, defiantly, "Anything wrong with that?"

Again that silence. It held for a longer minute. Then with vicious suddenness, Jack kicked back his chair and stood up.

"What's wrong?" he grated. "Eh? What's wrong? Can't somebody say something?" He glanced hotly from his father to his mother, and when no answer came, he gave a harsh, bitter laugh. "Excuse me!" he said, turned on his heel and crashed out of the room.

His going didn't ease matters, but it gave his mother her chance to start conversation again.

"Why are you like that, John?" she demanded. "Why did you provoke him?"

Old John looked up. "Provoke him?" he

blared. "Who provoked him? He sits there in his chair, bold as brass—"

"John!"

"—and says, 'Molly McPherson, of course!' As much as to say, 'There you are. Take it or leave it!'" The old man swallowed with difficulty. "Molly McPhurson!"

Hot-faced, his wife got up. They heard her climbing the stairs, as Jack had done a moment or so before. In helpless anger, old John smote the table with his balled-up fist and told the world that that was a woman every time.

Cockeye shrugged, and speared a piece of bread. "Every time," he agreed, calmly. "But I wouldn't bust the dishes account of it."

Old John glowered at him. "This ain't nothing to joke about!"

"And I ain't jokin'," Cockeye retorted. "Thinkin', mebbe; but not jokin'."

"Thinking what?"

Cockeye told him flatly. "Thinkin' it's pretty near time you got that concrete skull of yours checked over."

For a moment, old John seemed to be on the point of all-out action; but Cockeye was determined to say his little piece.

"You've bin lucky, John. Luckier'n a lot of people. You've got this boy back safe and sound, and he's just as fine as the day he left. Moreover, he's tryin' to play ball with you up at that godforsaken Burntwood. But now he wants to get married, you don't like it because he don't ask you first."

Old John stared. "Ask me first? What do I care who he asks? He can marry a dozen of 'em if he wants to—white gals. But it ain't got to be a white gal. It's got to be this Molly—a Nitchie!"

Now it was Cockeye's turn to stare. He did, for quite a while. Then his lips began to curl.

"For cryin' out loud! If that don't win the fur-trimmed underwear, I dunno what does!" He squinted at old John as though at something hairy he'd found in his soup. "A Nitchie! Why, you cold-deckin' old buzzard, you make me gag! You live with these people—"

Old John walloped the table again. "I don't have to sit here—"

"—live with these people and make money out of 'em, and then you have the

gall to talk about 'em like that! A Nitchie, wouldja! Why, that Molly's the cutest little thing I've seen in a coon's age. And just because, 'way back when, some McPherson married in the country, you hold it against her! Well, I sure don't. A whole lot of us McDonalds done the same thing, too!"

Old John managed to say, "You didn't!" "Mebbe," agreed Cockeye. "And mebbe I ain't the marryin' kind."

For a moment the two glowered at each other, then old John shook his head doggedly.

"I ain't got nothing against these people. They're all right. But there's been no mixed blood in us Ontario McPhersons yet and there won't be if I can stop it."

"If you can stop it!" snorted Cockeye. "How?" he demanded. "By roarin' and bellerin' and pawin' the earth?" He gave a crooked grin. "Well, knowin' the kid like I do, let's see you get out and try!"

OLD John did try. He tried a few minutes later, when Cockeye went out and Jack came down the stairs. The youngster's face was hard-set and he'd have followed Cockeye outside if a word from old John hadn't stopped him.

"Just a minute, son. I want a talk with you. About your Molly."

The old man, though, knew nothing about tact or the power of persuasion. Instead of admitting Molly's very definite charms, he brushed her aside, sang the praises of the true McPhersons and said that Jack shouldn't get the idea that there was only one tin-can in the alley.

Jack shrugged. Coldly, he pointed that he'd looked a lot of 'em over and his mind was made up. Further, and as for this pure McPherson stuff, he'd marry a Duckbill or a Hottentot if the spirit so moved him.

Old John growled, scowled, and tried an ultimatum. Okay, then; it'd be either Molly or the job; the gal, or a partnership in the business.

