

Short Stories

ANC

February

25c



**"PIRATES'
PRICE"**

**Theodore
Roscoe**

START A Fine Business in Spare Time!

RUN THE BEST "SHOE STORE BUSINESS" IN YOUR TOWN!



FREE!
SELLING
OUTFIT



**YOU DON'T INVEST A CENT!
EVERYTHING FURNISHED FREE!**

I put a "Shoe Store Business" right in your hands . . . you don't invest a cent . . . make big profits . . . no rent or store overhead . . . exclusive sales features build your business. You can have a profitable "Shoe Store" right in your hands. *You just make money!* You're independent, in a business with a never-ending demand, because **EVERYBODY WEARS SHOES.**

Just rush coupon—I'll send you my Starting shoe outfit right away. **ABSOLUTELY FREE.** Valuable actual samples, and demonstrators of calf skin leather, kangaroo, kid, horsehide and elk-tanned leather furnished free of a penny's cost to qualified men.

My Professional Selling Outfit contains cut-away demonstrator so your customers can feel the restful Velvet-eez Air Cushion innersole. Special accurate measuring device—National Advertising reprints—door opener kits—the actual shoes—Everything you need to build a profitable repeat business. Here's your chance! Join me and get into the **BIG MONEY!**

Put a "Shoe Store Business" Right in Your Hands . . .
You Don't Invest a Cent . . . Make Bigger Profits . . .
No Store Overhead . . .
Exclusive Sales Features Build Your Repeat Business

MORE PROFITS SELLING LEATHER JACKETS

Add more profits selling top quality horsehide, capeskin, suede, nylon, gabardine, and other popular leather jackets. Also raincoats. **EVERY OUTDOOR MAN A PROSPECT FOR THESE STURDY, HANDSOME GARMENTS. STYLED AND TAILORED BY EXPERTS.**



GOOD HOUSEKEEPING SEAL

The Good Housekeeping Magazine Guarantee Seal on Velvet-eez shoes opens doors for you and clinches sales.



TAKE ORDERS DIRECT FROM FACTORY

You sell features that no other shoe man or store can offer the folks in your territory. The Velvet-eez demonstrator you'll get free in your professional Sales Outfit will make easy sales for you, even in your spare time, as it has for hundreds of other Mason Shoe Men.

Velvet-eez



OVER 150 FAST-SELLING STYLES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Sell amazing Velvet-eez air cushion innersole shoes with steel box toes—horsehide shoes, elk-tanned leather shoes, kid shoes, kangaroo leather shoes, slip-resistant Gro-Cork soles, oil-resistant Neoprene soles—every good type of dress, service and sport footwear—at money-saving direct-from-factory prices. Exclusive comfort features that cannot be found in retail stores.

Also special steel shanks and sturdy built-in comfort arches. Be the Mason Shoe Counselor in your area and make lots of **EXTRA** cash every week! You're way ahead of competition—you draw on our factory stock of over 150,000 pairs plus huge daily factory production—each customer gets **EXACT** fit in the style he or she wants. Special features make it extra easy to sell gas station men, factory workers, waiters, etc.

HUGE NATIONAL ADVERTISING PROGRAM

YOU are played up in big, powerful ads in National magazines. People are eager to get your special Personal Fitting Service. Rush the coupon **QUICK.**

MASON SHOE MFG. CO.

Dept. M-894, Chippewa Falls, Wisc.



DON'T DELAY

RUSH THE COUPON NOW!

MASON SHOE MFG. CO.
Dept. M-894
Chippewa Falls, Wisc.

Set me up right away for **BIG PROFITS!** Rush me your **FREE** Starting Selling Outfit featuring Air Cushion shoes, leather jackets, other fast sellers. Send everything free and postpaid.

Name

Address

Town State

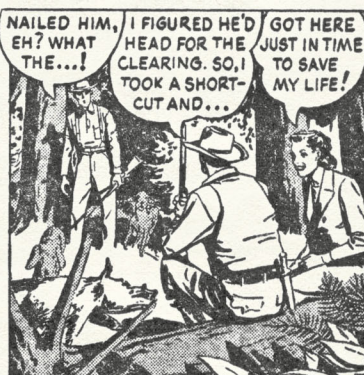
BILL STOPPED THE WILD BOAR'S CHARGE AND THEN...



WILD TURKEY HUNTING IN A SOUTHERN NATIONAL FOREST CAN HARDLY BE CLASSED AS A DANGEROUS SPORT, BUT WHEN A WOUNDED WILD BOAR INTRUDES...



BANG!
BANG!



NAILED HIM, EH? WHAT THE...!
I FIGURED HE'D HEAD FOR THE CLEARING. SO, I TOOK A SHORT-CUT AND...
GOT HERE JUST IN TIME TO SAVE MY LIFE!



WHEN WE BORROWED JEB'S CAR, WE SHOULD'A TAKEN HIS TRAILER, TOO
WHY THAT'S JEB SCOTT'S CAR! THEN YOU MUST BE HIS HOUSE GUEST!
THAT'S ME, ALL RIGHT!



WELL, JUNE, IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU TWO COULDN'T WAIT TO MEET FORMALLY. I WAS GOING TO BRING BILL OVER THIS EVENING

UNCLE JEB, YOU'RE A PEACH
SHE'S LOVELY



LATER
BLADES. YOU BET! TRY THIS THIN GILLETTE



WHERE HAS THIS BLADE BEEN ALL MY LIFE! THAT'S THE SLICKEST SHAVE I'VE HAD IN YEARS!
THIN GILLETES ARE MIGHTY POPULAR DOWN HERE. THEY'RE PLENTY KEEN



HE'S A FINE YOUNG MAN. EXCELLENT APPEARANCE AND VERY INTELLIGENT

I KNEW YOU'D LIKE HIM, COLONEL. I'VE APPROACHED HIM REGARDING A JUNIOR PARTNERSHIP

YOU ENJOY SWELL, EASY SHAVES... QUICK AND CLEAN... WITH THIN GILLETES. THEY ARE THE KEENEST BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD AND FAR OUTLAST ALL OTHERS. MADE TO FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY, THIN GILLETES CANNOT SCRAPE OR IRRITATE YOUR FACE. ASK FOR THIN GILLETES IN THE CONVENIENT 10-BLADE PACKAGE

10-25¢
4-10¢

TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

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THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

CONDUCTED BY PETE KUHLMOFF

Utility Handgun

THE dyed-in-the-wool handgun target shooter is a breed apart. This character is almost in the medicine-man class. He'll buy a brand new and quite expensive gun that has been refined at the factory (all working parts hand honed and hand fitted) to such an extent that it works as smooth as silk, and equipped with adjustable target sights that are just about perfect for most eyes. But he's not satisfied—he'll send the new lead slinger out to a gunsmith, or maybe I should say accuracy artist, and have it "accuratized." This may consist of making several new parts by hand, or perhaps a partial redesign and installation of certain parts.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to poke fun at these shooters, I'm in the same boat myself—or am I trying to belittle these 'smiths, for they are in most instances very excellent workmen who know their stuff. And not only that—they actually do fix up a gun so that a good shooter can gain a few points, or perhaps just one point, that may be all important when it comes to winning or losing a match. Under these conditions every effort made for a more accurate gun is certainly not a waste of effort!

But for the majority of the time most of us need one of these super-deluxe handguns about like we need six toes or another hole in the head! As I intimated before, I have several of these guns, but I don't use them for general purpose shooting, nor do I lug them around on field trips—they represent a good investment and I don't like to take a chance on bunging them up or wearing them unnecessarily. They are strictly for formal target shooting!

I have two heavy caliber handguns which I find I use more than all the others in my gun rack. They are the new Smith & Wesson Chief's Special (which I told you about

several months ago) and a Colt Police Positive Special revolver, both in .38 Special caliber.

My Colt has a 6 inch barrel and weighs about 26 ounces. This model is now made with 4 inch barrel only and weighs only about 23 ounces. The shorter barrel is really handier, but my gun is accurate and I have gotten so accustomed to its balance I have never had the courage to make the change. Due to the long barrel I carry the gun in a Heiser button down flap holster as I find it more convenient to get into action and I don't poke holes in my pocket!

I like my guns to look good (to my way of thinking there is nothing worse looking than a beat-up sporting arm that obviously has been abused—good honest wear gives a gun character) and the finish on my little Colt revolver is without gouge or nick—just some holster wear—after a good many years of constant use. The checkered walnut grips, still in excellent condition, are comfortable and easy to hold. They do not have the advantages of a special pair of target shooting grips, nor do they have the extra bulk—which I do not like on a work gun.

The front sight on my gun is the old round one and does not have the ramp effect of those on late guns (see picture). While the ramp is a decided advantage for a clean cut sight picture and is easy enough to remodel, I just keep the old round sight well blackened and have no trouble at all. The sight blade is not quite 1/10 inch thick, which is wide enough for easy and quick sighting with most eyes—but I would like it a bit wider as my eyes are not what they once were!

THE single action trigger pull on this little Police Positive Special is very crisp and breaks cleanly. It would be a little on the heavy side for outright target use,



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in the crying need for

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That's good news for you because, with proper training, you can qualify yourself for one of those jobs. How? I. C. S. can show you, just as it has shown thousands of men who today are foremen, supervisors and superintendents. Many had no experience, no high school education. But they studied easy-to-follow I. C. S. courses, applied what they learned and began to climb. Today they're on top and they credit I. C. S. for their success.

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DOCTOR BILLS UP \$500 While in Hosp. TO

ORTHOPEDIC UP \$500 APPLIANCES TO

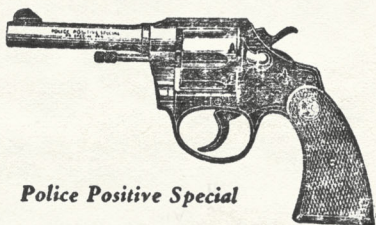
YOU CAN GET MATERNITY

but is just about right for all around shooting. It actually requires almost 4 pounds of pressure to release the hammer. Most target shooters like a pull at 2½ pounds or very slightly over on a revolver.

As a matter of fact, the actual weight of the trigger pull (within reason) is not important, as most anyone, with practice, can become accustomed to either an easy or a heavy trigger squeeze—but there is one big if—the trigger pull must not have a creep in it!

A smooth trigger pull with a crisp letoff is most important. It is almost impossible to shoot accurately with a creepy or uneven pull. I have had occasion to examine many hundreds of used handguns and it is unusual indeed to find one with a decent trigger pull. I don't know what the average handgun owner (who usually buys a gun for home defense) does to his revolver, but he certainly does manage to mess up the trigger mechanism!

To test the smoothness of the trigger pull, first be sure the gun is unloaded (this should be an automatic procedure), cock it and close your eyes, slowly and carefully press the trigger to the right, cock it again and press to the left and finally straight to the rear. The same even, smooth pull should be obtained regardless of the angle at which the trigger is squeezed off.



Police Positive Special

If you figure the pull is not what it should be, have it inspected and adjusted, if necessary, by a good gunsmith. I have found that it usually pays to send such a gun back to the factory for such a job! Then dry fire it until you have become familiar with its action and the necessary amount of pressure to release the hammer.

There are a number of adjustments that may be accomplished by a gun owner who can develop a little skill with a slip stone, and has the patience to stick to a delicate job until it is satisfactorily finished. Later we will cover a few of these operations for

(Continued on page 32)

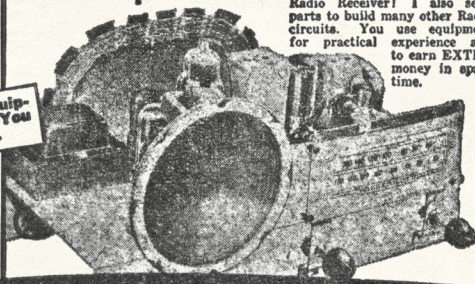
You Practice COMMUNICATIONS I send you parts to build this transmitter



As part of my Communications Course you build this low power broadcasting transmitter, learn how to put a station "on the air," perform procedures demanded of Broadcast Station operators, make many tests.

This is just part of the equipment my students build. You keep all parts I send.

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I TRAINED THESE MEN



"I have been operating my own Servicing business. In two years I did \$14,000 worth of business; net profit \$6,850. Have one full time employee, an NRI student."—PHILLIP G. BROGAN, Louisville, Ky.



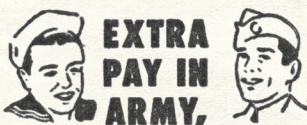
"Four years ago, I was a bookkeeper, with a hand-to-mouth salary. Now I am a Radio Engineer with a key station of the American Broadcasting Company network."—NORMAN H. WARD, Ridgeland Park, New Jersey.



"When halfway through the NRI course, I made \$5 to \$8 a week fixing sets in my spare time. Am now selling and installing Television sets and antennas."—E. J. STREIB, ENBERGER, New Boston, O.



"My first job was operator with KDLR, obtained for me by your Graduate Service Dept. I am now Chief Engineer of Police Radio Station WOOX. I never hesitate to endorse NRI."—T. S. NORBTON, Hamilton, Ohio



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Do you want good pay, a job with a bright future and security? Would you like to have a profitable shop of your own? If so, find out how you can realize your ambition in the fast growing, prosperous RADIO-TELEVISION industry. Even without Television, the industry is bigger than ever before. 90 million home and auto Radios, 3100 Broadcasting Stations, expanding use of Aviation and Police Radio, Micro-wave Relay, Two-way Radio for buses, taxis, etc., are making opportunities for Servicing and Communications Technicians and FCC-Licensed Operators.

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In 1950, over 5,000,000 TV sets sold. By 1954, 25,000,000 TV sets estimated. Over 100 TV Stations now operating. Authorities predict 1,000 TV Stations. This means more jobs, good pay for qualified men all over the United States and Canada.

Many Make \$10 Extra a Week in Spare Time

Keep your job while training. Hundreds of successful RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIANS I trained had no previous experience, some only a grammar school education. Learn Radio-Television principles from illustrated lessons. Get PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE—build valuable multimeter—experiment with circuits common to Radio and Television. Keep all equipment. Many students make \$5, \$10 extra a week fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time. SPECIAL BOOKLETS start teaching you the day you enroll.

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The ABC's of
SERVICING

How to Be a
Success
in RADIO-
TELEVISION

I'll Say I'm Living

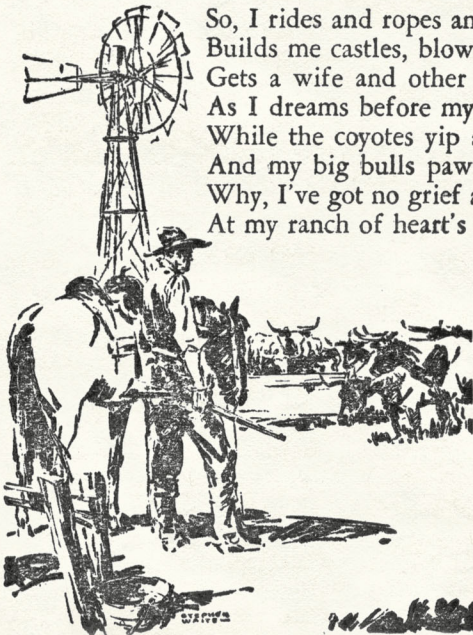
By CLEM YORE

I AM not a-cravin' riches,
Nor them dude-like, whip-cord breeches;
And I ain't a-countin' stitches
Though a stitch in time saves nine.
But I'm sure plumb full of yearnin'
And my daggone heart's a-burnin',
For a trail that's just a-turnin',
To that home-like "spread" of mine.

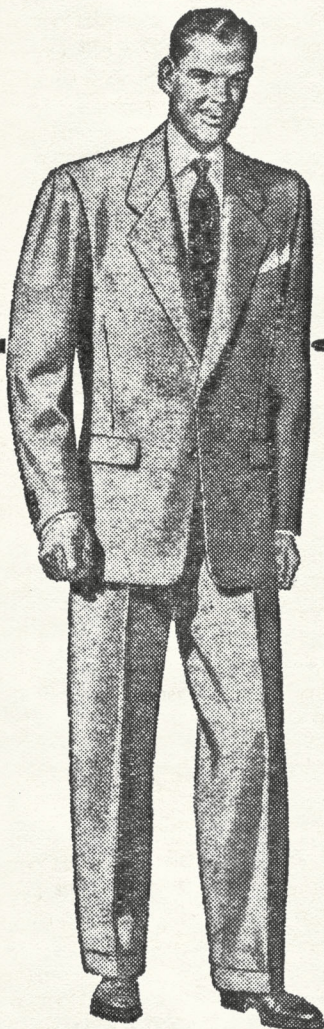
My old roof is poles and thatch,
And my door ain't got no latch,
But I sure knows how to batch,
Sizzle bacon, and all that.
There's no walls of alabaster,
But there is a mortgage-plaster
Which I'm sure a-goin' to master,
When my dogies gets their fat.

Oh, I loves the smell of cattle,
And the clash of horns a-rattle,
And the hoofs like shots in battle,
When my herd is on the prod.
Just beyond my shack, off yonder,
Where the pine trees point and ponder,
There is where I loves to wander,
When I'm getting close to God.

So, I rides and ropes and sings,
Builds me castles, blows me rings,
Gets a wife and other things,
As I dreams before my fire.
While the coyotes yip and call,
And my big bulls paw and bawl,
Why, I've got no grief a-tall
At my ranch of heart's desire.



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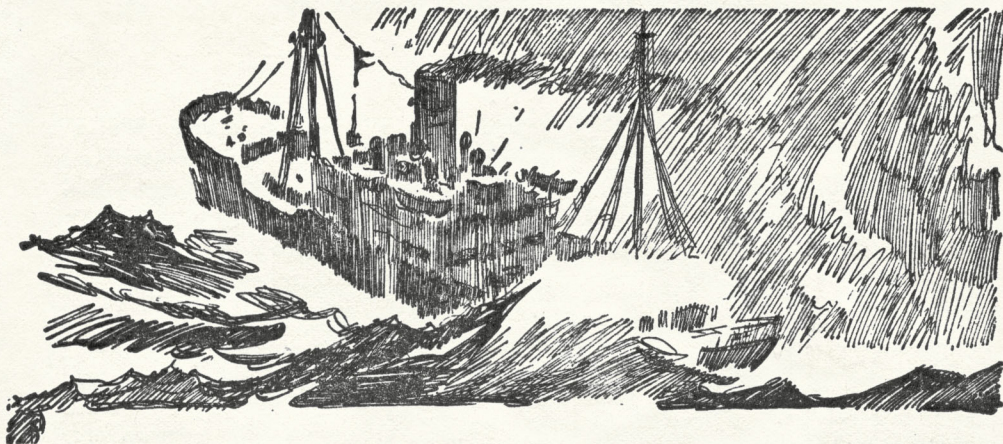
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Pete Ketherby Was a Sailor; He Knew Rag-Wagons, Tankers, Liners, Trawlers and Life-Rafts. The Question Was—Did He Know His Own Mind?

PIRATES' PRICE

YOU don't often see them like Pete Ketherby, any more; he belongs to a vanishing race. To have called him a perfect physical specimen would, as Old Pop said, have been to damn those golden-

brown, muscle slabbed shoulders, that limber torso so broad at the chest it split size-16 shirts, so flat at the hips he had to keep his dungarees belted, that stalwart jaw—to damn with faint praise. Six feet of sinew and bone, hard bronze from the





By
**THEODORE
ROSCOE**

thatch of bleached hair to his heels, an eye so blue it could stare down tropic suns and North Atlantic sleets, that was Ketherby. And to have simply pronounced him a sailor was not to appreciate the ease with which he tied a monkey's fist, scaled icy shrouds in a gale, bended a sheet or manned a wheel or hung overside to swab red lead without leaving holidays. He could work aloft or below; stand the bow in a head wind and roll cigarettes with one hand; he knew rag-wagons, tankers, liners, trawlers, life rafts; mates asked his advice. He was *the* sailor.