Jack shrugged again. "Put that way, it makes it easy. I'll take Molly."

AS COCKEYE had intimated, trying to force the kid had merely resulted in getting his back up. In proof of it, the boy got married within a week, put off a honeymoon and grabbed the next plane for town.

What happened there resulted in four more trips for the plane into Burntwood Lake; and in less than a month, two fur-posts blossomed in the northern hinterland where previously only one had been.

But "blossomed" was hardly the word to describe that of old John McPherson's. True, he put another man in there—the best man he could find; but the Woods-Crees of the district, knowing the ins-and-outs of the case, passed up old John's post to trade with young Jack.

Many of them had grown up with him. They loved him as much as they were awed by his father. And when such a man cut trade-prices by ten per cent and boosted fur-prices accordingly, well, that was the man to tie to.

The upshot was, come spring, Jack had the Burntwood trade all to himself. He was on the road day and night, he ranged far afield, and he prostituted the honesty of some of his old man's finest trappers. The old man had extended them their credit, but it was Jack who managed to get the fur.

Molly, too, played her part. She took her sister north with her for company, ran the business of the post, and kept the home-fires burning all those weeks that Jack was away.

But it was the spring hunt that really put Jack over the top. The beaver and muskrat yield promised to be the biggest in years, and old John was fully prepared to take care of it. At every camp where any of his trappers were operating, he gave one man an outfit of goods to trade with the rest. That way he had the whole territory covered with a network of McPherson traders, figuring that by the time Jack got around with his dogs or his canoe the fur would be gone and the youngster left holding the bag.

But the youngster was as astute as the old man. And as resourceful. Just before the breakup he bought a light Moth plane that had seen service in a war-time flying school and rigged her up to carry a trading-outfit of his own. With this, he flitted from camp to camp, covering in minutes what he otherwise would have covered in days. And when the curtain was rung down on the season's trapping, old John was left to wonder where all his many trading-outfits

had gone, and to write up a lot of his accounts in red.

And it soured him. He became more morose, more openly scornful of the people with whom he dealt.

"Sure," he told Cockeye. "Why shouldn't he get their business? He's one of them now. And they always stick with their own."

Cockeye said nothing. There was so little to say. In any event, he'd have got no hearing from the old man. And as far as Jack was concerned, well, the youngster had to make his own way in life and it was his own affair how he made it.

So things ran along for the short months of the summer. Cockeye's mineral-project ripened, the Consolidated went all-out on another project, and with the daily arrival of independent prospecting planes, Medicine River seemed on the way to becoming a town. In anticipation of it the government put in a two-way radio-station, another branch of the government built a small but efficient hospital, and the staff of the Mounted Police detachment was increased.

Jack himself started to build. He ran up a peeled-and-oiled log bungalow near his father-in-law's, left the finishing of it to him and set about preparations for the coming winter. He had had some capital before, but now, as a result of his spring-trade activities, he was in a position to give old John a real run for his money.

But only occasionally did he go up to his father's house, and then it would be when the old man was away. His mother, though, was still his mother; but Cockeye, on one of his trips up from his mineral workings, saw that she wasn't looking too well. There didn't seem to be the lightness to her step nor the joy in her eye that there was when Jack had first come home. The old rockrat clucked his tongue and shook his head. Old John had asked for it and was getting it, but why had the women to suffer, too?

And then he heard something else. It was at freezeup; and when he was told that Jack had gone north and that Molly wasn't along, he wondered if this was another rift in the lute. But his informant, the parson from the Northern mission, put him right.

"Molly just couldn't go. It'd be foolish.

One of these days she'll be going to hospital in a hurry."

Cockeye understood then. "That way, eh? Which'll make old John a grand-father."

The parson said, "And I wonder what good it'll do him?"

So the weeks went by and once more the Christmas season approached. And a week before the Day itself, a message went out from the radio station for Jack McPherson. Cockeye, down the river, picked it up on his all-wave set. "Molly," it said, "went to hospital today."