And to have watched the brawn ripple down his arms, to have witnessed him duck gin bottles, trade slugs with stevedores, throw punches like cannon balls to knock ganging wharf rats carpet-flat, to have seen him go into action with his fists and call him a natural fighter would have been faint praise, indeed.

"Ain't a finer fella goin'. Ain't a better seaman on the seven oceans. Ain't nobody in the world he can't lick." That's quoting Old Pop; and when Old Pop approved a fella, that man must be pretty stout metal. Yet—sometimes Old Pop was seen to shake his head. He'd sailed with Pete for the last ten years, and his salty old eyes kindled

every time he looked at the lad—well, most anyone was a lad to an ancient mariner like Old Pop. And that's how Old Pop knew Pete so well, and why Old Pop was a little worried about Pete, lately; how he knew something was eating his friend.

TAKE the night in the Scarlet Zouave's café down in Marseille. That had been a battle! Pete and Old Pop had gone ashore off their freighter and dropped into the Scarlet Zouave for a sidecar and a bottle. And they'd just been sitting there, Pop drinking, Pete staring into his glass and rubbing the blue anchor tattooed on an egg of a muscle on his right arm, when the bottle came unexpectedly from a tough stoker near the door. A yelled curse, a dodge, and an explosion of glass. Then all Old Pop had to do was sit there grinning and calling epithets while Pete waded in and punched the enemy and his boy friends and the Scarlet Zouave into a shambles. When it was over the ambush lay in wreckage, five stokers from the black gang of a sister ship lay snoring in a row and three French gendarmes were heaped up in the gutter.

Pete and Old Pop skidded around a corner, then strolled toward Vieux Port.

"It wasn't my fault," Pete exclaimed, studying a scratch on his elbow. "Those guys have been trying to lay for me the past year on account of I had to beat up one of them in Tampico." But his eyes were dark with concern.

Pop frowned. "Of course it wasn't your fault. What's the matter with you, lad? You don't need to apologize for slapping the bilge outa a bunch of rummies like that. What's hecklin' you?"

Pete stopped and looked up at the warm summer sky where new stars were showing; then he hitched his dungarees and stared down at the faded sneakers on his feet. Old Pop heard him sigh, and a worried scowl agitated Old Pop's forehead. "What is botherin' you, Pete? Seems like lately you—"

The big sailor pulled a bag of tobacco from his shirt, twisted a cigarette, and muttered with the bag dangling from his white teeth.

"I don't like it, Pop," he said slowly. "This cheap gutter brawlin'. In one port, out another. No home. Waterfront joints. Fo'c'sles. The—the sea." A dark glow burned in his eyes, and he dropped a fist into a pocket. "Listen, Pop. This sailor life. I hate it."

THAT was the beginning of it. Old Pop thought he'd get over it; but he didn't. There was the night Old Pop came on deck and saw Pete throwing the library of Conrad—books he'd treasured in his ditty bag—overboard. Old Pop shook his head. He knew. There was something in his own ditty bag; something that made a little catch in the old seaman's throat when he saw Pete jettisoning those sea books.

Walking aft, Pete met Old Pop leaning in the hatchway. "Pop," he growled. "What is it to follow the sea, eh? I been thinkin'—ever since that night in Marseille. I said I hate it, an' I meant it. What a life. You—well, maybe you wouldn't understand, Pop; but I want something more, I guess. I don't like this plowin' around on luggers, one minute you're a laundress, next you're a scrub woman, a pain-swabber, a—a glorified hobo. The skipper on this lugger ain't no better off'n the rest of us. Just a tramp—and that's highest

you can get. Listen, Pop. I'm gonna quit this lousy sea. I'm *through*."

Old Pop dropped a sympathetic, if horny, hand on Pete's gleaming brown shoulder. "I know how you feel about it, lad. We all get sick of our jobs. Only I can't picture sittin' around the Sea Service Bureau, outa work an' hungry, an'—"

"But you don't understand," Pete scoffed impatiently. "Anything's better than—than—"

He didn't say it, but Old Pop knew what he meant. "Than gettin' white headed, like me, a old man on one of these luggers with nothin' to look for'ard to but Snug Harbor an' a Seaman's Home in yer old age, eh?" the old man finished. If his eyes were a little sad Pete didn't see them, because the old man averted his gaze and spat a jet of juice over the rail. "I reckon you're right, lad. I been wonderin' when these ideas would hit you—"

Pete touched the old man's hand. "I didn't mean like you, Pop," he said gently. "You're ace high, see, and they don't come better. Only—well, me—when we get to port I'm swallowin' the anchor for good and all."

THAT was on a freighter going into Hamburg. Then they sailed out of Hamburg with sand ballast and tramped up Biscay Bay for the Gironde and a cargo of French crockery. A crimey rain was drizzling down from a sky the color of dirty smoke the night they docked in Royan. The port looked blue under the drizzle; a wharf of wet cobblestones and rusty iron cranes and black canals. Pete and Pop were working on the foredeck winch, soaked from head to foot and smudged with grease and grime. Pete had bashed a thumbnail in a deck boom, and blood stained his wrist. And the second mate had bawled him out. Now he glared and shot a dead cigarette over the bow and snarled at Old Pop.

"Looka there, Pop. Over the bow on that little hill yonder."

Pop saw a little batch of cottages with twinkly yellow windows and dooryards cozy against the rain and dark. Tile roofs and chimney-pots under apple trees. Pete leaned on the chugging winch, taut in the rain.

"See 'em, Pop? Homes—them houses up there. There's a woman cooking pies

over a nice warm stove. She's probably got flower pots in a corner an' a nice lace apron. The old man comes in off his bicycle to three squares a day, an' reads the evenin' paper an' smokes a big pipe. And there's a dog." He flung about, suddenly raging. "And where do we make out? Beans and hash ten times a week. Tobacco like to gas the German army. Go down a street an' dogs bark at you and nice girls turn up their noses because you're nothin' but a— a sailor. And why shouldn't they? I tell you, Pop, the sea don't do nothing for a man. I got sixty bucks comin' when we tie into this town. I'm takin' the money an' buyin' a passage to America. I'm *through*!"

Somehow it didn't come off. They had a few drinks in Jacques' Place and a bunch of Limeys off a Liverpool tanker started a game of pedro. There was a fight and Pete knocked out two big Irishmen with one punch.

He never could remember what became of his sixty dollars. He spent the last ten buying rubber boots and a sou'-wester from a waterside Shylock, and by dawn he and Old Pop were seventy miles out bound for Fort de France, Guadeloupe. Cargo of coal.

Black diamonds. Got in your hair, ears, eyes, nose. Coal in your bunks, in your soup. Hose down every day, swab and soogey decks until knuckles were raw and knees swollen. Then Guadeloupe was full of sunshine, bad smells, dead heat; and the Old Man wouldn't let anybody get ashore because the last time he was there his crew got into a gin mill brawl and a gang of Negroes minced an A. B. with butcher knives.

PETE and Old Pop sat on the afterdeck scrubbing dungarees in a wooden bucket. "Nobody'd ever be fool enough to quit in this dump," Pete admitted mournfully, giving Guadeloupe a glance to wipe it off the map. "But the next port we make—Say, have you tried drinkin' the stale water in our tanks? Butter all melted to yella grease in the mess room, an' no milk."

His eye dropped a half hitch on one of those big colored advertising posters you see pasted on waterside godowns. The picture was a nice girl in a starchy apron

bending over an ice box filled with cold salads. She was an awfully nice looking girl, Old Pop studied the poster, too.

"A home," Pete breathed, rolling a cigarette in soapy fingers and smiling, hard-lipped, at the poster. "Pop, *my* house will have an ice box like that one. I tell you, next port I'm gonna quit an'—"

"Sure," Old Pop said. "Sure."

"I mean it!" Pete raged. He flung a scornful hand to indicate the green slip, hot and steaming, where the freighter was tied in, dowdy and listing and dirty, with big smears of red lead all over her deck plates like measles. "What a thing to live on," he said through clenched teeth. "I want a *real* home. An ice box. Say—where does this tub go from here?"

"Halifax," Old Pop mumbled. "Cargo of limes."

"I'm tellin' you," Pete snarled. "Get to Halifax, I'm quittin'."

A big sigh came out of the freighter's funnel, just then, for all the world like a sort of raspberry. Wet steam and cinders gusted across the deck and peppered Pete's laundry with dirt. He sat there staring at the poster of the ice box.

SOMEHOW he didn't quit in Halifax. They took on farm machinery for Alexandria, Egypt, and a loading boom let go and dropped a McCormick reaper plop on the after hatch, smashing all manner of things astern. The Old Man sent out a special engraved request for the crew to stand by and please repair the damage, and before you could say hell they were standing out to sea in a freezing blizzard. Dirty weather on the Western Ocean. Green seas slamming over the bow and the six-thousand ton *S. S. Junius Luckenlock* putting her beam ends under at every roll. Low on steam and the fo'c'sle like the North Pole, the crew sleeping in boots and oilskins under straw mattresses, snoring white smoke in the lantern light. Minute you dropped asleep you got hauled out on deck to save a lifeboat torn from splintered davits.

They stuck Pete in the crow's nest, and he had his ice box. Ice everywhere. Ice in the rigging, hanging in big white chunks on the fo'c'sle head, glazing iron decks and ladders. Ice flying like shot in the

gale, beading a sailor's eyelashes, making an icicle on the end of his nose.

Graveyard Watch (midnight to four) Old Pop climbed aloft to see how Pete was making it. He found Ketherby crouched in a whirl of snow, cursing at the wild brine sloshing the decks under him. It was all a man could do to hang on up there. The hooker was rolling like a lumberman's log, pitch and toss and groan, and the crew's nest soaring in a ten foot arc through the blizzard.

"Us sailors are crazy! Plumb crazy!" Pete screamed through cupped palms. "Think of how landmen live on nights like this. Warm rooms. Fireplaces. Hot soups. My God! *They* got brains. They got a stove and a—a home!"

"Go below an' scoff a cup of Java!" Old Pop squalled, hanging on. "I'll stand by—"

Pete howled all the way down the ladder. "On shore you sleep all night! Are you yanked outa bed to freeze up a mast? If I ever sign with any bum crew again—"

He didn't get his cup of Java, either. The mess punk had slipped on the icy deck and two cans of coffee had gone down the scuppers. There wouldn't be any coffee till morning. Pete went raving aft to the galley, took a beam sea into the hatch with him, fell down the companion and sprained his ankle. And then on the Alexandria waterfront, weeks later, his ankle went bad on him when a gang of dockwallopers jumped him to get his purse. That was how one of them managed to stab him in the hip before he knocked the lot of them cold.

A Greek doctor came aboard and before he could get off they were started down the Suez Canal for Aden. The freighter crawled between the banks of the desert, the fo'c'sle broiled with cinders and bugs, getting hotter and hotter in the savage sunshine, and Pete lay on his back for a week, cursing life at sea.

"I'm quittin'. Next chance. I promise you. I'm through."

Old Pop sat by his bunk and said, "Sure, lad. Sure!" and shook his old head and, now and then, looked sadly toward his own ragged ditty bag.

It wasn't that Pete was a sea lawyer trying to stir up trouble with the crew,

though. No man obeyed his officers more smartly, and he admitted the *Junius Luckenlock* was a good ship so far as ships went.

"It's the ocean in general," he would growl at Old Pop. "The life a man gets into. Ever see a sailor with any education or bank account? What good is a man who can't do nothin' but bend a couple of hawsers? Even a kid could learn that, an' a kid knows how to talk right and what fork to use. Look at me. Just a big dumb swab with a couple of fists. No right-thinkin' girl would want me. I tell you, Pop, *damn* the sea!"

Especially the Red Sea down to Aden. They had a lot of tough luck that run. The sky was blazing brass and the air like a furnace and the galley ran short of lemons and vegetables. The steward chiseling on the food, again. They had to eat beans and tapioca. The water got scummy. The third mate got drunk, walked down an open hatch and fractured his skull. A little Italian ordinary crushed his foot in the chain locker and you could hear him moaning in his bunk all day long. Then one of the engineers twisted a knob in his brain one morning, climbed up out of the fire room, covered himself with talcum powder, and, before anyone could stop him, jumped overboard shouting the Lord's Prayer.

The crew lowered a boat, but two sharks were quicker. Pete Ketherby slammed an oar at a white belly rolling in a swell of reddened brine, and the sweat ran down his jaw like rainwater. That man's last scream would haunt a sailor's dreams for a long time. So would the memory of the Old Man standing at the bow in rumpled pajamas, his face purpled by the sunset and whiskey, coughing out the burial service.

"We commend this body to the deep—"

After that it got to be almost an obsession with Pete Ketherby; and Old Pop was seen to gloomily shake his head. Pete shook his fists. He'd stand at the taffrail and shake his fists at the creaming wake stretching behind their stern. He'd roll cigarettes and fire them overside as if they were bullets he was shooting at the brine.

"Curse you!" he'd mutter at the water. "Whyn't you try to get *me*, eh? You sloppin', heavin' salty hell, you!" And then he'd wave a fist at the smear of the bridge

lolling against the sky. "An' *you*, you rotten hooker, you! Punk of a *ship*! You killed that man! Drove him crazy down below where your ventilators don't let a man breathe. You think you got me, too, do you? Well, you ain't! You an' your lousy sea! I'll get away from you!"

A typhoon was the next thing to hit the *Junius Luckenlock*. The sea got up on its haunches, piled itself into mountains of green glass and smashed those mountains down on the freighter's foredeck. The crew slaved at the pumps with bleeding fingernails. The freighter, loaded with grain, sprung a plate, and you know what happens to wet grain. The cargo swelled like a sponge; the craft sank to her Plymsoil mark; Pete stood watch on the bow with the storm pouring through his hair and savage oaths in his teeth; and Chips, the ship's carpenter, got in the way of a wave that hurled him against a ventilator and broke his back. A. B.'s earning fifty a month worked twenty-two hours a day and saved the grain; but they couldn't save Chips. When they dropped the hook in Aden Chips had to be transferred to a Dollar liner heading north because he was going to die and kept mumbling about wanting to go home.

Pete and Old Pop carried Chips ashore on a stretcher. Pete's jaw was like a vise, and his eyes were hard as pins of metal. "Home!" he choked out to Old Pop. "Poor Chips. He ain't been to his home in Denmark in six years. His wife has probably bummed off with a sausage maker by this time. That's what a sailor gets from the sea. It breaks his back an' busts his home. I'm through with it here an' now."

BUT he couldn't quit in Aden, because Aden was just a clutter of shacks on a hot rock and the only other thing there was a white pleasure yacht tied into the slip like a snobbish lady. Pete told Old Pop he'd rather sail an honest rat out of there than a painted-up, shiny-brassed snake-in-the-grass like a pleasure yacht. He promised to quit in Calcutta.

The freighter pulled out for the India ports that night with Pete and Old Pop holding the auxiliary wheel on the monkey bridge, bareheaded under a velvet sky sprinkled with tropical stars. A golden cart-

wheel of a moon cruised up on the horizon, and after the tempest of yesterday the Indian Ocean was a silken millpond. Running lights sifted a soft red and green haze at either bridge-wing. The foremast swung in dim, lazy arcs against the sky. Somewhere aft of the bridge the Portuguese cook was squeezing plaintive chanties out of an accordion.

Old Pop lit a peaceful corncob. "This ain't so bad, sonny."

Pete made a noise in his teeth as if he was chewing cinders, and his eyes glittered at the moonlit water. "Don't let her fool you, sailor. She's quiet, now, yeah. The dirty, swindlin', double-crossin' scut. Minute your back is turned, though, she'll sneak up an' hit you from behind." He was naked to the belt, and the muscles in his bronzed torso rippled as he hung his elbows on the wheel-spokes and glared hatred at the plowing cutwater. "Honest, Pop, I'm quittin' for good this trip. Get to Calcutta I'll jump ship an' do a Number Ten passage back to the States an' live in a city like a human being. I've promised myself, this time. I—I want to have a wife an' that home with the ice box an' kids an'—well—" he looked at Old Pop, shy as a big dog, "Well, have—love. I wanta make something of myself. The first honest girl I could meet an'—an' fall in love with I—I'll stay ashore the rest of my life. My mind's made up. I hates the sea, an' if I c'n find me a girl—"

"Oh, isn't it just too thrillingly lovely up here—"

That gentle voice spoke from the moonlight behind them, and Pete and Old Pop did an about face, double time. There was a girl. At the same moment the *Junius Luckenlock* jarred from stem to stern—*rram!* Gongs rang. A wild yowl whistled up from the skipper's bridge. The jolt knocked Old Pop off his feet. Pete tangled with the wheel. The girl was thrown forward, headlong into Pete Ketherby's powerful arms. A shower of loose gold covered his face, and a white cheek pressed against his brown one.

IT TOOK the Chief Engineer hours to back the freighter off the sandbar piled there where it shouldn't be by the typhoon. The ship sprained a cylinder head at the

jolt; and old Junius Luckenlock, himself, rushed madly and unexpectedly from the chart room, his sideburns stiff with anger, his little mouth sputtering like a radio. He exorcised the captain.

"Look here, Cap'n Lumm! Inefficiency! Confounded poor crew!" Splutter, splutter, splutter. "My daughter and I no sooner step aboard one of my vessels than something goes wrong. No wonder my line can't show a profit when my sailors don't seem to know how to handle my ships—"

Apologies. The skipper, looking like a baked apple, bawling out the mates. The mates bawling out the bos'n. The bos'n bawling out Old Pop and Pete.

Pete didn't seem to mind. He listened obediently, or maybe he didn't listen at all. He just stood staring up at the sky and now and then touching his cheek. He didn't seem to be there on shipboard. It was queer. Old Pop knew Pete was thinking about the girl with the gold hair and friendly smile, the nice girl in the printed frock; and Old Pop shook his head, sober-eyed. That girl's name was Eve, and she was the daughter of old man Luckenlock, millionaire owner of the line. His was the snobbish yacht tied up in Aden. The typhoon had disruddered the craft; the line owner and his daughter had abandoned her in Aden, boarding the freighter to continue a cruise East. Old Pop had not seen them embark, and Old Pop was uneasy.

"Oh, what fun! On a *freighter*!" He could fancy a young girl saying that. She looked like a good enough sport, too, not like the usual cocktail crowds that hang like barnacles on steam yachts. But a woman aboard a lugger. Old Pop didn't like it. Any more than he liked her father.

Junius Luckenlock soon proved the worst—a ninety karat son-of-a-sea-cook if there ever was one. From that night forward he was a sizzling menace. The fo'c'sle had to goose step in front of him; the skipper had to salute. Luckenlock prowled around like an admiral on a flagship—looking for trouble and finding it. No holidays, no fleck or rust escaped him.

Odd thing of it was his shark eye did not spot the main holiday right under his foxy nose until it happened. Perhaps he was too busy hounding the bridge, harry-

ing the crew and roasting the engine-room because the old teakettle couldn't steam over five knots. Too busy sneaking around looking for flaws to notice how often his pretty daughter was climbing to the monkey bridge, especially when Pete Ketherby stood the helm.