Jack picked it up, too; for that afternoon he landed in his light two-seater. Cockeye didn't see him till later on at night, when he reached the settlement and took a stroll up to the new log bungalow.

JACK had had supper at his father-in-law's and at the moment was sorting over a pile of foxes, brush-wolves, lynx and mink. Meeting Cockeye, he waved him to a chair and threw another log into the stove.

Cockeye grinned. "Thought you'd be all a-jitter."

"I am," confessed Jack. "Just doing this to keep my mind off things."

"Any news?"

"No. And there won't be till morning. If then." With a glance at the clock, Jack added, "Looks like a long night."

He sat down, lit a cigarette and puffed on it nervously. Watching him, scanning his windburned, frost-bitten face, Cockeye said, "Yeah; I guess you got your worries."

"Too many of 'em," Jack agreed. Sud-

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denly he turned to Cockeye, startled him by asking, "Heard anything about the old man selling out?"

"Selling out?" Cockeye hadn't; and definitely said so.

"That's what I heard," Jack went on. "To the Northern and Arctic people."

Cockeye's tufted eyebrows went up. "Northern and Arctic, eh? The N-A outfit."

After a while, Jack said, "I can handle the old man, but the N-A bunch are bad medicine. They're streamlined, a high-pressure mob. Operating in connection with their wholesale houses in the East, they make it tough for anyone. You're bucking real money when you go up against them." After a pause, he added, "But I still don't understand why the old man should sell out."

"Better sell out than get chased out," suggested Cockeye.

But Jack didn't agree. "They wouldn't chase him out. If the old man wouldn't sell to them, they wouldn't even start up. If they did, there'd be three outfits trading here, exclusive of myself. And each of us would get something."

Cockeye grinned knowingly. "Yeah; even you."

Jack didn't answer at once; then suddenly, with a touch of fierceness in his tone, he said, "You don't think, do you, Cockeye, that I get any thrill out of bucking the old man? That I like to swipe his fur and take his men away from him? Well, I sure don't! I know he's jug-headed, but I figured his business came first. I thought if I made it tough enough for him, showed him where he was losing out in fighting with me, that he'd come around. Oh, I know," he said, bitterly. "Know he's got no use for Molly. She's got a dash of the Indian in her; and that hits him where it hurts. She may be educated, no different to any other girl; but because she's not a 'pure' McPherson—" He broke off. "But what's that got to do with his business? Why, instead of teaming up with me, is he selling out to the N. and A.?"

Cockeye shrugged, and let the question pass. But he knew the answer. As he saw it, old John was comfortably well-to-do; he'd made money in the years gone by. And though by selling out now he'd be on easy

street for the rest of his days, there was still no need for him to retire. He didn't have to sell out, and he probably didn't want to sell out; but being unable to smash young Jack in a business way, he'd let the N-A people do it for him.

"Don't try to explain your old man," he told the boy, soothingly. "He's smooth and long-headed, and you never know what he'll be up to next."

BUT he tackled old John about it. He asked him casually if what he'd heard was true and if he didn't figure he was a bit too young to be turned out to grass.

"Don't know about that," old John answered. "Forty years at the game is long enough for me. And I want some fun while I'm still able to enjoy it." Then he regarded Cockeye suspiciously. "Anyhow, who told you all this?"

"About you sellin' out?" Cockeye looked innocent. "It's common property. And they say you're closin' the deal right away."

Old John gave a grunt. "Yeah, well—seems like they're right. I'm heading for town in the morning. Flying out on one of the Nordlanders."

"Quite in a hurry, ain't you?" Cockeye suggested. "Me, I like to think things over first."

"Me, too," old John retorted. "And I done it."

Everything seemed cut-and-dried, and there was nothing more that Cockeye could say. So when old John McPherson, dressed in his Sunday suit and new mackinaw, clambered aboard the Nordlander the next morning, Cockeye watched with a troubled heart. This, as he saw it, was the wash-up of the Clan McPherson. With old John out of the North Country and young Jack staying in, this represented the parting of their ways. Mule-headed, stubborn, old John wouldn't give an inch; so the future held little of real happiness for either of them.

Moodily, Cockeye watched the plane take off; saw it roar away upstream and upwind. It cut across a timbered point, gained altitude, banked and turned towards civilization and the south.

But over the point again, something seemed wrong. The engine coughed, hic-

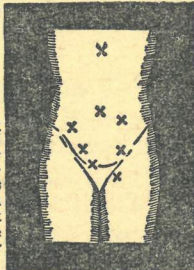
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cupped, caught for a moment and missed again. The ship wobbled, nosed down. One of her wings clipped a spruce tree. She wavered crazily, hit the ice, skidded a few feet till she hit a snowdrift; and then nosed over onto her back.

Cockeye waited for the fire that would follow. None came. The crack-up had occurred less than four hundred yards away. Two Indians sent their dog-teams racing for the spot, others followed afoot. By the time Cockeye got there, two men were out and dragging a third man from the cabin.

The third man was John McPherson. There was blood on his face and on his shaggy graying hair. He was unconscious, and they loaded him onto one of the dog-toboggans. Five minutes later he was in the new hospital.

BUT it wasn't till an hour after that that Cockeye learned any details. Old John had suffered a slight skull fracture and his shoulder was broken, but his injuries were thought not too serious. These details came from old John's wife. But when night came, the doctor in charge revised his opinion. There was more blood-flow than there should have been and old John had not recovered consciousness.

The loss of a night's rest meant little to Cockeye, so he was in and out of the hospital throughout the hours of darkness. Old John's wife sat at the injured man's bedside, sharing her vigil with young Jack. And Jack had two worries on his mind. Things weren't going with Molly as they should be.

But with the dawn, he had one worry the less. He was called out of the room. He had a son and heir to carry on the McPherson name.

Cockeye congratulated him, so did his mother; but until old John found himself, there could be no great ease of mind for any of them.

So the day passed; and when night fell once more, the doctor ordered John's wife to bed. He found one for her in the hospital and gave her a sedative; but when Cockeye was approached on the subject, he said he'd stick around and see what turned up.

So he was there when, at a little past midnight, John McPherson returned to the world. Old John blinked, groaned, looked about him and fell asleep again. And though his period of consciousness was the briefest, the doctor was satisfied.

"He'll do," he said. "He'll make it now."

Cockeye sighed, stood up. "After a whispered word in private with you, Doc," he stated, "I'll hit the feathers myself."

BUT it was four days later that old John was allowed visitors. After his wife and son had departed, Cockeye dropped in on him. The patient was coming through nicely, and he gave Cockeye a grunt and a shake of the hand.

"You made it," observed Cockeye.

Old John said, "Yeah."

"You had us worried," Cockeye went on. "Figured for a while you was passin' out."

There was another grunt. "Worried! Nice to think you 'worried' over me."

It was Cockeye's turn to grunt. "Sour old buzzard, ain't you? Well, for your satisfaction lemme tell you that pretty near everyone in the village was worryin' about you. They kep' comin' up to ask about you all the time."

Old John blinked. "Who did?"

"Everyone. The white men, the Nitchies. Yeah, and most of the McPhersons."

Cockeye let that sink in. Then he said, "You seen Jack?"

In a quieter tone, old John said, "Yeah. I seen Jack."

"He worried most."

"Oh?"

"Yeah," stated Cockeye. "And I s'pose you know he had a coupla worries—you and his wife? And I s'pose you know you're a grandfather now?"

Old John's lip stiffened. After a while he said, "I don't feel up to an argument, Cockeye."

Cockeye agreed; then he looked down the room. Three men were coming forward. One was Charlie McPherson—Jack's brother-in-law—and two were definitely Indians. These latter two wore parkas and moccasins, and were shy and hesitant in their approach.

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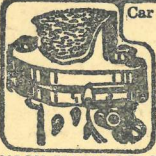
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"More visitors," observed Cockeye. "Just come to say how-do."

The Indians didn't stop long. With a handclasp that Cockeye noted softened that stiffness in old John's lip, they said a word and silently walked out again. Jack's young brother-in-law stayed little longer.