Funny. If Pete Ketherby was working on the fo'c'sle head, sooner or later Eve Luckenlock would be leaning on the rail nearby. If Pete went aft to play with the log line, the girl sauntered aft to see how it was done. If Pete took the wheel on top the girl would be standing by on the bridge-wing, her gold hair blowing. Slow, easy days while the lamed freighter panted down the Indian Ocean. Sunshine, flying fish, cobalt skies. Slow, easy nights of soft indigo and violet stars. Pete. And the nice girl.

Old Pop had eyes. Ears, too. He couldn't help hearing their first talk.

"They call you Pete, don't they?"

"Uh—yes'm."

"Pete what?"

"Huh—Ketherby, miss."

"Peter Ketherby—That's a nice name. I shall call you Pete. Now, Pete, what is that shiny brass gadget, there, with the handle on it?"

"Well—that there's the signal to the engine-room, miss. If the Ole Man, Cap'n Lumm, I mean, is up here—say we're comin' into a port—well—"

You know how it would go. Old Pop did, too. He saw how Pete got to wearing his shirt and combing his hair. How Pete would say "ain't" and turn hastily to "isn't" and get red. Down in the mess room Pete mumbled over his food. "Please pass the salt" instead of "toss the lighthouse." "Tapioca" instead of "fisheyes." "Butter" instead of "grease." And then Pete would sneak a shy little book out of his ditty bag in the fo'c'sle. *Biddle's Etiquette*. Old Pop would be reminded of something tucked away in the bottom of his own sea bag, and look the other way with his old eyes crinkled at the edges.

And then Old Pop would say to himself, "My God!" and, "Naw sir! Not with a millionaire's daughter! Golly Jerusalem! Naw!" and call himself a blundering old busybody. As a matter of record, Old Pop didn't believe it, himself, until it happened. And *how* it happened!

ANOTHER of those Garden of Eden nights when the ocean was a black mirror lit with starshine and moondown had left a greenish penumbra on the horizon where warm winds blew. Away north of the port bow a tenuous strip of coastline. Asia. A thin black fence along the rim of the world to keep mariners from sailing off the edge in the dark. The old freighter swinging down easy swells, trudging patiently along under an umbrella of smoke. Lights glimmering. Another freighter off the starboard quarter—a rakish tramp flying the Swedish flag—had come over the horizon that afternoon and was bearing down rapidly in the dark, apparently headed for the Persian Gulf. Off the sea lane, it was the *Luckenlock's* first sight of a ship in six days. The crew off watch lined the rail amidships, smoked pipes and enjoyed the companionship of the overtaking vessel. The Swede tramp's lights made a cheerful wink in the dark and robbed some of the loneliness from the ocean.

Old Pop had gone topside for a chat with the radio operator.

"Hey, Sparks, who's the Swede comin' up astern?"

"Gonna walk past us, ain't she, Pop? Dunno who she is. Blew the generator on this dam' set today an' can't seem to receive nothin', either. Radio's no good, like everything else on these Luckenlock hookers."

"Easy," Old Pop shushed at Sparks. "If Daddy Luckenlock heard you make a crack like that he'd have your tonsils. He prowls all over this—"

Sparks nodded, looking up from a tangle of wires. "Ain't it so. An' I just been wonderin' what the old lion would say if he knew his daughter has been holdin' hands with a *sailor*!"

"Holding—" Old Pop gasped. "Holding *hands*!"

"An' gazin' at the moon," Sparks grinned. "Right here on this deck. You better tell that A. B. pal of yours to watch his step, or—"

AYELL broke loose on the deck below them. A raging, trumpeting shout that could only issue from the grizzled mouth and nose of a ship-owner. That

yell started feet running in the night. Old Pop darted from the wireless house. The crew ogled from the rail; mates were leaning over the bridge; all eyes trained aft where the deck was dim and shadowy and three figures stood transfixed in the glow of the taffrail lantern. The limber frame of Pete Ketherby, A. B. The girl, a clinging shadow in a white frock. Papa Luckenlock, purple as a rutabaga, prancing in the lantern glow, stamping like an elephant.

"Kiss my daughter! My daughter! I walk back aft and find you embracing my daughter! You infernal, insolent deckhand, you! Dare to—to kiss my daughter! I'll—I'll have you in irons for this, you confounded—"

"But, Papa dear," the girl's voice came sweetly through the barrage, "Pete didn't dare to kiss me. I was kissing *him*!"

Faces looking down from the bridge, peeking from behind stanchions and ladders grinned in silent and delighted applause. Here *was* a show. A common A. B. had smacked the daughter of the line-owner. Maybe the admiral would burst a blood vessel. His face was crimson. He shook. He exploded.

"Well, I'm a—of all the—Eve Luckenlock, you come away from that sailor rat. I won't have my daughter associating with deckhands. No, by God! As for you," he stormed at Pete, "you're fired! You'll go in irons! Why, my daughter is on her way to Shanghai. I don't suppose she told you she was engaged to marry a captain in the diplomatic corps—"

Watching from the deck above, Old Pop felt his heart sink. He saw slow flame crawl up Pete's temples; saw Pete stand there rubbing the egg of muscle on his arm; heard Pete's confused drawl.

"But—but," the big sailor began, "she told me, sir, she told—"

"I told Pete I wasn't going to marry Captain Harrison," the girl cried. "I've just broken the engagement, you see. I'm going to marry *Pete*!"

"Going to marry this sailor!" Luckenlock screeched, reeling. "Don't be a little fool, Eve! You're—you're bewitched! My God! You've let this tropic moonlight go to your head. It's the warm night and these fool stars and—great Scott! I might

have known the first calm night at sea you'd go out of your senses! Marry him, indeed! This punk, sea-going, tattooed deck-hand—"

"He's not sea *going*," the girl defended cheerfully. "He wants to quit the ocean and," she smiled, "have a house with an ice box and—"

"Ice box!"

"He wants a home, and I love him and I'm going to marry him!"

"Wants a home!" Papa Luckenlock screamed. "I'll give him a home. In the forepeak with chains on his neck! You think you're in love with this barefoot fo'c'sle rat, this paint swabber, just because it's romantic at sea, that's all. You don't know what you're saying, Eve!" The man strangled; mopped his mouth; shook a fist under Pete's chin. "What lies have you been telling my daughter? Love, eh? What d'you know about love, you wharfrat! You big sea-going tramp! I know sailors! You stick to your own kind of love! I'll teach you!" Veins jutted on his forehead. He spun, palsied, at the bridge. "Cap'n Lumm!" he hollered. "You know what's been goin' on aboard this ship?"

Bam! What went on aboard the ship right then was a clap of thunder. A clap of thunder that boomed from across the water and struck the bow like a lightning bolt. A sulphureous ball of flame burst in the dark. The freighter shook from jack-staff to fo'c'sle head; smoke boiled at the stars; scraps of iron and kindling flew across the deck. Somewhere a lookout shrieked.

"All hands! Help! *Pirates!*"

PIRATES! Tame enough on paper, but it didn't sound tame on that desolate reach of the Indian Ocean. That Swede freighter was almost alongside, and the men who manned her weren't Swedes. A brass cannon had appeared as if by magic on her bow and, as magically, fifty brown devils in turbans had dropped into boats and were swarming like mad for the American ship. Faces livid with earrings, nose rings, grinning teeth. Fists waving shotguns, pistols, meat axes, clubs, butcher knives.

The crew of the *Junius Luckenlock* forgot the little scene on the afterdeck. Bells

clanged. Lights jumped on. Smeared men boiling out of the fire room hatch, standing dazed, running for cover. The skipper bounding down from the bridge with an armful of rifles. Springfields beginning to thud. A smashing and crashing and howling and yowling going up in the night to a demoniac crescendo. "Fight 'em off!"—"Here they come!"—"Allll hands!"—"Pirates!"—"Guns! Give us guns!"—"They'll board us! Help! Guns!"

There weren't half enough rifles to go around, and the freighter was trapped, and those Arabian pirates knew it. Sparks pounding and cursing at his fizzy wireless set. The Chief Engineer sweating and shouting at the rheumatic engines. A few of the crew happy with Springfields, driving hot lead at the oncoming attack. The rest of the men, stokers, firemen, mess punks, deckhands darting about, grabbing up clubs, hiding, cursing, milling.

Those pirates knew their business. They guessed the radio was out of commission, they knew the engines were weak. Yes, and their waterfront spies had told them about the millionaire white girl who boarded the freighter at Aden; and they swarmed aboard the freighter like so many hellions, screaming for a juicy million to kidnap. But they didn't know about Pete Ketherby.

Old Pop, tumbling down from the bridge with a fire axe in his fists, saw the first batch of pirates come over the taffrail, and he saw Pete go into action. Mr. Luckenlock seemed to have vanished at the first crack of doom, and there was Pete and the girl trapped on the afterdeck with a tidal wave of devils spinning around them. Old Pop hollered like a Choctaw. The crew on the bridge didn't dare shoot for fear of hitting the girl, and it looked as if she and Pete would be minced in a jiffy.

Old Pop saw the pirate leader come over the rail and make a dive for the girl. That big Arab was a first class devil. His face, under a yellow turban, looked like a spoiled beef with great crooked teeth in a grinning mouth. He was six feet five and naked but for a breech cloth; shoulders wide as a bull's; and a monstrous iron bar swing in his fists. In the fire and smoke and wild dark he charged like a rhino,

knocking his wolves to one side, screaming and grabbing the girl's arm. Old Pop saw it all.

HE SAW Pete swing the girl against his side; saw her head buried in Pete's shoulder; saw Pete dodge and duck and waltz and skip and whip a punch that took that pirate leader whok! in his grinning mouth. The grinning mouth turned into a bloody watermelon, and the big pirate screamed like a kicked tiger. His wolves charged at Pete, a stampede of knives, but the big chief screamed something at them that told them not to hurt the girl and sent them in a rush for the bridge.

Old Pop got busy with the fire axe, then. Bullets whistled through the dark from all directions, and bodies came galloping every-which-way. Old Pop stood on the bridge ladder and chopped at brown masks, and had a glimpse of Pete. Pete was fighting, now. Really fighting. He had only one hand, because the other was holding the girl, but that one hand was moving like a piston, smack, smack, smack, beating off that mush-mouthed pirate chief with the iron bar.

Mushmouth was a sharpshooter with the iron bar, too. He had to hit fast and true, and he didn't want to ruin the girl's golden head and spoil the main prize. He vaulted around Pete's left and slapped the bar a thud against Pete's jaw. *Slam!* Old Pop heard that blow thirty feet away; saw Pete's head go down and come up like a cork in a wave. Blood sprang from the tall sailor's lips, a vermilion bruise glowed along his chin. But he lifted an uppercut that went straight through the other devil's guard and landed beautifully on the already ruined mouth. Blood showered; the pirate screamed so hard he dropped five teeth; Pete threw the girl behind him, rushing headlong for the giant; and the battle was really on.

Old Pop wielded his fire axe in frenzy, cutting a path to Pete while the sailors, trapped amidships, fought in a tempest. And the point of the battle is that before Old Pop could get to the afterdeck he saw Pete take five crucifying blows on the jaw from that iron bar. Five times the big pirate's bludgeon bounced off Pete Ketherby's chin, *crash!* Five times Pete

shook those terrible swats off his face and kept on boring in, hurling his big right fist into the Arab's lips, blasting punch after punch until both of them rocked like masts in a gale. They crashed across the scuppers and caromed off ventilators and thrashed down the afterdeck. A battle of giants. Giants fighting for a golden-haired girl.

Pete's fist against the Arab behemoth's crowbar. And the sixth time that bar walloped on Pete's jaw it bent a trifle in the middle and Pete went down. Or, perhaps, he tripped on a deck-bitt. But before he could get up again, his face swollen and streaming, the Arab ox had his paws on the girl.

Old Pop, his own face doing some streaming, was almost there, and he heard Pete's voice like a trumpet.

"Drop her!"

The big Arab swung to lash out with his bar, but Pete soared off the deck like a panther, his fist coming up from the wood in a rocketing arc. The blast pulped the Arab's left ear and spun him into a dervish spin. Old Pop struck out with the axe; missed. The axe buried itself in the deck. Pete sprang to catch Eve Luckenlock just as she crumpled. The Arab chief was doubled against the taffrail, but his boys were coming back along the deck, shrieking like jackals.

"Follow me!" Pete screamed at Old Pop. "Quick!"

Swinging the girl's limp form across his shoulder, he sped for the afterhatch. Old Pop sped after Pete; and the Arab leader, with all hell loose, brought up the rear. It was something to see Pete go down that ladder with the girl on his shoulder. Old Pop hollered himself hoarse. They ducked into a companion and tore up an inside passage and came to the hot door of the fire room. Old Pop couldn't see why they'd gone down there. A swell hole to be trapped in with the Arab chief and all his pirates after them.

"Down the hatch!" Pete squalled.

IT WAS all very confusing to Old Pop, bewildered by the smoke and din, the ungodly suddenness of the row, the amazement of seeing that crowbar bend across Pete's jaw. He only realized that he and

the girl and Pete shinbanged down the ladder into the fire room, that Pete handed him the girl and shouted for him to go up the starboard ladder across the room. Old Pop took the girl, raced across the iron floor, started up the ladder. But Pete Ketherby stayed behind. Old Pop stopped on a high rung and looked down, and a yell came out of his lungs.

The big pirate chief and all the Arab devils in the world were pouring down the portside ladder, and Pete was standing in the middle of the pit to stop them like Horatius at the bridge.

"Come on, you fiends!" he bawled at the pirates. "Come on! Try to get the girl! Try to get past *me* if you can!"

"Pete!" Old Pop shrieked. "Pete—hurry—"

Pete didn't hear. He made a jump at a coal bunker; grabbed a shovel. There was scarcely room to turn around in that pit. About four feet of space between the big iron boilers that loomed over the furnace doors like the fronts of locomotives and the black wall aft. Hotter than a volcano in that space. The stokers had quit in a hurry, leaving their fires full blast. You could read the pressure on the glass steam gauges set in the boiler fronts. It must have been a hundred forty in that fire room.

The temperature went up when the Arab chief and his gang hit the iron floor. That pirate chief came down the ladder like a catamount, his mashed mouth screeching, and made a wild jump at Pete. And Pete sprang. Old Pop saw him jump like a panther, shovel a-swing in his brawny arms. Crash! Straight into the face of one of those big Wilcox boilers the scoop smashed. There was a tinkle of glass, and the brass tubing of the boiler gauge was sheared away like a barbered hair.

On the ladder, clutching the fainted girl, Old Pop saw the thing as if through a drunken dream. Pete clapping a hand over his mouth and nose like a man trying to stifle a guffaw; hurling his muscled frame for the ladder; coming up the rungs under Old Pop, one hand at a time, ferocity in motion. The Arab chief and his wolf gang standing a second-tick in fuddlement, astonished at what Pete had done with the shovel. Then the big Arab screeching, making a flying leap for Pete's feet.

He never caught them. Pete was half way up the ladder by that time. Old Pop was hoisting the girl topside through the hatch.

"Get her out!" Pete was shouting. "Get her away—"

His voice was drowned by another, a more terrible shouting. A fearful, inhuman wailing that bawled up from the assassins on the floor below. Old Pop knew what that was, Pete knew. And you and I know about live steam. Unseen, lethal, deadly as poison gas it spurts from a hole in a high-pressure boiler and scalds human lungs in the unwary.

The giant leader got it first. Threw a hand to his throat, staggered pop-eyed, bawled in agony. And suddenly the press behind him fell backwards shrieking, tumbling together, grabbing, spilling, rolling and coughing. Hot, now, in the fire room. More than hot. The stampede for the ladders was not nice to see. Such a snapping, clawing and gargling, such a monstrous outcry as if the whole batch of them had suddenly gone epileptic.

OLD Pop and the girl were safe in the upper passage; and Pete yanked out his scorched heels and slammed the iron door. Then he fled to port side and crashed that door. In the pit below they were caterwauling. The sound got up to the topmost deck, and the pirates there, hearing it, fled cold. The crew on the bridge had a lot of fun sniping the devils as they swam in the brine. Pete and Old Pop and the girl climbed from the afterhatch, just as Mr. Luckenlock crawled out from under a lifeboat canvas.

Pete leaned on the rail, fingering his purpled jaw, listening to a last echo of gunfire die away. Eve Luckenlock's white arm circled his neck as she woke to consciousness.

"Where—where *are* they?"

Somberly the big sailor nodded his head. "I wouldn't open them fire room hatches for a million dollars."

It looked as if he'd got more than a million anyway. There was the reward for capturing the pirate chieftain, a cut in the prize money for rescuing the Swedish freighter—the buccaneers had taken it a month before—and there was more. A whole lot more.

"Hero of Sea Fight to Wed Society Girl!" That was the headline in the Shanghai paper. The story went on: *"Local elite excited by dramatic marital event to come. Shanghai out to welcome couple. Miss Eve Luckenlock to marry Mr. Peter Ketherby, former sailor on Luckenlock vessels. Love match blossomed on trip east brought to head during terrific fight in which Ketherby practically single-handed, vanquished pirate crew and destroyed feared Arab renegade. Junius Luckenlock welcomes couple with open arms and informs press he is glad to have daughter wed seaman who saves crew from tragic slaughter. Mr. Luckenlock announces he will present couple with family estate and racing stables in Kentucky. Groom to quit sea-life and become gentleman farmer. Wedding to take place early tomorrow at St. Thomas' chapel. Mr. John Anderson of besieged freighter's crew to be best man. Others of the party will be—"*

The story went on and on. There were pictures of Eve and Luckenlock and Pete and the ship and Mr. John Anderson. Mr. John Anderson was, of course, Old Pop, and early tomorrow was today, and Old Pop, sitting in his room in the Anchor Hotel, let the paper fall from his knees and sighed and looked toward his ditty bag in the corner. Then he got on with his dressing—shoes to be greased, store clothes that prickled his arms, shirt, collar, necktie—and the old sailor who could work knots like jewels in vast loops of wet hawser had just finished a seventh attempt on his necktie when the door was knocked.

"Who's outside?" crossly.

A kick opened the door to reveal a wonderful figure standing on the threshold. Here was a bronzed giant moded to the heights of sartorial perfection. Flawless morning coat, carnation in buttonhole. Striped afternoon trousers. Shining top hat.

Old Pop gaped in awe. "Pete! You look swell!"

"Do I, Pop? Well, I—"

"Sure, I know. Feel kinda nervous on your weddin' day, huh?" Old Pop forced a broad grin. "Golly, Pete, am I glad for you! But—say, what you doin' here? Thought I was to meet you up at the big hotel at eight-thirty o'clock. It's only quarter to seven—"

"There's gonna be a mob, Pop. I—I

thought I'd walk down here an' meet you. We—we can sorta stroll back to the church together—have a little walk—"

"Sure. Only—only you can't go walkin' through the waterfront in them fine clothes, Pete—"

"Why not? Let's get goin'. And say," Pete pointed at the corner, "bring your sea bag with you, Pop."

"What for?"

"Well, I got to carry mine." Pete stepped aside and showed his canvas bag standing in the hall behind him. A faint color came to his forehead. "It's the newspapers, Pop. They wanna get a picture of you an' me on the church steps. You know. Couple of sailors in big weddin'. I—" he mumbled something Old Pop couldn't hear.

Old Pop shrugged, picked up his ditty bag, trudged obediently out of the hotel on Pete's heels. They sure looked odd, all dressed up and toting those canvas sacks. This best man business was a little over Old Pop's head, but he was lost in the warm shine of his companion's apparel.