"Glad you're making it, Mr. McPherson. Hope you get around soon."

Then he, too, left.

Unobtrusively, Cockeye watched old John's face. The sick man was staring at the ceiling and his lip was now actually trembling. A moment later, Cockeye went on.

"Yeah; you were pretty low for a while, John. Only them transfusions helped you out."

Old John turned his head to look at him sharply. "Transfusions?" he echoed. "Who had transfusions? Me?"

"Sure. Lots of 'em."

"Who gave 'em to me?"

"The doctor, of course." Then, "Oh, I get it," exclaimed Cockeye. "Who pervided 'em? Well, let's see— There was the parson for one; and Johnny Natakam—that crooked Nitchie who done you out of his last spring fur. Then there was the three boys who just went out; y'know Charlie and them two bucks. Their blood was all the right type. But the offers the doc had! There musta bin fifty people up here to see if they could make the grade. Yeah, fifty anyway that wanted to see you get well."

There was now no doubt about it. Old John was fighting himself, but that lip of his couldn't keep still.

But Cockeye went relentlessly on. "Nothing like fresh blood in your veins. Good red blood. And the doc says the Indians' blood was as good as any—" Cockeye paused to grin quizzically. "Now there's a thought for you, John. You're here to-day account of that good Indian blood in your veins!"

Old John sniffed, swallowed a bit hard. "Right now, Cockeye," he said, weakly, "I don't think I can stand anything more."

Cockeye said, "Oh, yes you can. How about that grandson of yours? Don't you want to see what he looks like?"

But he had to wait for his answer. Old

John continued to stare at the ceiling. But finally he gave a short, brief nod.

Cockeye smiled as he turned to leave. "I'll have the nurse fetch him in."

The Story Tellers' Circle

Front and Center, Johnny and Sam

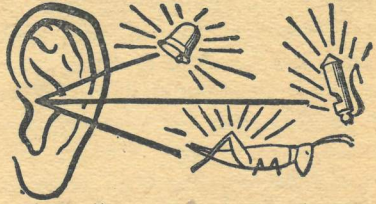
"THE Leather Duke" returns that fine mixture of Frank Gruber and his people Johnny Fletcher and Sam Cragg to the pages of SHORT STORIES. Since they've visited these precincts Johnny and Sam have dressed up a bit (well, their grammar, anyway!) and become radio personalities of note.

We can't believe even radio could daunt Fletcher and Cragg for long—or short. Once a man starts swiping hotel towels and railroad stationery he's in it for life. And a private detective is, after all, a *kind of* man. But what made us wonder about things was a sentence Frank Gruber dropped—as you will note presently—mentioning casually that the two boys have been compelled to take "working jobs."

Still we won't jump to any conclusions without more evidence. As for that business about "working jobs" there must be an explanation. We can't believe Johnny and Sam have gone soft on us. Read "The Leather Duke" and see what you think!

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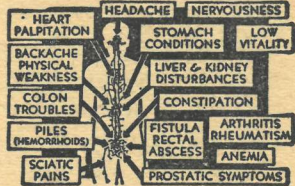


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background is factual. If any employees of Wilder & Company, in Chicago, think they recognize the leather factory, they are quite right.

"Some Chicago readers may also think they recognize the athletic club where Johnny and Sam take up brief residence and they are right about that, too. I was a bellhop at this club for two months, when I was 16 years of age. For the intimate details of these experiences I advise readers of *SHORT STORIES* to place their orders, with their favorite booksellers for 'The Angry Road,' which will be published sometime during the coming year. This is a big book, three times the length of a Johnny Fletcher mystery and will sell for about \$4.00, cash or easy payments, money refunded if you are not satisfied—provided you are at least six-foot-four and weigh 220.

"But, seriously, 'The Leather Duke' is the 12th Johnny Fletcher-Sam Cragg mystery novel. And it is the first one in which Johnny and Sam are compelled to take working jobs. Johnny and Sam, as some of you may know, were on the air over the ABC network, for six months in 1948 and as you read this they may again be on the air, for their 1949 season."—FRANK GRUBER.