"Pete, boy, you look like a million. Honest. Gee, am I glad for you." Old Pop chattered, gay as a sparrow. Mustn't let Pete know how sorry he was to lose a messmate. "It's great for you, kid. Remember how you used to wish for a home, a little wife? How you allus wanted to leave the sea? An' now you're gettin' a swell gal an' a big estate in Kansas an'—an' you won't never swab no decks again in a blizzard nor wash in a lousy tub. It's like a dream."

If Old Pop's voice grew a little wistful Pete never noticed; and if Pete lapsed into quiet, strolling easily in his marvelous clothes, eyes straight ahead, a bit of a smile on his face, it was only because a chap finds it hard to talk on his wedding morn.

THEY walked up this way and down that; finally the only sound between them coming from boots on waterfront cobblestones. Somewhere off to the right there was a river and water, ship masts spiking against the blue.

Old Pop's toes began to ache. "Gee, pal, it's a long ways yet to the church."

"We'll take a short cut," Pete advised.

A narrow lane between dark walls and little doors. A tough district. Old Pop

suffered a moment of apprehension. He didn't like the looks of the quartet lounging under the beer sign up ahead. Four ragged wharfrats in sweaters. One of them with a bulbous red nose. Drunks. And as Pete and Old Pop hove near them they began to point and sneer.

Old Pop pinched Pete's arm. "Don't pay no attention, lad. The rats are soused."

But something terrible was happening. Pete was stopping in front of the bum with the big red nose. "Don't you like my hat, punk? Then try to knock it off."

Old Pop choked in alarm. At the same moment the red-nosed rat slapped out a hand. Pete's top hat spun across the cobbles, lit in the gutter. Before Old Pop could yell, Pete struck out. His fist whistled at Red Nose's ear, a terrific punch. And missed! Old Pop's cry died in his mouth. For Red Nose, in turn, had launched a punch; and *crack!* that punch landed flush on Pete Ketherby's chin. Pete Ketherby's head went back on his neck. Pete Ketherby's shoulders sagged in the beautiful morning coat. Pete Ketherby's legs folded in the flawless trousers. Eyes closed, mouth ajar, Pete Ketherby fell flat and limp and motionless on the cobbles.

Jaw unhinged, eyes bulging, Old Pop was a statue of amazement and horror. Too late he saw the four come at him, swinging belaying pins, one of them jerking a coil of rope from under a sweater. The fist that tapped Old Pop's ear found him unprepared, and Old Pop went down in black mist.

A BUNK swayed under him. Smells of water, paint, tar. Old Pop lurched awake and sat upright in a fo'c'sle where cockroaches scurried across a blanket and sunlight shimmered in a moving pattern across the ceiling. There was his sea bag swinging on a hook. There was Pete's sea bag beside it. There was Pete leaning at a porthole, his brown head framed against a background of leaping blue and foam-flecked spray. Pete, naked to the belt, barefoot, in faded dungarees. Old Pop exhaled a howl.

"We're at sea! We been *shanghaied*?"

Pete shrugged. "They got us, Pop. We're

bound for Australia. Square-rigger. We better get out on deck 'cause the bos'n on this lugger is a tough baby, an' he's been bellerin' for us to come topside."

Something in the big sailor's voice, in the way he leaned there calmly manufacturing a cigarette then easing ribbons of smoke through his nostrils, got through the mist in Old Pop's head. "Pete!" His tongue moved like a rusty bell-clapper. "Damn *queer*, this is! You, the fighter you are. After the way you took 'em from that pirate's crowbar an' all then—to let just a swab sock you—"

"Yeah?" Pete's voice was soft.

Suspicion flared in Old Pop's eye. He sat stiff on the bunk. "You—you *pulled* that flop! You—you let those rats shanghai us! You—"

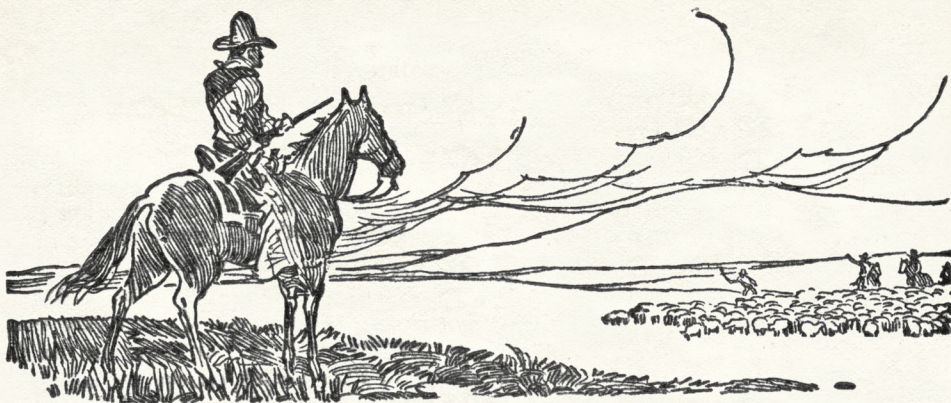
"And it cost me a heap to hire 'em. Sorry they conked you, Pop, but they was only earnin' good money, an'—"

"Well, I'm keel hauled!" Old Pop blurted. "On—on your weddin' day! Are you crazy? An' how about that house in Kansas an' the horses an' dogs an' ice boxes an' the swell girl an' the home you been allus wantin'? You hatin' the sea like you do an' wantin' a home an' a girl an'—"

Pete Ketherby's voice was low; his words came in a slow groping for expression. "She'll go back to that diplomat man, Pop. Better for her, see? More her kind. I couldn't go through with it, Pop. The house—Kansas farm—all that was swell, but—love, I mean—well, lots of times we hate the thing we *really* love, Pop." His eyes were on the horizon. Wind, whipping through the porthole with a smell of salt and tar, mussed his hair. Tawny sinews rippled across his shoulders, and he rubbed a tattooed egg of muscle on his brown right arm, and Old Pop knew he was smiling. "I couldn't leave *her*," he whispered. "I couldn't leave her, Pop. You understand?"

Old Pop nodded without speaking, and looked toward his ditty bag. There was, in the bottom of Old Pop's bag, a faded picture. A girl's picture. Her father had been owner of the fastest clipper fleet in the India trade. She had married a congressman from Iowa.

Old Pop understood.



THE DECISION

By ERNEST HAYCOX

"I'M NOT a bending man," said old Bravo Sharpless. "On this subject my mind closed thirty years ago." Then he added, voice riding the still air, "It will not change."

He sat in a porch rocker, big arms lying idle on spread thighs, a tempered character whose features had a Roman breadth and boldness to them. A silver mustache guarded full jaws; his eyes—only slightly faded by time—held the land under that sharp observance learned from a rougher, trickier past. He was remembering back, young Easterwood realized, to the early day when his will had been absolute throughout the valley and nothing limited it except a pride of being utterly just. That sense of authority was strong in all these old-time cattlemen; there was something a little ruthless about them, a toughness of mind and body. And they never understood at what point in the years their magisterial power had slipped away.

Dan Easterwood scrubbed his red head and his high-built body shifted with a ripple of muscles. "Henry Jewett," he observed, "wants to

see all the owners tomorrow. You'd better go, Bravo."

"Certainly," assented old Bravo dryly. "I shall have pleasure in tellin' him something he already knows."

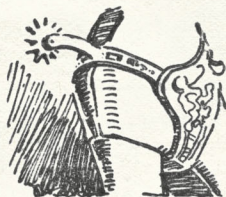
Dan Easterwood lifted his lean cheeks to Elaine Sharpless across the porch. A little glint of humor, electric in its liveliness, brightened the thoughtfulness of his glance. These later years young Dan bitted in his temper severely, but there was always that hint of a reckless spirit beating against discipline. Wildness had not yet died out of him. The valley knew it. Old Bravo knew it. Bravo said suddenly:

"I don't want a fight. But if there is a fight, Dan, it should suit your fancy."

"I'm through with that."

Bravo's voice turned shrewd. "A little piece of property knocks the early nonsense out of a fellow. But it's good for him to look back on his salty days and grin over the bar mirrors he's busted and the hell he's raised. Liquor's no good without plenty of ferment. If you never have to lift your voice at another man it will be because they remember what you could do.

*Sheep on the
Cattle Ranges,
an Age-old
Feud—with a
New Ending.*



Nobody crowds a fighter." He was recalling his own past again. But his eyes, very keen, strayed from man to girl and presently he rose and went into the house.

Dan Easterwood said idly: "I've got to get back to my shanty, Elaine."

The girl rose and they strolled down the yard to Easterwood's horse at the gate. Twilight was thickening across the valley, the pale purple of another night flowed down the side of the near ridge. A little breath of wind crossed Gateway Pass. Elaine stopped, her shoulders round and graceful against the background, the scent of her hair disturbing Easterwood. She was silent, but her gaze lay against him, very direct and understanding.

"I see no clear end," mused Easterwood.

"It isn't that, Dan," said Elaine, gently. This man she knew.

"No-o," he admitted, and afterwards went on in a slow, uncertain manner. "Bravo took me in when I was nothing much but a hot-headed saddle bum. He made a rider out of me. He trusted me to the limit—and I'm obliged to him now for the few acres I own. I'd hate to hurt him."

"There is nobody in the world—not even me—he expects so much of."

"I am not sure—that's the trouble. I'm not sure where this showdown will find me."

There was a simplicity and a directness in her as strong as sunlight; a candor as elemental as old Bravo's. "Do what you have to do," she said. "It took you a long time to find yourself, Dan. A long time to pull away from the influence of others. Don't go back to the old way. I expect a great deal of you too."

He stepped into the saddle and lifted his hat, watching Elaine move toward the house, a faint glow following her yellow head. On the porch she lifted a white arm and her voice was a cool, fluid note in the dark. "Good night." Easterwood went down the valley road at a posting gait, following the tawny ribbon of dust beneath a crusted starlight. The coyotes were mourning along the ridge; meadow smell drifted with the slight breeze. Three quarters of a mile onward he passed two silent figures guarding the lateral road running up to Gateway Pass—two Sharpless men. In the throat of Gateway—which was the valley's only entrance—

burned the crimson herders' fire. Gip Hagan's band of two thousand sheep waited there to enter a range never yet touched by a mutton's sharp hoofs.

ABOUT twenty of them were in Henry Jewett's bank at Prairie; and it was plain to Dan Easterwood how the sentiment ran. Lane Wolff, to whom the sheep were consigned, had three quarters of them on his side—that younger, brisker element to which the beginnings of the valley was but a tradition; a tradition fresh as the bullet scars in Bob Lucy's saloon, yet nevertheless a way of life passing out. Old Bravo, whose memory was sharp with the first winter, the first roundup and the first death, had only a little support. The sense of change was strong in Easterwood's mind, disturbing his difficult thinking; and Henry Jewett's talk was an overtone that thinned and thickened in significance.

"Never mind what has been. No section of this country ever has remained aloof from sheep. Sheep complement cattle, sheep mean the break-up of a one-crop land. Mutton is, or ought to be, the cattleman's ace in the hole. I recognize the old antagonism. But what's that got to do with business? The old free and easy, pastoral stage is going. I can't forever continue to place the deposits of this bank exclusively in cattle loans and you people should be thinking of something besides cattle and wild meadow hay."

Bravo Sharpless looked on, indifferent, amused in his own doggedly unyielding way. Jewett was, Easterwood knew, talking to Bravo alone. The rest didn't count. It was Bravo whose still lingering dominance held his few sympathizers in line; it was a newer generation that, admiring him for what he meant, insistently challenged him. Bravo's question was tolerantly skeptical.

"And who's to pay for all the damage done by sheep to a free range, Henry? How are you performin' the miracle of combinin' oil and water?"

"By fencing," said Henry Jewett, sudden and sharp, as if the worst had to be soon said.

"Fences?" exploded Bravo.

"I have sat here in this office," said Henry Jewett earnestly, "wondering just when dynamite would blow the country to

pieces. Ever think, Bravo, how much of your range you own and how much you hold through pure squatting? When the hoe man comes he'll have along his government maps. He'll see the sections you never bothered to file on and he'll take them. He always has. No, it won't work. Sheep mean fences. Fences mean clear titles, which few of you careless, by guess and by God ranchers can show. That's why I want sheep."

"Ever consider what it takes to get title on some hundred thousands of graze?"

But Henry Jewett could be as daring as old Bravo. He said distinctly, "It isn't my place to tell you fellows the tricks of acquiring government land in quantity. Uncle Sam's been fooled before."

Silence came heavily across the room. Dan Easterwood's attention had been for some moments placed on Gip Hagan who stood beside Lane Wolff; and all the while his resentment grew greater at this unscrupulous, evil-reputationed man's presence. Hagan's record stank. He had no acquaintance with honesty, no right to stand with honest men. Yet here he was, a vulpine wisdom glittering in his obscure eyes and some humor in them, too, of knowing that for once he had such entry. Why, Easterwood pondered, should Lane Wolff, himself straight as a string, have chosen that cavilling creature to handle the sheep?

Bravo said, still amused, "I have heard your sermon, Henry. I knew it before you spoke. You know my answer before I speak. There's never been a woolly in the valley. In my time none ever will be."

Jewett made a quick, irritated gesture. Lane Wolff's anger got the best of his usual suavity. "Just what law do you happen to base that large statement on, Bravo?"

Bravo's biting jaws firmed up. "Law of public opinion, Lane."

"How much of it do you think you represent?" challenged Lane Wolff.

"Enough to keep that band at Gateway Pass."

DAN EASTERWOOD slowly laid aside his faint hope. It was Bravo speaking for Bravo, remembering the past. Save for those few behind him—adhering only through loyalty—Bravo stood alone, unable to feel the change of time. More and more alert, Easterwood watched Gip Hagan's eyes

ferret through the crowd, gathering its mood. He was no fool; he was testing the wind before moving.

Lane Wolff spoke very bluntly. "There's no intention of hurting your feelings, Bravo. But we have a right to do what we damned please with our property. Those sheep have been stopped at Gateway ten days while this palaver's gone on. They can't stay there much longer."

"Turn 'em back to the original owner," said Bravo.

Lane Wolff turned to Hagan. "You still feel up to the job of bringing them in?"

"Yes," said Hagan, and stared inscrutably at Bravo.

Bravo's scorn was enormous. "I've handled ordinary thieves like you before, Hagan. It's a sorry day when your type of brush jumper rubs elbows with civilized company."

"That's plain speaking!" sneered Hagan. "I'll bring those sheep to Wolff's pasture. And how will you stop me?"

Bravo rolled his big body half around and his heavy arm fell across Dan Easterwood's shoulder. "I'm not as young or as quick as I'd like. But this boy—this boy you all know—is my son. How's that for an answer, Hagan?"

The silence was sudden, deep, very taut. Oppressed by it, Dan Easterwood felt inexpressibly lonely. They were all watching him with a penetrating curiosity. He had little pride in his rash past, but he knew what it meant to them now. Against the general scrutiny his face turned impassive. Gip Hagan's narrowing glance was oddly bright.

"If that is so," said Henry Jewett, "I'm very sorry to hear it. Is it so, Dan?"

"I said so, didn't I?" interrupted Bravo proudly.

DAN EASTERWOOD never knew a harder moment. Old Bravo had said: "This is my son." And to the old cattleman every emotion was thereby expressed. In Bravo's creed, no power on earth transcended that tie of announced kinship, and even as he thus indirectly called for help he was announcing to the world his assumed blood obligation to Dan Easterwood, to fulfill which he would go through fire, bankruptcy, the threat of death itself. It was very

real to Bravo Sharpless, very clear. Easterwood, knowing all this, remained silent while the tension of the scene increased. Henry Jewett looked uncertain. Gip Hagan's body was motionless and a straining attentiveness locked his cheeks. Bravo stared at Easterwood, the faintest shadow coming to his eyes. There was only one more thing said. Lane Wolff said it, raggedly, unhappily.

"This can't run on without ending."

The meeting broke up. Bravo Sharpless went to his horse and waited for Easterwood who came out, said, "a little later, Bravo," and turned along the town's single street, striding fast, his slim frame straight, his bronzed face pinned moodily on the ground. He hadn't taken a drink for three years yet he gravitated to Bob Lucy's saloon naturally, and found Norman Griffio, a particularly close friend, waiting there.

Griffio said idly, "What are you going to do about it?"

Gip Hagan came in with a quick hunch of his shoulders and moved the length of the bar, placing his back to the saloon's rear wall. Nothing, Easterwood thought impatiently, ever lessened the self-protecting instinct of a bad one. It was a desperate, feline quality Hagan's kind had at birth, the sign of their hand being doubled up against every other man.

"It isn't the sheep, Norm," he said.

"It is to Bravo."

"No. It's a situation that used to be. It's the past. It's a way that was when Bravo drove his Texas cows across Gateway. You know what he sees when he rides down the road? He sees a fire behind a chuck wagon's tailgate and a circle of men, and a valley that's without a scar. Most of those men are dead, but not to Bravo. He can hear their voices clearer than he hears mine."

Griffio said, "A little drink for you, mister?"

"It isn't the sheep. What's a few woollies in pasture?" He stood up to the bar, both his hands on it, preoccupied and hard pressed by his thinking; a tall man with the hungry gleam of vitality in his gray eyes. "Look beyond the sheep. Over that ridge the world moves along its own giddy way. New times and new things. *That's* what pushes the sheep. It might be fine to live in a world standing still, but it doesn't. Yesterday you and I were a couple of fools burning powder through this saloon. That's gone and we're two different men looking back on the antics of a pair of strangers. What Bravo hates in those sheep is something he can't stop, nor I, nor anybody. And ain't it a hell of a thing that a whelp like Gip Hagan stands at Gateway with his trumpet to announce the new dawn?"

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I never knew a greater man than Bravo," Easterwood said gently. "What would I be doing now if he hadn't backed me up three years ago?"

Lane Wolff came in, stopped, moved his hands nervously. "Now, look. Where do you stand?"

"What," demanded Easterwood quite curtly, "is Hagan's share in this?"

"Nothing, Dan. He was hired by me to do nothing but bring that band through Gateway."

Easterwood's eyes went severe. "Why did you pick a thief like that, the sight of which is a slap in Bravo's face?"

Lane Wolff spread his hands, a gesture at once full of meaning. "Who else would take the job? Now, your silence in the bank means anything. What does it mean? I haven't seen a gun on you for a long time. If you make it a scrap, it will be a scrap."

There was silence again, attention again.

The growing crowd looked on. Gip Hagan's slouched body stiffened a little at the bar's end and he stared at Easterwood with



a renewal of that painstaking, searching attentiveness; missing nothing. Easterwood shook his head, said to Norman Griffo, "I'll see you later," and cut sharply out of the place. Nooning light lay in the sultry bands across the prairie, the eastern ridge was so wrapped by haze as to seem melting along its peaked summits. A man spoke discreetly. "Henry Jewett wants to see you, Dan—" But Easterwood got to his saddle and trotted south. One mile that way and a half mile west brought him to a tar-papered shanty and a windmill seated in the bottom of a gulch running off the ridge.

HALF a dozen cows stood motionless beside a dry trough. Easterwood turned on the tank faucet, let his horse try the water; then unsaddled and slapped the beast toward a corral. Spirals of dust lifted behind his heels across the yard; inside the single-roomed shanty a dense heat sucked the resin smell from the boards, the creosote odor from the roof paper. He ate two cold slices of bacon and a piece of bread, dipped out a drink and then crossed the yard again, this time to a higher point in the gulch. Beneath three pine trees lay the timbered foundations of a permanent house. Here he sat, staring into a valley's surface turned fluid by the lifting, atmospheric waves.

Occasionally the faint outline of a pasture fence was visible, but beyond those little compounds the tawny earth ran unbroken. Out of Gateway Pass three times a week wheeled the Antelope stage, as it had since 1871, into that Prairie City which had its life in cattle and cattlemen and the cattle code. There it slumbered beneath the ridges, a valley in which much of the freshness and wildness of Bravo's early day remained.

Some of it would always remain, yet Easterwood felt the change. Being young, he was a part of the change. Thoughtfulness had come to him late, late enough to leave him profoundly regretting his wilder, wasted years, to nag him with the knowledge that at twenty-eight he was beginning where he should have begun at twenty-three; and nothing but a black, self-directed anger was in him when he realized how long Elaine had waited, saying nothing, for him to mature. The steady, timeless patience of the girl was a bright flame burning

through darkness—a light that would never die. He remembered the day he had seen what she had always seen; and that day the wild Dan Easterwood broke his last whisky glass over Bob Lucy's bar.

So because his past folly was bitter to him now he clung doggedly to what his thinking kept dredging up. Bravo's world was dying—that fine, careless, hearty world; and change was creeping across the Gateway in the shape of a thousand sheep guarded by a scoundrel. Dan Easterwood saw it clearly. In the new order he meant to make his stake as Bravo had done in the old.

"No more wildness," he said; and his long fingers curled restlessly about a cigarette. No ease came to him with the decision, for he remembered Bravo's words in the bank. Rising, he put himself reluctantly to work, hauling native rock out of the upper gulch's end for the walls and porch of the new house. Beyond five he knocked off, fed his stock and himself; drenched a little milk down the throat of a sick calf in the barn; and closed the pasture gate. It was six-thirty when he started for town. A hundred yards from the shanty he turned to look back, a puzzled crease across his forehead, and then he went for his forty-four and tucked it inside his waistband. He didn't know why; there was no logic in it.

PAST sundown he reached Prairie and only stopped when he saw the man who had come to him with the message from Henry Jewett and hadn't gotten a civil reply. He reined over. "Sorry, Bill. There was something on my mind." The man looked up, wondering, but Dan Easterwood cantered north along the road, through the rippling colors of twilight. When he came to the Sharpless ranch—the brazen beating of a blacksmith hammer pulsing across the quiet—he found old Bravo seated in the porch rocker, watching day go as he had done for two generations. Elaine slipped from the house, a sudden hope turning her direct eyes luminous.

"What have you heard?" asked Bravo.

"Nothing new."

"I've got two men watching the pass," said Bravo quietly.

Easterwood stood at the foot of the steps, one leg halfway up and his arms lying across it. The shadows were drifting rapid-

ly, like the rise of a silent water. Summer's fragrance was quite heavy. Elaine, stillness seizing her slender, graceful body, watched him closely. She had always understood him; and she knew now. He said to Bravo:

"Your thirty years are behind you. Mine are ahead."

Bravo straightened as a man will who hears strange intrusions in a familiar air. His big hands lifted from his thighs and settled again. The rocker squealed. "What was that, son?"

"It isn't the sheep, Bravo. Something else is pushin' across Gateway we'll never stop. There is a time for all of us—for you in your turn, me in mine, and for the man coming after me. Nothing stands still. We've got to go with the particular tide that carries us."

Bravo stirred. Into the succeeding silence the blacksmith's hammer laid bell-like echoes; then there was a piney breeze flowing down from Gateway. Bravo's voice was as arid as thirst. "I thought your attitude at the bank was a little faint."

"I have come to have a little wisdom—and that's your work, Bravo. What if we go yonder and lay smoke on the ridge? Nothing's settled. The sheep will be coming just the same. Such as I've got is yours. But this won't work. It won't work."

"I have never asked an unwilling man to serve me," said Bravo, and fell speechless again. Easy-spoken as it was, the phrase burned into Easterwood. That laconically Bravo had expressed the depth of his disappointment, his judgment of another's failure, his closing of a deep affection. Through the cloying dusk Easterwood saw Elaine's hand strike a white track to her cheeks and fall.

"When I first saw the valley," mused Bravo gently, "the grass was waist high. The antelope was thick and old Homly's band of Umatillas made camp where this house stands. I made a treaty with Homly, saw him go and all his people go. Wild horse bands used to raid our tame stock and lead 'em away. It was that open. All the men of my first crew were from Texas, wonderful boys that could endure anything, meet any proposition. Elaine came along pretty recent, but her brother Jeff was the first child born here and the first to die. I recall riding sixteen miles that night to the

nearest neighbor, which was the Carson family, and killing the horse doing it. Mrs. Carson rode back with me. We never slacked out of a gallop that whole distance. Looking at it now I'd say Elaine's mother saw the best of it before she went—the very best of it. You said you'd do a thing, and you did it. You could lay ten thousand dollars in gold on the trail and it would be there when you came back. I knew it all—wonderful people—wonderful country. The grass was mighty green."

Dan Easterwood said, "I guess that's all, Bravo."

Bravo pushed himself out of the rocker and walked heavily through the doorway, not looking back. His voice emerged from the house, infinitely courteous and exclusive. "Yes, sir, that is all."

Dan Easterwood swung sharply from the porch and strode to his horse, the shadows suddenly very dark. Elaine's voice arrived with a throaty imperativeness and she ran after him. "Dan—wait!" She stopped him at the gate, her hands pulling his shoulders down, the pale oval of her face sharpened by fear. He had never seen fear in her before. "If he leaves here—if he goes out to the pass—I'll not expect to see him alive again."

"I have tried to use my head," was Easterwood's bitter reflection. "It seems a poor substitute for all he's done for me. I've lost Bravo's faith, Elaine." He felt the strength of her hands on his shoulders; then that pressure relaxed and her arms dropped. Her talk was a mere murmur, as low as the echo of that water in the irrigating ditch behind the house.

"I know you both. Do what you've got to do, Dan." Her slim body went swaying through the shadows. Easterwood watched her blur and dissolve into the night and then he got to the saddle and trotted off. Five years' hope lay in ruins back there by the gate and nowhere was the least light. Onward, he passed the two men stationed on the Gateway road; and above, in the notch of the pass, the sheepherders' fire seemed to hang out of the sky like a crimson signal.

When he reached Prairie he walked directly to the sheriff's office, finding that official at his desk, bathed by a floodlight's pale glare. He looked instantly, sharply at

Easterwood and his eyes, full of trouble, began to narrow. He spoke before Easterwood had the chance.

"No, Dan. No. There's no help to be had from me. When neighbors fall out all the rules are down the spout. Ain't anything as unholy and unnatural and murderous as that. God help the man steppin' between. I ain't. I'm out. I'm ridin' away."

Strain raddled his cheeks; he was nervous, short of confidence. Seeing it, a little remnant of faith expired in Easterwood's heart and he cut about on his heels and headed for the saloon. The moment he pushed open the doors and found the crowd there an old feeling ruffled the back of his neck. Those men knew. The tribal intuitions of a kill to come had gathered them as surely as a written summons. Along the smoky reaches of the hall he saw the flash of eyes, the restlessness of bodies, the drawn and remote thoughtfulness. At the far end of the bar Gip Hagan's head bowed and rose and bowed again to accent his talk with two other men. Norm Griffio came from a pool table, cue and chalk in his hands.

"Listen. Are you in this or out of it? If you're in, I'll pick up a hand."

"You'd be a fool," muttered Easterwood. "We've been fools before. I can remember when we—"

"Two other men," interrupted Easterwood roughly. "Two other men in another time. That's all gone. Didn't I tell you nothing stood still?"

LANE WOLFF entered Lucy's as if he had been pushed and came straight at Easterwood. He looked dragged out. The strain had rubbed his nerves raw, as it had the sheriff's; his eyes were too bright. His right hand struck the air insistently before Easterwood.

"I've got to know," he said in a ragged voice, "what your intentions are."

"Was there an idea to move the sheep tonight, Lane?"

Lane Wolff said, "no." His tone pushed it out and dropped it. It rang queer, but Easterwood's attention had gone back to Gip Hagan and the pair Hagan talked so earnestly with.

"Hagan," said Easterwood, "has got himself a couple recruits. It's a regrettable bunch of dogs you're lettin' loose to bay across the valley, Lane."



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"What are you going to do?" insisted Wolff.

"Give me credit for not being afraid of a scrap," said Easterwood, knowing he was answering not only Wolff but all the valley as well. "But I can't stop the sheep. I can't stop the hands of the clock. I won't try."

Relief swelled Lane Wolff's face out of shape. He said, emotionally: "Thank God for that, Dan!" Easterwood's clinging glance caught the growing confidence in Hagan's odd eyes, the ironic amusement. Norman Griffo, utterly impassive, slowly chalked his cue while the abraded powder fell to the floor. A little murmur went breathing through the saloon and a man said, not meaning it to be heard apparently: "Well, he's through with the Sharpless family now." Then the murmuring ceased and the hush was greater than it had been before. Easterwood swung, impelled by the change of Lane Wolff's expression, and found Bravo standing there. Nothing about him had changed.

"I wish," said Bravo, "to amend a statement made in the bank. I will ask no man to do what he is not willing to do. I will personally and alone oppose any effort made to move the sheep down from Gateway."

HE TURNED immediately and a little after Easterwood heard his pony drumming down the road. Something happened on the edge of Easterwood's vision just then and he looked across Lane Wolff's shoulder in time to catch the quick exit of Hagan and the two others through the back way. He dropped his eyes to Lane Wolff, asking again:

"You're not moving those woollies tonight, Lane?"

"No," said Lane and pivoted away.

Dan started for the door. Norman Griffo called, "Did I hear you say you wanted company?" Easterwood looked back and got Griffo's careless, devil-take-the-hind-most grin. It was, he thought somberly, a final appeal of the rash and heedless past. The two of them could stand at Gateway and laugh, for a little while, in the face of time. They had done it before; it had seemed good. But he shook his head and walked on, reaching his horse and rode slowly south toward home. A little beyond

town, five hundred yards or so, he came to the paralleling line of Lane Wolff's pasture fence. The gate was open.

He didn't think of it then. But afterwards, near the end of the fence the fact exploded through his preoccupation and pulled him to a stop. He trotted back to the gate and sat there looking at it, realizing finally that Lane Wolff had lied to him—a friendly lie. This much was clear; the rest was not. He touched his spurs to the pony and cantered through town, on down the road toward Gateway. It was a mile and the herders' fire was a vivid point against the silvering moonlight. Halfway, he saw a pale, uneven stream trickling along the black sides of the ridge—which was the sheep, in motion at last, moving into Bravo's beloved valley. Ahead of the band three men were riding at a careful pace; and after that Easterwood's traveling glance raced back to the main road to find a group of riders waiting there. Sharpless men, ranked silently together, waiting for the sheep.

One of them didn't wait. One of them said a crisp, calm word—its echo clear in the quiet—and rode casually from the group, toward the three advancing down the incline. Wheeling through the sage and scab rock, he placed himself athwart the road they were using and there stopped. Easterwood drifted within two hundred feet of that road, recognizing Bravo's big shape barring Gip Hagan's way. A clear, rough call came from Hagan. "Sharpless, what's your men doin' back there?"

Old Bravo said gently, "I'll handle this."

"If there's going to be any shooting," said Hagan, "I want to know it now."

"Why do you suppose I'm sittin' here?" asked Bravo.

It was a splendid thing to see—that courage which never had known a doubt and depended on no outside strength. It was as fixed as the stars, as inflexible as rock; the last of a tradition too strong to bend, too stubborn to last. As for himself, Dan Easterwood looked on with the feeling of a man standing in ruin. After twenty-eight years he had made a decision that was sound, a decision uncolored by the recklessness of his younger days. It was right, utterly right. Yet, he knew he would be remembering it darkly the rest of his life. There wasn't any-

thing left. Old Bravo's faith in him was gone; the regardless loyalty of youth was gone. Elaine was gone. What could she have to do now with a man who had refused a call as deep as human nature could form? There wasn't anything left save the cheerless comfort of a principle.

GIP HAGAN'S talk was suddenly bold. "Old man, you're wrong. You're standin' on a public road, interferin' with private property. You're out of date and no law in this state will support you. Better step aside."

"Gip," said old Bravo, "I made most of the law around here in my time and I have hung braver scoundrels than you. Even the tough ones are gone and there's nothin' left but a few chicken-thief brush skulkers like you. I recognize the change."

The sheep were flowing down. They wouldn't ever stop, Easterwood realized. There was a power pushing them on that no man could stand against. It was a cold fact, yet there Bravo stood, challenging something he didn't understand, or wouldn't understand. It was the last of a world.

"Who's that over there?" called Hagan.

That was when it came to him, a remembered phrase from a book. "A world well lost." And the sense of it was like light and warmth to him; it was the answer. The valley knew he would never stand against sheep and now the valley might as well know that his last act was a bow to Bravo who had loved him. What did it matter where he stood, having lost everything? He touched his pony quietly and rode toward Bravo.

"Who's that?" challenged Hagan.

The old day was back for a moment with its fine feeling that nothing mattered except the faith of stout friends. There was nothing in this for anybody—the sheep would go on. All that counted was the discharge of an obligation to a great man. He was beside Bravo, turning. Bravo's serene face came around, unmoved.

"I thought you'd see it," he said quietly.

"Easterwood!" cried out Hagan. "If there's goin' to be shootin' I want to know!"

Easterwood said nothing; nothing was left for him to say. But old Bravo's words rolled out. "Turn your sheep, Hagan."

HAGAN'S body swayed as if he bent to speak to one of the two men beside him. Easterwood murmured to Bravo, "Watch this," and brushed back the skirt of his coat. Then the soft silence was riven by a swelling roar. All the horses were pitching. A gaunt streak of muzzle light lanced the shadows and Easterwood heard old Bravo sigh profoundly and fall. The rage in him went cold and ferile and he held up his gun and deliberately sighted it while Hagan's weapon battered at the night and wrecked the peace of the far slopes. Easterwood laid a sure aim, dead to everything but the necessity of that, and squeezed down on the trigger. The detonation rushed headlong into the prairie and a queer roiled silence trembled along the earth. One of Hagan's men was speaking urgently. "That's enough, Easterwood. Don't fire again." Hagan wasn't speaking. He had dropped off his horse, dead.

"That's enough," repeated the man wildly.

Bravo's crew was coming on from the road, cursing out their feelings. Bravo's staunch body was face down on the ground, one arm under the big head. His hat had fallen and the white of his hair was very plain in the moonlight. Easterwood stared until a strange sound disturbed him and afterwards he raised his eyes to the sheep, seeing them for the first time. They were surrounding him and surrounding Bravo, drifting on to the main road, a gentle and bleating tide as relentless as destiny. Bravo's crew rode ruthlessly through the sheep. One hand said: "Get those—"

"Let the mutton go," muttered Easterwood. "It'll go anyhow. Let those two fellows alone. What have they got to do with it? Don't make a bad mistake worse." He descended and took hold of Bravo. The cursing of the crew was very bitter; and a man came along to hold Bravo and cry openly while Easterwood climbed back to the saddle. He brought Bravo up in front of him and started home.

A little stench of powder remained in the air, blending with the strong smell of wool. The sheep were setting down the road toward Prairie and Lane Wolf's pasture, sharp hoofs kicking up the dust. On the far edges of the band he saw the herders as so many wary shadows. Bravo's crew followed

behind him. All life was full of irony, but there was no greater irony than this: Bravo was dead and Hagan was dead of a quarrel so bitterly near to them while he who had lost everything remained alive. He was thinking of that when he rode into the Sharpless yard.

ELAINE waited on the porch, warned by the firing, one white arm holding to a porch post. A rider held Bravo while Easterwood got down and then Easterwood carried the old cattleman into a dark living room. He stumbled against a chair, he stopped beside a couch, and laid Bravo on it. The crew hadn't come in. Elaine's body was a vague shape against the light of the window. He couldn't hear her breathing; he couldn't see her move.

"Hagan shot him," said Easterwood. "I shot Hagan. The sheep are in the valley. I wasn't trying to stop them, Elaine. That's all. That's the end of it."

She wasn't crying, but she swayed and when he caught her he felt the cruel shuddering of her muscles. Yet as long as he had known her, and as long as he was to know her, this was the moment when he was to see clearest the strong flame of her spirit.

She was old Bravo's girl, following her light as far as it led and to wherever it led; and not even this tragedy could dim her changeless hope or the simplicity of her thinking.

"No, Dan," she murmured through that tearless grief. "He had his world. We have the right to ours."

THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

(Continued from page 6)

tuning up several of the more popular handguns!

DDOUBLE action shooting (cocking the hammer and releasing it by pressure on the trigger alone) is a very difficult method of shooting to master and takes about ten times more practice than single action shooting where the hammer is cocked by the thumb. Ordinarily, double action shooting should be used only for defense work at very short range. As a matter of fact the majority of law enforcement officers are instructed to use this type of shooting only in combat at very close range! On the other hand there are a few shooters who make a hobby of double action target work and it is entirely possible to become very good at it—but as I said, it really takes a lot of somewhat expensive practice if factory ammunition is used!

The fellow who loads his own ammo can get in a lot of shooting without having to mortgage the homestead to buy cartridges. The .38 Special is fairly easy to reload (as are most caliber cartridges) and excellent practice ammunition may be made up at a great saving. The necessary equipment suit-

able for this purpose is surprisingly inexpensive. A tool that will do a good job of actual reloading is on the market for around \$10. It will make as good ammo as a \$40 or \$50 (or more) tool—but it is a little slower and requires more careful operation.

I do a great deal of my reloading in steps, usually spending from a half hour to an hour several evenings a week. This way I keep a good supply on hand without noticeable time element.

To get back to our general purpose gun (which includes self-defense)—its sights should be arranged so it will shoot dead on at about 25 yards. Most target shooters have their gun adjusted so that when sighting at the bottom edge of the bull's eye, the bullets land in its center. The idea of having a utility handgun sighted in to hit where it is aimed is easy to understand—you just naturally want to hit where you look, and not have to mess around figuring over or under holding.

Always remember this—any gun is useless unless you can hit what you are aiming at. And that takes practice! See you next issue!

*The Geologists Always Had Their Rock
Box Handy*



GEIGER COUNTER

By JOHN E. KELLY

A GEIGER COUNTER is an electronic instrument devised to detect radioactivity. For mining purposes it is built in portable form, to be carried by geologists and prospectors seeking uranium and thorium ores. A recent model weighs only two pounds.

The instrument clicks or buzzes when radioactive material enters its electronic field, the faster and louder the richer the ore. For comparison a control sample of ore, whose radioactive properties are known, is carried by a member of the party. It is kept out of the Counter's range of sensitivity (a few feet) except when testing.

POP SAWYER brought bowls of mutton stew to the pair in hunting togs. Curiosity sharpened the small black eyes behind his steel-rimmed spectacles.

"Ain't you the fellers stopped here this

mornin'?" he asked, setting coffee on the scuffed oilcloth counter. "I figured you was drivin' through."

"Might better we did." The younger stranger speared a potato with a battered fork. "That Todden's the crotchiest galoot in a month o' Sundays!"

Sawyer's gnarled hand cupped an ear. "Hearin' 's poorly lately," he interrupted. "Who done what." He shot an alerting glance at the quartet lounging across the room.