Buchanan's New Book

SPEAKING of being on the air, Lamont Buchanan, the Associate Editor of this establishment, was interviewed over the radio recently concerning his latest sports book out this season. This one, "The Story of Basketball" put out by Stephen Paul Publishers, New York (\$3.50) is a text and picture account of the court game from its beginning with Dr. Naismith's peach baskets down to the glass backboard of today, including the 1948 Olympics and the first bounces of this season. Hank Luisetti, George Mikan, Kurland, Ralph Beard and the other greats of the game are shown in their most thrilling roles. There are over 150-action-packed photos with nation-wide basketball facts and statistics.

Buchanan's earlier sports book, "The Story of Football" now going along merrily in its second printing, received the enthusiastic plaudits of such experts as Grantland Rice, Amos Alonzo Stagg, Stout Steve

Owen, Red Barber and Lou Little, among others. He hopes "Basketball" will be as well received.

Our Sure-Thing Reader

THE purveyor of these columns that trot their paragraphs out every per issue (under what it says above—which ought to read Story Tellers' Circle), often wonders about something. Lest the reader thinks that this department prides itself on an exclusive faculty or the workings thereof, we hasten to add that doubtless our customers wonder too, and possibly about a variety of things.

But like the man who used to fill the Columbus Circle horse trough and then hung around most of the night to make sure what happened to the water, we have, on occasion, wondered whether these deathless paragraphs were ever enjoyed by anyone outside these precincts. A thing like this too long cogitated upon might do all sorts of things to one's morale. Fate, it seems, saw fit to intervene on our side, perhaps barely in the nick of time. Some months ago, partly to fill a void in then-current submissions and partly, probably, to fill some space in the Circle for that number of *SHORT STORIES*, we ran some rather plaintive lines wondering why, with an embarrassment of riches in all other departments, we received so little in the way of good sports material—reader-writers, please note. We said that, locked it up, and promptly forgot about it.

Lo and behold, not too long afterward, we received a letter attached to a story—a sports story—saying that our query about sports manuscripts in the Story Tellers' Circle had been duly noted and herewith something in that line. The author of that letter was Malcolm K. Murchie, an ex-Marine, and on his own shameless testimony, a longtime reader of *SHORT STORIES*. Since then, Murchie has sold us several good stories, but that wasn't the half of it as far as this corner is concerned. This department thinks of him not as a new and promising writer—which he is—but as a bona fide certified and self-confessed, over his own signature, reader of these Story Tellers' Circle paragraphs!

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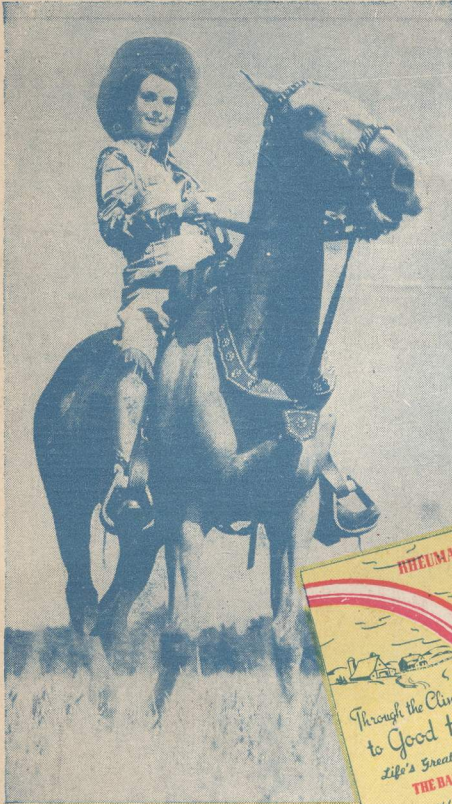
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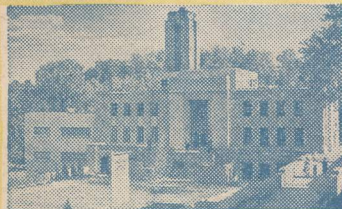
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