"Peter Todden, that old guy batchin' up at the forks of the creek," the other explained. "Ordering us off his bramble patch like he really had something—" He broke off, wincing, as a boot heel drove into his ankle.

"Stow it, Gab!" His assailant arose, tossing a dollar on the counter. "Come on, before we lose the whole day."

As the shack's door banged behind the

khaki-clad figures, Sawyer drew the loungers to him with imperious flailing arm.

"Now's your chanct, boys!" he cried.

"Chanct for what, Pop?" A hulking youngish man lowered his bulk on one of the vacated stools. "What you so het up about?"

"Bide Sloat, was you behind the door when brains was passed out?" Sawyer demanded. "What's Todden got that you're cravin'?"

"A crock o' gold under his chimbley, as any fool knows," Sloat retorted. "But old Pete ain't turnin' it loose, less'n we was to kill him."

"What's stoppin' you?" barked Sawyer. "The little runt can't stand off no four."

Bide encircled his stubbled throat with splay fingers. "I ain't hankerin' to jig in a hemp collar," he said dryly. "Ever'body's heerd Red here soundin' off on the old rooster's gold—Sheriff'd nail us soon as the body's found."

Sawyer hushed Hacrag's protest. "Let be, Red!" he snapped. "That was yestiddy. You fellers just got you an alibi, water-tight and brass bound."

Sloat corrugated his low forehead. "Not me, I ain't," he muttered confusedly.

"You set right there and heerd it!" Sawyer banged a spoon in exasperation. "When the sheriff comes nosin' round, five of us all swear them strangers 'lowed they had a ruckus with old Todden. They didn't let on what they done to Pete. But you seen how when the young'un blabbed about Todden orderin' 'em off'n his land, his sidekick jumped like he was snake-bit and rushed him outa here. That's enough for the law."

"And for me!" Sloat made for the door. "C'mon, boys! Todden's a dead duck right now if he don't come across."

"Hol' on, Bide!" old Sawyer yelled. "It's my idee! Promise to cut me in?"

Sloat's words rumbled over the stutter of his jalopy. "You'll get yours, Pop!"

MACPHERSON banged shut the lid of his Geiger counter.

"Not a flutter all afternoon, Gabby!" Disgust flattened the geologist's voice. "The only likely spot we've tested was at that old crab, Todden's."

"Let's go back there," offered his assist-

ant, and work through the brush out of sight of the cabin."

"We'd have to see Todden if we found anything," MacPherson demurred. "After his morning performance, if he doesn't cut loose with buckshot, he'd want a million for the mining rights. Was there any other place worth trying, I'd let Todden rot," he sur-rendered reluctantly, turning downhill toward their car.

A second sedan, battered and muddy, was parked behind theirs in the rutted lane. A lanky man peering into MacPherson's car turned to meet them.

"Was you fellers at Pete Todden's this mornin'," he hailed.

"Oh, oh!" MacPherson groaned. Under his breath he spoke swiftly to Galen. "That's probably Todden's lawyer, guessing our business, come to drive a tough bargain. Whatever you do, Gabby, don't mention uranium."

To the newcomer MacPherson made terse acknowledgement. "Yes," he said, "but not long enough to see anything."

"You'll be takin' a good look this time,"—the lanky man's voice hardened—"and mebbe you can explain what you see."

"See what?" Galen echoed.

The lanky man flipped a homespun label to show a nicked star.

"Murder," said the sheriff flatly. "The murder o' Peter Todden."

WITH the peace officer crowding their heels, sinewy hand hovering over the revolver in his waistband, MacPherson and Galen pushed through the rickety door. Four men seated in Todden's frowsy hovel arose baying at sight of the strangers.

"You've nailed 'em, Sheriff Bell," they chorused. "Them's the ones knocked off pore ol' Pete!"

MacPherson followed Sloat's stabbing finger. Peter Todden's body sprawled grotesquely before the wrecked chimney place. Bloodied brains leaked from his shattered skull into the ashes of his last fire. The hermit's pipestem legs in work jeans lay half buried under cobbles and rubble torn from the hearth. Beneath the back log a hastily dug pit held the outline of its looted treasure crock.

The sheriff prodded MacPherson out of

his brown study. "When was you fellers here?" he demanded.

The geologist saw Galen's lips part. Give Gabby his tongue and he'd spill their secret. "About mid-morning," MacPherson said hastily, to forestall his helper.

The peace officer caught the maneuver. His voice rasped. "How soon after you come did you meet up with Todden?"

Galen would not be denied. "An hour, maybe longer," he replied.

"Hey?" barked Bell. "What was you doin' meantime?"

"We-uns figger Ol' Pete was down to the spring gettin' water, Sheriff," Sloat interposed, "and when he come back he found these fellers diggin' fer the crock. Todden musta tried to stop 'em and they mashed his head with that big stone yonder."

"Why, you—" Fists swinging, Galen made for Sloat. MacPherson lunged to restrain his raging aide. The control sample of uranium ore in Gabby's pocket swung close to the Geiger Counter hanging from the geologist's shoulder. The small box ticked furiously.

"Hey, what's that?" cried the sheriff.

"What's that thing for?"

Obsessed with preserving his secret, MacPherson snatched at a vagrant thought.

"It's a lie detector," he replied.

"Like city cops use to force confessions?" Bell mouthed the phrase. "I never seen one. How do you work it?"

"It buzzes when it nears—" began Gabby eagerly.

"When it hears a lie," MacPherson cut in, woodenfaced.

"It sure buzzed like an ol' he rattler-snake when Bide 'lowed you bashed Todden's head in," the sheriff mused.

"Bide," the peace officer addressed Sloat, "are you sartin things was jest like this—" his left hand swept toward the littered hearth "—when you fellers come in? Pete might o' tripped on them spindly legs o' his'n and cracked his head open on the chimney stones. Anybody findin' him a-lay-in' there could have dug up the crock."

Admiration gushed from Sloat. "You're there with the brains, Sheriff!" he cried. "Thet's how them fellers done it."

"There ain't no other diggin', though," doubt clouded Bell's face. "Tain't hardly

"It's no mystery to me!"

SAYS STAN WARREN, PRIVATE EYE



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likely strangers'd hit it first crack out o' the box. But there's folks around here claimin' to know where Pete had the crock hid at."

"None that I ever heerd tell of," Bide protested.

"Then you're deaf!" the sheriff snapped. "When I locked you boys up a month ago, you wasn't too likkered up to hear Red Hacrag blabbin' about Pete's gold crock."

"I done no such thing!" the redhead shouted. "I allus figured Pete was pore as Job's gobbler turkey. I never laid a hand on him."

MacPherson shifted his weight, surreptitiously swaying toward Gabby. The Geiger Counter clicked loudly in the sudden silence.

"So you done it, Red?" Bell said heavily, drawing clanking metal from his coat. "Put your arms out front, I got to handcuff you."

"No, ye don't!" Hacrag sprang back against the wall. "I won't be no goat, we was all in this together."

"Ain't that plumb pitiful, Sheriff?" Sloat's voice was compassionate, man to man. "Red's teched in the head, for sure. He's been actin' queer lately, and when he wasn't around this mornin', we-uns went a-lookin' fer him. We met up with him comin' away from Todden's. Red 'lowed Pete had a ruckus with a couple of strangers. We come to help and found pore Ol' Pete a-layin' like you see and the place all tore up." Bide shook his head sorrowfully. "I can't rightly believe Red done it."

"Nor I never!" Hacrag panted. "You knowed me all yer life, Sheriff. You seen me a mite likkered up, mebbe, or stompin' some feller when my knife broke, but I ain't never been took up fer a killin'. You got no call to plague us home folks on the say-so of that newfangled gadget. You don't even know them strangers."

"Hey, that's right!" Bell swung on MacPherson. "Why was you totin' the liar box when you come to see Todden?"

LACKING plausible reason, the geologist stood mute.

The sheriff gave him his answer. "You aimed to use the box to make Pete tell where his gold was hid," he accused.

"Geiger Counters don't work on gold, only on—" Galen began, met MacPherson's glare and hushed awkwardly.

"Only on what?" Bell snapped, turning to the youth.

The geologist's nerves crisped. Mention of uranium would set off a prospectors' rush, ruining their careful study. Striving for calm he moved between the sheriff and Galen. The Counter buzzed.

The sheriff drew his gun. "I ain't sartin yet which o' you killed Pete," he said, swinging the Colt to cover all within the cabin, "but I'm all-fired sure you're all liars." He jerked a peremptory thumb toward the strangers.

"Line up alongside Bide's boys," Bell said, "so's I can keep an eye on ever'body to oncet."

MacPherson and Gabby obeyed, avoiding contact with the quartet by crowding into the corner behind the door. The geologist swung the Counter to his off shoulder, keeping their two bodies between the instrument and Gabby's ore.

ALIGHT motor stuttered to crescendo, choked and stopped in the bush behind the cabin. The sheriff stiffened.

"Only a feller knowin' the country'd chance the back trail," he muttered. Holding his gun leveled, Bell swiveled his gaze through the hut's single window.

"Been wonderin' how to get you-all to the lock-up," he said with evident relief. "Here's a feller I can deputize."

Footsteps approached at a half-running pace. The door was thrust violently inward, banging upon Galen's toes and forehead. Pop Sawyer rushed into the cabin, making for the hearth. Through eyeglasses dimmed by transition from the sunlit glare without, he did not note the geologists in their corner, the sheriff standing aside toward the farther wall.

Sawyer prodded Todden's limp shape. "The ornery old coot asked for it," he said callously. "Hand over my divvy, Bide!"

Sloat made a covert warning gesture. "Them strangers that et at your place, Pop, musta done in Ol' Pete," he said loudly.

"You can't flimflam me, Bide!" Sawyer retorted, extending an avid hand. "Come across!"

"We-uns found Todden like this and called the sheriff," Bide said desperately. "He's here now, right behind you."

Bell ranged beside Sawyer. "How come

you knowed Pete was dead, Pop?" he demanded. "What's that 'bout your divvy?"

"I was only funnin'," the old man returned smoothly. "Ever'body knows 'bout Pete's crock and seein' all the boys here in the cabin, I reckoned somebody'd found it."

The sheriff brushed that aside. "Step out here, you two," he ordered. "Not too clost," he warned, as MacPherson and Gabby came forward. The Colt moved in a lethal arc before them.

"Now, Pop, tell me," Bell asked, "you know these strangers?"

Sawyer stared owlishly at the two in khaki. "Tenderfeet," he said contemptuously. "I never laid eyes on them two varmints before."

"But, Sheriff," Pop added vindictively, while his black eyes raked Sloat, "I heerd Bide an' his boys was fixin' to go gold huntin' with city fellers, and mebbe they ganged up on pore Ol' Pete. You offerin' a reward fer the killers?" A collective snarl spat from Sloat's quartet.

"He'p me and I'll see you get what's comin' to you," Bell promised. Pop grinned complacently but his lips thinned at the officer's next words.

"Fore I deputize you, Pop," the sheriff said, "I got to know more 'bout that divvyin'. Was you in cahoots with Bide to rob Todden?"

"Cahoots with Bide?" Sawyer's voice rose self-righteously. "Sheriff, Ol' Pete 'n me was good friends! Time and again I warned him Sloat was fixin' to get his crock. Finally I talked him into puttin' his gold safe, and I come out today to ride him to the bank." His voice broke. "'N 'pears like I was too late."

Revolted by such cool hypocrisy, MacPherson nudged Galen. As Gabby turned inquiringly, the Geiger Counter shrilled.

"Pop's lyin', Sheriff, like the box says!" Sloat burst out. "It was his idee, us knockin' off Pete and blamin' it on them strangers."

Sawyer stood his ground. "What box?" he demanded. "You gone plumb crazy, Bide?"

"The one the big stranger's totin'," Bell told him coldly. "The lie detector. It's sounded off ever'time a lie's been told this afternoon."

"Lemme see it!" Sawyer snatched the instrument to the length of its carrying strap, tufted it swiftly in his hands and hurled it against MacPherson's chest.

"You're the biggest fool I ever see, Sheriff!" he said venomously. "Lie detector! That's a Geiger Counter rockhounds use lookin' for radium. It can't tell what's lies no better'n you can! I got no time to listen to such tomfoolery, my evenin' meal customers will be waitin'!" Pop strode toward the door.

"Hol' on!" Bell's Colt held unwaveringly on Sawyer's heart. "Turn 'round and reach, Pop, *pronto!*" Sawyer's arms rose in surrender.

"Liar box or rock box," the sheriff said. "It sure told me the truth. I'm arrestin' you, Pop, 'long with Bide and his boys, for the murder o' Peter Todden, and deputizin' the strangers to he'p me jail you-all."

"Restin' us?" Sloat's slow mind fumbled with disaster. "That double-crossin' Pop framed us!" Words could not hold his rage; he threw himself at Sawyer.

Bide's spring knife, Bell's Colt flashed simultaneously. Steel slid between Sawyer's ribs, lead ripped Sloat's lung.

Herding Bide's remaining cowed gang back to the wall, the sheriff hunkered down beside the fallen pair, finding no pulse in Sawyer's wrist. Sloat lay across his enemy, his stiffening hand yet grasping the knife. Bloody foam bubbled from his lips. Bell turned his ear toward the dying man.

"What'd you say, Bide?" he asked.

"I told Pop he'd get his," Sloat gasped. "That warn't no lie."

The Geiger Counter hung silent.

*The Great Ice-packs of the Southern
Seas; and Men—and One Woman—
Who Were Cut Off There*



WHITE GIANT

By CLIFF FARRELL

I

FOUR SURVIVORS!

“HOB” SLADE, master of the steam whaler *Snow Queen*, sat poring over ice charts, and meager wireless reports, his heart heavy. The roar of a chantey came to him from forward where the crew was celebrating, but Hob's heart was not in tune with them.

The *Snow Queen* was northward bound. Astern was the sullen Ross Sea, where the new ice was growing heavier day by day. Even out here in the gray reaches of the South Polar Sea, great patches of mushy new freeze rolled ominously in the long swells.

Winter was coming. The wind that moaned through the rigging carried the voice of authority—a voice that no man dared deny, for it whispered of the icy reaches from which it had come. It carried the bite of the polar plateau in its teeth.

The great whale herds had vanished, bound for their winter sojourn in the Indian Ocean. The whaling fleet was gone too—except for a straggler or two such as Hob's ship, which had hung on to mop up on the few big blues who were themselves stragglers.

Strung out behind the big ship, like fat, ugly ducklings, bobbed four tiny "chasers," steam-powered. Mere cockles in size, they had been built to ride the stormiest waters on the globe. The Norwegian crews were celebrating, too. Their harpoon guns were under canvas, their bunkers carried coal for three weeks, and their mess tables were loaded with *fiskeboller*, *söd supper* and schnapps.

Somewhere to the north the great icepack awaited to challenge them, and it, too, was cementing harder each day. But that was Hob's worry. The crew's work was done. The curved knives of the flensing crew were oiled and laid away. The steam trypots were cold and empty. The black gang had coaled their last chaser.

Below decks, the oil tanks were full. It had been a whale of a whaling season for the *Snow Queen*—a season to celebrate—and the crew was tuning up in anticipation of the real spree that was due them when they swarmed down upon Hobart.

Hob drew a black line across a chart. That line bisected the pack and pointed toward Hobart. If his calculations of the ice situation were correct the *Snow Queen* should break through without difficulty over that course. If he was wrong? He shrugged his shoulders. The season was late—too late for safety.

If he was wrong the *Snow Queen* would be forced to winter in the Antarctic, and she was not equipped to winter the fifty men in her crew.

No, he would smash through—through to Hobart. But for the first time in his life Hob regretted the outward trip. He recalled bitterly his impatience on the northward voyage the season previous. He had been mate of the *Snow Queen* then, and young even for that responsibility. Now he was her master—a master at an age when most men are still working on their first papers.

And his first cruise had been a triumph. Hob's percentage would top his master's salary. The owners would realize the big-

gest profit the *Snow Queen* ever had returned.

But it meant nothing to him now. There was a girl who had been waiting for him in Hobart last year. She was not awaiting him now. Hob was the type that one does not associate with sentiment, for he was a seventy-two inch block of brawn, grained and graded by the sea. A chin like an ice ram adorned a square face that had taken on the rugged tint of his calling. The fine lines of responsibility were netting the corners of his mouth, and puckering in his inquiring gray eyes.

Perhaps because the wound was so hidden it remained unhealed. It had been a year now since his dream ended, but the pain of it was still as keen as that moment when she had refused to see him. He pictured her blue eyes and the glint of sunshine in her hair, as he had last seen her. He did not believe he ever would see her again.

HOB, by an effort of will, forced his thoughts back to the ice chart. Suddenly he cocked an ear. He thought he had heard a faint alarm from the crow's nest. Then the ship changed course slightly, and he slid into his furs and made for the deck.

Gus Cahill, his first officer, was straining through glasses to the windward, his seamed face screwed into a scowl.

"A chaser, comin' up," he grunted. "Can't identify her."

"Trouble." Hob predicted swinging his own glass on the spot.

"Sure," Gus agreed gloomily. "Nobody would be prowlin' around here in a teapot unless some blasted pig chaser had gone an' hung up in the pack."

The approaching dot was coming up at a twelve-knot gait.

"She's one of the *Tramsos's* boats," Hob said quietly at last.

"Huh?" Gus exclaimed. "Old Nels Melovar's tub, hey."

Then the mate mentally kicked himself. Nels Melovar was the father of Lundra Melovar, and Gus knew that Hob and Lundra had been sweethearts—until something had happened.

Hob watched, his big mittened fist gripping the rail, as the squat little chaser came foaming into the lee of the *Snow Queen*.

which lay hove to. The chaser was tiny even for her calling, registering not more than forty tons.

"Only four aboard," Gus muttered, counting the whiskered faces. "An' that looks like that swab, Dude Williams."

Hob's face had tightened. He knew Dude Williams was mate of the *Tramso*, and had earned his sobriquet because of his foppish garb when in port. As a rule Williams was sleek and debonair—a ladies' man. Now he was a whiskered, slovenly figure, as lean as a wolf, with sharp, burning eyes.

"The *Tramso's* gone under," Williams shrilled as a line was made fast. "All hands lost."

Hob motioned him to the bridge. Gus Cahill, despite his burning curiosity, decided that this was no place for him, and he went to the deck to question the other three castaways. There was something in Hob's face that said that he and Dude Williams had little in common.

"How did it happen?" Hob asked.

Williams was gaunt of cheek and nervous. "She had just pushed into the pack," he said. "We were in tow at the end of the line. A squall whipped up and we cut loose and ran to sea room. But the *Tramso* and the other two chasers were squeezed, and went down like stones."

"Why were you aboard a chaser?" Hob demanded.

"The Swede skipper of the tub had gone overboard the previous day in a gale," Williams said curtly. "I took over the chaser."

HOB studied that. The explanation did not seem to ring true. A whaler's mate is usually too valuable a man to waste in skippering a mere chaser homeward. But perhaps he was unduly hostile. Perhaps his dislike for Williams was warping his judgment. And he knew that Williams held no love for him. They had met several times at the home of Captain Nels Melovar in Hobart—too often, in fact, for it had seemed to Hob that Williams had made a point of intruding whenever he and Lundra had been together.

"We'll start a search at once," Hob said.

"It's no use," Williams objected violently. "I tell you all hands went down. They didn't have a chance to quit the boats."

"Some may have reached the ice," Hob snapped.

"Not a chance," Williams assured him. "The squall was a spar-breaker. The pack went to pieces. None could have lived through it, even had they reached the ice."

"You seem to have survived," Hob said.

Williams' face set, and his eyes blazed. Was it hate? It looked more like cunning.

"Don't play the hero, Slade," he sneered. "You know lousy well you don't dare waste time south of the pack now. You'll lose your ship. I reckon you're figuring on a play to square yourself with the girl. Don't you know that she was a—"

Hob's fist snapped out, propelled by steely muscles. Williams' jaw stopped the fist squarely, and he went down heavily.

II

BULLET MARKS

"THIS is the second of our guests that needs patching up," Gus Cahill said, attracted by the sound of the blow. "One of them huckleberries has a bullet-hole in his shoulder. He tried to keep quiet, but I saw him favoring his arm, and took him to the bay. He fought like a shark, but we looked at his shoulder. The doc took this little souvenir from it."

Gus dropped a mushroomed piece of lead in Hob's palm.

"A thirty-eight automatic," Gus opined.

Hob stared in frowning speculation. "How does he say he got it?" he asked.

"He won't say."

"And the other two?"

"They're clams too. I tell you, Skipper, they're hard cases. They ain't seamen at all. They're coal heavers. Williams is the only salt of the four."

Hob turned and hurried to the wireless room. "Is that crackerbox working?" he asked the operator.

The wireless had been useless except for brief intervals for the past fortnight, because of interference by the aurora australis.

"I just spoke Hobart," the operator said. "Can't say how long I can hold 'em. Might get one shot through."

Hob scribbled an inquiry for information regarding the *Tramso* from the owners of that whaling craft.

"The guy at the key in Hobart, tells me the *Tramso* hasn't checked in for a week—but then the aurora has been cutting out everybody in the Ross Quadrant. Here's something though. There's a woman aboard the *Tramso*. A girl. Old Nels Melovar's daughter sailed with her dad last spring for the whaling season."

Hob gasped with unbelieving horror—a horror that grew as he thought about it. Of all the world, the Antarctic was the most savage. It was not even a man's world, much less a woman's.

"God help her if she's adrift on the pack!" Hob thought.

But Williams had said that all had gone down. A new blazing thought struck Hob. Why hadn't Williams told him about her? And then Hob remembered the words that his fist had stopped. Williams had started to tell him—but he had not listened.

But had Williams told the truth? Hob bounded to the deck. The battered chaser still lay alongside, and he boarded her. She showed signs of a hard season. Polar seas and ice had dented her rails and chewed her ironheart ram. Her bunkers carried a ten-day fuel supply. Her provisions were frightfully meager.

But all this proved nothing, and Hob was about to return to his ship when his eye caught a furrow in the charthouse door.

"A bullet did that," Hob muttered.

He looked farther about the foredeck. Soon he had located the marks of at least four more bullets and there were other gouges in oak planking and stanchions that he could not be sure of. He dug a misshapen piece of lead from a bulwark and decided that it too had come from the muzzle of a thirty-eight automatic.

HE RETURNED to the *Snow Queen* and headed for the bay. Dude Williams was glowering, nursing a purple jaw as Hob entered. A gleam of fear sprang into his sharp eyes as he read the menace in Hob's face.

"You'll pay for this—" Williams began.

But Hob jerked him erect and shook him, though he was no puny individual. "Tell the truth or I'll rip out your lying tongue," Hob muttered. "What happened to the *Tramso*? What became of the girl?"

"Damn you, I tell you they're done for,"

Williams howled, fighting like a madman. "I'm not going to stand for—"

Hob hurled him spinning against a wall. "Easy," Gus Cahill cautioned, awed by Hob's frenzy. "We can't do anything—even if this slick cuss is stringing us. It's too late. In the spring we can search for 'em. If they're on the pack they may be able to ride out the winter. Shackleton's outfit did it once in these waters you know. We can find—"

"Lundra Melovar was on the *Tramso*," Hob almost shouted.

"But—but," Gus began. Hob was bounding away. In a moment he had a signalman calling in the biggest of the *Snow Queen's* chasers.

"What's on your mind?" Gus asked in anxiety as Hob routed out the black gang and began snapping orders to the supply staff.

"I'm going to hunt for 'em," Hob panted, racing to his cabin to break out furs and finnesko boots.

"But—but—we'll freeze in," Gus pointed out.

"I'm going on the *Adelie*," Hob said. "Williams and his two buddies will be my crew. You're skipper of the *Snow Queen* for the remainder of this cruise. You can follow the course I've charted into the pack. You'll reach Hobart without trouble."

"But—but," Gus repeated aghast. "You'll have to winter down here—on the pack most likely. You can't—"

"If I find 'em, I'll try to move 'em to Cape Adair in the Ross Sea for the winter," Hob said, stabbing his finger at a chart on the wall. "A hut and some supplies were left there by an Australian exploring party two years ago. Leave the word for the first whaler that runs the pack into the Ross next year to look for us. If we're not at Cape Adair they can quit worrying about us."

"They'll murder you and feed you to the killers," Cahill predicted. "Williams won't show you where he deserted them—if he did desert them."

"I've got a plan," Hob said grimly. "And Williams will do what I tell him, or we'll stay at sea until we starve. You keep that wounded pelican aboard, and have him held in Hobart on suspicion of mutiny. That bullet wound is enough to hold him."

III

DANGER BELOW DECKS

HOB stood on the bridge of the chaser *Adelie*, as the lines were cast off. The full roll of the Polar Sea caught them, as the comforting bulk of the *Snow Queen* drifted away.

The brief Antarctic day was going. The *Snow Queen's* siren lifted in a dismal below of farewell, her engines rumbled, and white water boiled from her counter. She was under way—heading northward out of the clutches of grim winter, followed by four chasers. The last in line was the small craft that Williams had skippered.

Hob had chosen the *Adelie* because she was big—as chasers go—registering one hundred and forty tons. He turned now to face his “crew.” Dude Williams was glaring venomously. The other two, swaddled in Jaeger woolens and windbreakers, their flat faces matted with greasy whiskers on which tiny icicles were forming, seemed gorilla-like and ponderously dangerous. But they were not thinkers. Williams was. One of them was a Russian, the other an Australian.

“Fellow shipmates,” Hob began sarcastically. “Lend me your ears. No! I’ve heard that some germs live even in these latitudes. Never mind your ears. We’re gathered here for a great thing. The—”

“Cut that guff,” Williams screeched. “What’s the idea? If we’re going to follow your tub through the pack, let’s get under way. She’s leaving us.”

“We’re not heading north,” Hob said.

They had not been told why they were being assigned to the *Adelie* with Hob as skipper, though they had been suspicious.

“You mean we’re—we’re—” Williams said shakily.

“Exactly,” Hob assured him, tapping an automatic at his belt. “We’re going to hunt for the survivors of the *Tramso*.”

They tensed as though about to rush him, despite the menace of the gun. “I’ll kill you,” Williams snarled.

“I’ll cut yer dizzy heart out,” the Australian shrilled. The Russian spat and hissed viciously.

“You don’t seem anxious to find your shipmates,” Hob continued.

They did not answer, and Hob’s face became flinty. “I’ll tell you why,” he barked. “You deserted them.”

It was a ruse—and it worked.

“Wot of it?” the Australian shouted. “There warsn’t grub enough fer—”

“Shut up,” Williams howled, whirling on the Australian. “He’s stringing you. Don’t let him—”

“You four grabbed the chaser, which probably was the only boat that missed the squeeze, and tried to work your way to safety alone,” Hob shouted, sure of himself now. “You left the others on the ice. You left a woman there—damn you.”

They wilted under the heat of his fury. “Well, we’re going to find ‘em—or we’ll all stay here forever,” Hob assured them. “We’re getting under way now. You’re the navigating officer, Williams. I’ll be engineer. These other two sea-slugs will shovel coal.”

He smiled grimly, for their faces were mirroring their thoughts. “No use hoping you can pull my cork while I’m asleep,” he warned them.

Then he reached inside the charthouse and produced a black, wooden box a foot square and six inches high. He flipped open the cover and they stared at the eight sticks of dynamite arranged neatly in a double row, fuses attached, that were wired to a clockwork.

“It’s an ice bomb,” Hob explained casually. “It will blow the bottom out of a ship this size. We use these time machines when we need simultaneous shots in blasting heavy floes. Take a look. I’m going to start the clockwork. I know when it is timed to explode. You don’t. I’ll have to keep a sharp eye on the hours, so I won’t forget to set this thing back at intervals. Let’s hope that I don’t oversleep—or forget. And above all, let’s hope that nothing happens to me so that I *can’t* set it back.”

They glared at him, their savage hope dying. Hob was smiling grimly as he went below with his little black box. But he knew that Williams was not beaten. The mate was forced to bide his time. Hob realized that he would have to be vigilant.

Hob secreted the black box down in the bilge, directly against the heavy oak skin. He listened to the gentle tick of the clockwork and shivered. He was not bluffing.

Unless he visited the thing before four hours had passed it would send the little chaser plunging down into the freezing depths of the Polar Sea.

Then he returned to the engine room and summoned his boiler crew. They came sullenly and turned to at the scoops.

SOON the *Adelie* was under way, with Dude Williams at the helm. Hob noted with satisfaction that Williams had set the course north by east. That should raise the great ice pack within forty-eight hours.

The menace of the hidden bomb had them cowed. Hob established four-hour tricks, with the Australian and Russian taking turns at relieving both himself and Williams. At regular intervals Hob sent whoever was in the boiler pit above. Each time he visited the bomb and set its clock-work back.

Once, toward daybreak of the first night he heard the engine room scuttle creak as he was heading for the bilge hatch. He whirled and stole back. The ratty eyes of the Australian were at the scuttle, and Hob drew his gun and fired—not to wound, but to frighten. The bullet tore a splinter from

the combing within six inches of the spy's face, and with a screech he disappeared.

There was some grim humor in the situation, though none appreciated it. Hob took to his cabin at daybreak, but the Russian called him an hour ahead of time. The Russian had that bomb heavily on his mind.

Two days of that went by. As weak daylight came on the third morning Williams gave a sullen shout that brought Hob.

There dimly to the north was the pack. Above it wavered the steady, white blink of great ice fields—the reflection from a frozen, floating desert. It was the main pack—the inner edge of the mighty white ring that girdles the Antarctic. As they progressed it seemed to encircle the horizon, for they were steaming into a giant indentation. It is such an opening in the pack that ship captains seek, for it shortens the struggle with the ice, and Hob believed that Dude Williams had brought him to the spot where the *Tramso* had started her ice passage.

BY MID-DAY they were skirting the ice at a respectful distance, for brash and growler rolled in endless battle against



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the solid floes and small bergs that edged the main pack.

The endless white vista rolled away to the horizon without a sign of life as Hob swept it with the glass. Then he seized the whistle chain. The siren bellowed a deep, vibrating note.

The murmur of the grinding ice off the port beam seemed to hush as though listening. At intervals Hob sent blast after blast from the siren. Five minutes passed—then ten—

Hob gave a cry of triumph. A slender column of smoke was ascending from a mile to the north. It was black smoke such as is made by a fire of seal blubber.

A moment later he sighted a file of black specks creeping over the ice-field. The fugitives evidently had taken shelter far enough in the pack to be safe from the insecurity of the sea-washed fringe.

Hob looked at Williams. The latter was watching the approach of the castaways with an impassive face, and Hob felt a qualm of misgiving. Hob had reasoned that Williams and his three followers had escaped from their comrades after a fight for possession of the chaser. The bullet scars on the deck led to that assumption. But Williams did not seem in any great fear of facing them again.

Hob shrugged his shoulders, and then scanned the ice-foot for a landing place. A flat floe, free of growler, seemed the likeliest spot. It was a quarter of a mile off the port bow, and he put the *Adelie* for it at bare steerage way.

Day was waning already. Hob cast a weather eye southward—and his eyes narrowed.

A vague, white pallor blinked above the horizon in that direction. Up to that time the south had sported a "water sky," dark with the reflection of a sullen, open sea, free of ice. But that low pallor was the blink of ice.

"A nasty trap to be caught in, if there's heavy ice being carried up from the Barrier," Hob thought.

But the menace was distant and intangible—at least fifty miles away. The *Adelie* pushed through brash, shouldered aside heavier fragments, and ground her nose into the neve surface of the floe. Hob mounted to the look-out barrel, and sighted

the approaching party less than a quarter of a mile away. His heart gave a bound as he put the glass on them. One of the parka-clad figures was slender and small—a girl.

There were some twenty in all. The *Tramso* had not been a big ship as steam whalers go.

Suddenly a freezing thought caused Hob to break out his watch. With an exclamation he slid down the stays, the icy strands burning the skin from his hands through the dogskin mittens.

He raced frantically to the engine room scuttle and fairly dove through it, and then sped for the bilge.

He had forgotten the bomb—a blunder he expected would blow them to eternity as he dropped into the chill, oily space against the skin of the chaser. His heart standing still he reached the black box.

As his hand touched it he heard a snap—and the ticking of the clockwork stopped.

In that brief instant as he jerked up the cover and reached for the plunger that would set off the percussion cap, Hob lived a bitter lifetime. He was not thinking of himself—but of those twenty men and the slender girl who were toiling toward what they believed was certain rescue.

Then his hand found the plunger and jerked it free as it began to fall.

Hob breathed deep, lung-filled gasps, as a man does after a dive into chilling water. His knees shook with the reaction.

Then, with another shrug, he turned to make his way back to the engine room.

As he thrust his head through the tiny hatch, he saw a shadow move above and slightly behind him—and he tried to duck. But too late. He glimpsed Dude Williams' face, screwed into a grimace, teeth bared. Then a numbing force struck his head.

IV

ADrift ON THE PACK

HOB came wearily back to life—or a travesty of life. His eyes, at first, saw only dizzy pinwheels. He lay on a surface that seemed to loop the loop, and he tried to cling to it, but his muscles did not respond. Finally his eyes began to focus.

But it was dark. He discovered that he was toggled into a damp, cold sleeping-bag.

A shrieking drone began to separate itself from the buzzing in his head. It was the howl of the wind.

A grinding sound that has no counterpart registered, and brought him rigidly to his elbows. It was the sullen voice of laboring ice. At the same moment he realized that he lay on a frozen surface that heaved gently.

The pack! He was on the pack! But he was in a tent. He struggled to rise. A hand pressed him back.

"You must be quiet," a voice said. And what a voice.

"Lundra—Lundra!" Hob cried.

"Yes—this is Miss Melovar," the girl replied tonelessly. "You will recover. Remain quiet please."

Hob sank back. That unemotional voice, the studied neutrality of it, had brought him back to reality after a moment when things of the past had been forgotten.

"Father," he heard her call. "He is conscious now."

A slit of gray, black sky appeared, then vanished. A third person had entered the tent.

"This is Captain Melovar speaking, Slade," the voice of Lundra's father said. And Hob, in bewilderment, read hostility and contempt in the inflection. In the past Nels Melovar, a Viking of the old school, had been Hob's firm friend.

"Where am I—and where's the *Adelie*?" Hob asked, mastering the gyrations of his brain.

"You're safe for the present," Melovar told him. "As soon as you are able, we will move farther into the pack. A gale is building up, and causing the ice to work."

"The *Adelie*?" Hob cried sharply.

"Mr. Williams and his two brave fellows, have put out to sea to ride out the blow," Melovar said.

"And they put me on the pack after bashing in my skull," Hob said with a bitter laugh. "Sea room. They'll find plenty of it. Why did you let them slip away? Wasn't one lesson enough?"

"Slade, you need not try to blacken Williams' character," Melovar boomed angrily. "He told us about you—and how you refused to help rescue us. I don't approve of his shanghaiing you. But perhaps he was justified."

Hob furiously thrust an arm free, untog-

gled the bag, and dragged himself to his knees. He was weak and dizzy, but forced himself to think. "Shanghaied—me?" he asked unbelievably.

He was realizing that he must have guessed wrong about those bullet scars on the deck of the chaser.

"How long have they been gone?" he demanded savagely.

"The *Adelie* just put out," Melovar admitted.

Hob caught the distant beat of the chaser's stack, during a lull between the gale blasts. He reeled past Melovar and into the open. The wind nearly capsized him. The running light of the *Adelie* were but dim dots through the spume. Not far away the swells were smashing over the ice-foot.

"A gun—a rifle—anything to stop 'em," Hob choked, wresting away from Nels Melovar, who had grasped his arm.

"None of that, Slade," Melovar shouted. "You cannot jeopardize the lives of my crew, not to mention my daughter's, just because you fear for your own. Mr. Williams is a smart seaman. He will ride out the gale."

"You fools," Hob cried in agony. "Williams will never come back. Didn't he desert you once before! Didn't he—?"

"You're insane," Melovar roared him down.

Hob calmed. Somehow Dude Williams had lied his way out. Somehow Nels Melovar had been hoodwinked.

"Listen," Hob said, desperately forcing himself to speak slowly. "Williams was trying to reach Cape Adair—either that or run the pack in an effort to make Hobart. He stumbled into us. He told me all of you had gone down. He said—"

Melovar silenced him with a sweep of his arms. "That is not true. I lost my ship and two chasers when the pack closed in on us suddenly just after we had entered it. We had barely time to take to the ice before all three ships went down in a lead that opened under them after they had been smashed. Only one chaser escaped the squeeze. She was too small, and too short of provisions to carry all of us."

"There were bullet marks on the chaser's decks," Hob said. "One of Williams' crew was wounded. I decided that you and your



men had fired on Williams as he was escaping with the chaser."

"You were wrong," Melovar said. "Mr. Williams had asked permission to scout for another whaling ship. It was our only hope. He sailed with eight men. There was a mutiny. Half of the crew wanted to try for Hobart or Cape Adair, abandoning us. There was a fierce battle on the chaser. Williams and his three loyal men won out. You found them—and you know how they forced you to turn over your biggest chaser to them, and how they duped you into accompanying them."

Hob stood staring off into the south. The gale was winding up, and the lights of the *Adelie* had disappeared. Finally he laughed bitterly. He looked about. The survivors of the *Tramso* had gathered around them. Lundra Melovar stood at her father's side.

"Williams and his pals are murderers," Hob finally said quietly. "If you can pray, pray now. They murdered the four men you sent with them. And now they probably have murdered the rest of us. Dude Williams never intends to come back. He's interested only in saving his own hide. He wants all the food—and the boat for his own escape."

"That is a monstrous accusation," Melovar said hoarsely, though a note of doubt had crept into his voice. "Why—why—he—my daughter. He hoped to marry her."

Hob looked at Lundra. A flicker of consternation had broken through the mask of aloofness. Her lips parted as though to cry out. But then the mask slipped back into place on her frost-blackened cheeks and hunger-pinched mouth. She turned abruptly and fled into the tent.

THE gale and the sea were ripping the pack to shreds where they stood, so the castaways started a retreat farther into the floating ice, carrying the thin silk tent and the meager provisions they had brought with them.

Hob, as he marched at their heels, sensed the panic that was upon them. Nels Melovar, his daughter near him, led, his lean, old figure straight and confident. But Hob knew that the captain of the lost *Tramso* was afraid, too. Stark terror was in the hearts of the crew. They did not speak to Hob, but as they looked his way from blood-shot eyes, he could read the fearful question in their minds.

Had he told them the truth? They had never liked Dude Williams. He was not their type of seaman. And now as they measured Hob's brawn, square jaw and level eyes—they were beset by the devils of doubt. Their only hope of life was that Williams would return in the chaser when the gale had blown out. And Hob's declaration had thrown a freezing chill upon that hope.

The gale worked up to a ten-point blow, and as they moved in from the open sea, the wind began cutting the frozen snow, whipping it along in a blinding, waist-high drift. Traveling over the heaving pack with that swirling wall of white hiding even a man's knees, was like wading through a brutal torrent.

Occasionally a man stumbled and went down into the stinging tide. Once Hob's boots found a form, and he lifted it to discover that it was Lundra. She seemed weary and beaten too, and for a moment he supported her.

"Don't be a quitter," Hob howled, shaking her.

She stiffened and drew away, stumbling ahead into the murk to find her father.

The storm grew. Gusts reached velocities of a hundred miles an hour, flattening out the humans like straws. Ice fragments came whizzing on the gale like shrapnel. Every step became a strength-sapping battle—every rod gained seemed a mile long.

Hob, through the ghostly darkness, saw a form to his right disappear into the scudding drift—and fail to arise. He veered, leaning against the storm that cut biting through his windbreaker, and searched for

minutes before his boots found the form of a seaman who had given up.

Hob tried to slap him back to life, but that failed, so he was forced to shoulder the man. He struggled ahead with the heavy burden, but the main party had been swallowed by the storm.

The seaman was big. Occasionally Hob stumbled and went down. Each time he arose and pushed grimly on. But there was a gnawing apprehension in his heart. Finally he realized that he had lost contact with the main party.

V

THE GIANT OF THE SOUTH

THIS seemed the end! About him he could hear the ice booming and groaning. The storm was twisting and tearing the pack apart.

He heard the sinister slosh of open water during momentary lulls between gusts, when vacuum-like silence came. Leads were opening all about him.

Once he heard a new sound that caused him to flinch. It was a puffing snort. An orca was blowing in one of the leads nearby. And if one was there, more would be near, for these ferocious killers of the sea travel in packs, like wolves.

Hob was thankful then for the scud that hid him. He had seen these killer whales poke their beady eyes above floe edges upon which seals were sleeping, sight their victims, then dive and burst up through the ice beneath them. He had seen them tilt up floes, and hurl unsuspecting seals into their mighty maws.

He felt his way carefully, the weight on his shoulder sapping his stamina. Despite his caution he stepped into an open lead, but it was only a yard wide, and he and his burden fell upon solid ice on the opposite side. Hob's boots dangled in icy water, and an instant after he withdrew them the floes came together with a report like cannon-fire. He and the seaman were lifted up on a newly formed pressure ridge and dropped six feet upon the floe beyond.

It was a world in travail—a groaning, stricken world of ice—a frozen hell, with the storm roaring a satanic chant.

The bulk of a small berg webbed in the

pack, loomed ahead, and he made for it with his burden, though it was an ordeal that seemed to thin his life-blood. The lee of the berg gave relief from the wind and drift, and the ice was more stable here, too.

He rested for a minute, his breath sobbing from burning lungs. Then he staggered out into the gale again.

"Lundra—Lundra—" he said over and over.

Instinct—or Providence—led him to them in less than two hundred yards. They had crouched down on a heavy floe. Nels Melovar had grown bewildered by the tumult. Weeks of over-powering responsibility and exposure, the reaction of events of the last twenty-four hours, and this new ordeal, had crumbled him.

Hob led, or rather drove them, over the heaving pack to the shelter of the berg. They huddled together there for warmth. The seaman he had left there, retained barely a spark of life, but Hob knelt at his side and began massaging his blood into circulation. Only one helped him. That was Lundra. And she worked in silence.

Soon they had the seaman on his feet, and then Hob walked him for a weary hour until the will to live had returned.

AS BITTER, freezing daybreak came, the gale abated. They looked around upon a wild world. The pack had cemented again, but its surface was a nightmare of pressure ridges and shattered floes.

Hob surveyed the ghastly faces of the group about him. With one exception they were looking to him for leadership. The exception was the girl. Her eyes had lost the summer-sky luster that Hob had known in them, and her cheeks were hollow; but at that she had withstood the ordeal better than had her father or his crew. Hob felt a shock of horror as he looked at them. They were like men who still went through the motions of living after their souls had fled. It was evident that they were resigned to death. High hope had surged in them at dusk. Now, at dawn, they had given up, their eyes sunken, their shoulders bowed.

One carried a pack of food—a meager pack, that Hob opened and inspected in dismay. A small chunk of frozen seal meat, half a slab of pemmican, and two tins of plasmon biscuits. Barely enough for a day's

starvation rations. Only a few ounces per man—and woman.

"We burned our last blubber signaling the ship," Melovar said in a despairing voice.

Hob moved to the berg, found a crevasse, and scaled to its crown. A mile to the south was open water, with the white tops of the big rollers freezing as they curled.

He stared farther—his face hardening into bitterness.

The pallid glow of the previous sunset, had borne fruit. A white line filled the southern horizon from end to end—a white line that was ominously distinct at that distance.

Ice was coming up. And it was Barrier ice—a mighty segment of the great continental sheet itself, for the blink from its face told that these were not low-lying floes. These were bergs, fifty, seventy, ninety feet high. A berg, rather, for despite its mighty sweep there seemed no break in it. It was a veritable continent that had calved from the mother ice cap and was moving ponderously in the grip of some Polar current.

No gale could disturb that majestic body. No ship, nor all the ships that had sailed the seven seas, could challenge its might. Not even the ice pack could even delay it, for its weight would shear through these floes as though they were of tissue.

Hob judged the great ice field to be thirty miles away. Unless its course changed before it reached the main pack, then the upheaval set up by the storm would be but a puny tremor in comparison.

Hob's jaw set as he pictured the chaos that would follow when the pack began piling up against the face of that oncoming ram. He had heard fo'c'sle tales of Barrier segments bigger than Tasmania. He himself had sailed around forty-mile slices of floating ice.

But this was monstrous, incredible—a marrow-freezing display of nature's naked power, before which a puny human seemed to shrink to the proportions of the ant that is unknowingly ground beneath the heel.

He stared down at the castaways, his eyes dull. The only hope was to push northward, farther into the pack—and that was only a faint one, for the upheaval would extend for miles—and it was more than likely that the entire pack would be shattered.

But they were weakened, and without food. They could not travel far—and over this jumbled surface, progress would be agonizingly slow even for able-bodied men.

HOB'S eyes caught a movement half a mile to the north. A form wriggled from behind a pressure ridge. A seal! Food! That would help. But then Hob saw that the animal was slender, and spotted of coat. It was a sea leopard, which next to the orca, was the most vicious creature of the polar seas.

Hob descended and trotted to the apathetic group. "I've spotted a seal," he told Melovar. "Give me a gun."

A whaleman hung his head. Nels Melovar spoke tragically. "We—we had only one—and it was thrown away last night—because of its weight."

"A knife then," Hob said grimly.

"That ain't a seal," a sailor said. "We sighted it too. It's a sea leopard. You can't get it with a knife. It will kill you."

"A knife!" Hob snapped.

Someone handed him a long-bladed hunting knife. As Hob trotted away Lundra Melovar rose with a cry of protest but he ignored it. After he had gone a short distance he discovered she was following. He waved an order to return, but she plodded on, though she could not keep pace with him.

The leopard and Hob sighted each other simultaneously. He had hoped to creep on it and surprise it, but the animal was on a pressure ridge now, evidently looking for a lead, or for prey, for it had been trapped when the pack cemented, and was hungry.

The beast, which was of the seal family, but far more agile and alert, came gliding down to a flat floe, snarling. It was a slender thing, with graceful, deceptive speed—and powerful muscles. It was a formidable opponent and Hob knew it, so he chose his ground—a broken area where the leopard *sastrugi*, the wind-worn furrows in the neve.

The leopard probably never had seen a human before, and looked upon Hob merely as an easy prey. It slid on toward him at amazing speed. Within a dozen feet of Hob it seemed to lift from the ice in a charge of savage agility.

Hob had removed his parka and wrapped it about his left arm as protection from

those gleaming teeth. He braced himself and, praying that his feet would not slip, faded aside as the beast struck.

Then he closed in, his knife burying in the leopard's throat. The beast, crimson froth slaving its jaws, whirled, whipping its tail in a hammer-like sweep. Hob leaped



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the instant he struck, for he had counted on that maneuver, but even so he did not clear the beast in time. He went spinning as the tail struck him on the thigh. A depression tripped him, and he went down.

The leopard reared up, and with a hiss, charged him again. Hob rolled aside as the beast's bulk struck the ice. He heard its jaws snap almost in his ear. Then he struck again and again with desperation. Crimson gore bathed him.

Then he realized that the leopard was collapsing in death. His first stroke had been enough, though vitality had carried it for a minute longer. He arose weakly. Lundra was running up, her face chalky, her eyes wide in horror. Inexpressible relief glowed in her eyes as she realized that Hob was uninjured. Hob sheathed his knife and looked at her grimly.

"Why did you do it, Lundra?" he asked simply.

She began to sob. "This is no time to talk of that," she choked, bitter tears blinding her.

"You're right," Hob muttered. He had remembered what her father had said. Dude Williams had sought to marry her. That was the reason, of course. That was why she had returned his ring, and refused to see him again.

VI

DUDE WILLIAMS' RETURN

HOB mounted the berg again. Below, the crew of the *Tramso* were still reveling in their meal of tough leopard-meat, singed over a fire of blubber taken from the same animal.

Hob had not told them of the terror that was riding up from the south. He hoped that the great icefield would have swerved. But as he measured it he saw that his hope was futile. It was nearer—and Hob remembered that at this point, the ice pack was indented deeply. The approaching mass probably was nearing contact with the pack to the east and west already, and it would be upon them at this point in less than twenty-four hours.

Then his eyes caught a dark haze to the southeast. He felt no emotion, for he was past that stage now. But he knew what

that haze meant. It was smoke—coal smoke.

The *Adelie* was returning! Dude Williams was coming back!

"Williams couldn't clear the ice field—and was forced to turn back," Hob told himself grimly.

There could be no other explanation. Hob was certain of that. If Williams could have won through to Cape Adair, he would have been safe for the winter. Then, with the supplies based there, he and his comrades could have run the pack in the spring, made Tasmania, New Zealand, or even Australia, and remained in hiding until certain that no accusing survivors had been rescued from the pack.

It was a question of food—and Williams was out to save his own skin, even at the sacrifice of twenty lives, including a girl's. And he wanted to marry the girl.

Hob waited a quarter of an hour to make sure. The *Adelie* was lifting steadily, and her course would bring her to the pack at the point she had touched the previous day.

Hob cupped his hands. "Sail, ho!" he bellowed. "The *Adelie* coming up!"

He watched with sardonic eyes the galvanic reaction of the group on the flat ice.

Life seemed to spring into them. The food was forgotten. Men in a delirium of joy shouted and screeched and pounded each other. Some laughed hysterically.

Only the girl seemed unmoved. She was the only one who thought of the food, for she began methodically gathering blubber and meat into heaps on the silk of the tent.

Hob descended. Nels Melovar approached him, stern of face.

"Slade, you must admit that you were wrong," he thundered. "Mr. Williams has returned after all."

A score of eyes fixed on Hob, and men muttered. They had changed in a twinkling from pathetic reliance on his strength, to hostility. He had been responsible for their doubts and torture of mind the night before. And now, in their belief, he was convicted of deceiving them.

"Led him rot here, Ay say," one of them bawled. It was the seaman, a Swede whale gunner, that Hob had carried on his back over the rolling pack.

Hob, with a growl, sprang, his fist flashing up, and the Swede went down like a log.

"You thick-headed numskulls," Hob raved, whirling on the others. "Come on, all of you. I'm sick of your sniveling. Rot on the pack, eh? Well, that's what we're all in for. You think Dude Williams is coming back to pick you up—and starve through the winter at Cape Adair with you, don't you? Well, he's coming back, but not because he wanted to."

They charged like a breaking comber.

"Stop!" It was the girl, who had sprung in front of Hob, and her voice throbbed with anger. "Stop, I say. Father! Hob—I mean, Mr. Slade deserved more than this. Why—why—he saved our lives last night. And he risked his today to get food for us."

That brought them back to sanity. They milled for a minute, then avoiding Hob's contemptuous eyes, shouldered the packs of food, and started for the sea step. The crisis was over.

"Thanks," Hob said to the girl. Then he pointed to the ice blink in the sky, for down here, the approaching menace was hidden by the pressure ridges of the pack, and lowered his voice. "Hell is going to break loose in the pack before another day. That's an ice field—the heaviest I've ever seen afloat. It's due to crumble the pack."

She looked, and Hob saw that she believed. "Is that why the *Adelie* is returning?" she asked quickly.

"Perhaps," Hob said.

THEY followed the others, Hob assisting her over broken ice. She did not avoid him now. Eventually from a pressure summit she saw the White Giant on the southern horizon. There was no color in her lips as she stared, but they did not tremble. She was of Viking stock.

"Is there any chance?" she asked him quietly.

Hob hesitated. "Not unless there is a passage through that wall of ice," he finally said.

"Perhaps we can steam clear of it before it closes," she argued.

"The two icefields have come together to the east and west already," Hob said bluntly, for there was no purpose in concealing the situation from her, for she had nerve. "The pack is under pressure already. See those floes far to the right tilting and piling up. The trouble is a

long way off as yet—but it is beginning to be felt all through the pack."

As if to grimly confirm his words there was a series of dull reports as though field guns had opened up to the west. A mile away a sharper blast cracked through the frigid air, and they saw shattered ice flying. A floe had exploded under the pressure that was setting in.

Nels Melovar had discovered the peril too, and now he dropped back to await Hob, his face gray with new anxiety.

"What do you think of it, Slade?" he asked. There was an apology and a surrender in his voice.

"Only time will tell," Hob said.

They waited as the *Adelie*, a mile away came on at full speed, her bow smashing recklessly through the pup floes.

"'E'll wreck 'er, the blarsted dunce," a seaman cried.

Dude Williams was on the bridge, and he drove the *Adelie* up to the ice foot so violently that she buried her prow ten feet into a floe. But she withstood the shock.

WILLIAMS came down from the bridge. At the same instant his two companions appeared from below—and all three were gripping guns. The group on the ice, with the exception of Hob and the girl, were shouting wildly in welcome. But the three on the boat paid no heed. Instead, working in a sort of a frenzy of haste, they dragged a loaded basket sled—a hand-drawn sled—that had been a part of the *Adelie's* emergency equipment, to the prow.

Williams dropped down on the ice with the Australian, to ease the sled down on the floe.

Hob had been crouching on his heels, hidden by the others who were standing, and suddenly he realized the significance of that heavily loaded sled, the guns in their hands, and the murderous desperation written on their features.

A pressure ridge was nearby and Hob flattened out and wriggled into its shelter. He believed he had not been seen, but Lundra turned. He waved a frantic admonishment and she looked away.

The cheering suddenly choked off. Hob did not dare peer out.

"Stick up your hands," Williams shouted. It was the shrill voice of a desperate man,

and it trailed off into a torrent of frenzied oaths. Williams' followers were backing him up with threats and curses too. They seemed beside themselves.

Hob heard a sailor cry out. The man too had guessed what this meant. Then—

Bang! The man gurgled and gasped. Hob felt a chill of horror. He could guess what had happened. The sailor, evidently had leaped to tackle the three—and had been shot.

"Don't try that again, or you'll all get the same thing," Williams screamed. "You can have the boat, you dumb fools. We're heading north—across the pack. Don't follow us. We'll kill the first man who does. There isn't food enough, I tell you. There's not even enough for the three of us on that sled. Don't try to follow us, I tell you."

HOB heard the squeak of sled runners and the crunch of boots. Williams and his fellow murderers were still gambling for their lives. They believed their only chance was to escape as far to the north as possible in the hope of putting enough distance between them and the coming chaos that they would be able to ride out the turmoil, and winter on the ice. They were taking the only sled, packed with food, knowing full well that the group on the ice could not pack enough from the lazaret on their back to feed themselves until spring.

But Hob knew that the three were pursuing a vain hope. The entire pack would dissolve before this battering ram. No human could live through it.

Hob crouched lower. The boots were nearer. They were heading to pass within two yards of where he lay. They were drawing the sled as they backed away from the group with leveled guns.

Then Dude Williams' wolfish figure was in view.

Hob sprang with a muscular reflex like the snap of a spring.

His right hand snapped the automatic from Williams' grasp, his left winding about the long neck of the killer.

As they toppled Hob glimpsed the Australian whirling to bring his gun to bear, and Hob pulled the trigger of the automatic as he hit the ice.

The gun chattered savagely. The Australian went down with two bullets in his brain.

Williams generated explosive, dynamic energy in the next instant, and tore free.

Hob felt something burn his shoulder. The roar of a gun was in his ears. The Russian was firing at him, but Hob had been rolling, and was only pinked. A second bullet threw ice into Hob's face as he twisted about, his gun describing an arc in an effort to locate the Russian.

Then Hob's weapon rolled pink flame in a steady crackle. The Russian seemed to collapse, for his stomach had been shredded by bullets. As he fell his gun flew from his agonized arms.

Dude Williams had rolled to his feet, screaming insanely. The fallen gun rolled to his feet. He grasped it and began firing the instant his finger met the trigger.

Hob aimed and squeezed the trigger of his own gun again. There was no response. He had emptied it on the other two.

Something like the blow of a sledge numbed his side. Then he hurled the empty gun into Williams' face. It struck squarely, and Williams went down.

But the last of the killers retained his weapon. He wriggled about dazedly to locate Hob. Hob gathered himself, though there seemed to be paralytic weakness in his left side, and hurled himself upon Williams.

The killer fired again as Hob grasped his wrist.

Then Williams' teeth parted in a grimace of agony—and he went limp. The bullet he had fired had pierced his own brain, for Hob had twisted the gun inward just in time.

TEN hours later, Hob, standing grimly beside Nels Melovar on the bridge of the *Adelie*, surveyed their situation, and looked sadly at Lundra.

She smiled bravely. That smile would make death worth while. For death was near. The *Adelie*, at bare headway, rolled in a narrowing strait of water less than a mile wide. To the south loomed the forbidding cliffs of the oncoming juggernaut. To the north was the pack, already tossing in travail, for it was being squeezed by a mighty force from the east and west.

More than two-score eyes resigned to their fate, watched the slow march of the oncoming White Giant.

Suddenly a sigh came from them. It seemed to come from the *Adelie* herself—a sigh such as few humans hear in a lifetime. A sigh of forlorn hope.

Something had happened among that unbroken white cliff-line to the south. Ponderously a mighty fragment was swinging out from the face of the White Giant. It buried itself in the sea, and a thirty-foot wave rushed toward the *Adelie*.

"Hard over," Hob said mechanically, and the ship altered her course to take the wave. It came—and the *Adelie* was buried beyond her trucks, but she shook free, and she bobbed up.

As the spume blew away every eye was glued to the spot from which the berg had calved. Then a sailor in the crow's-nest bellowed frantically and unintelligibly.

A dark line was appearing in that solid white phalanx! A dark line that widened with agonizing deliberation.

The White Giant had split! A lead was opening into it! But would it penetrate to open water beyond? Or would it be a trap that would close before the little chaser could work through?

THOSE questions were not answered for two mortal hours during which men with pallid hearts and a woman with a brave smile looked into the teeth of death. The fissure did split the two-mile thickness of the White Giant—and it did begin to close as deliberately as it had opened.

But the *Adelie* squeezed through—with only rods to spare.

She emerged into the open Polar Sea. Four days' steaming to the southwest was Cape Adair—shelter—safety.

"We can't make it," Nels Melovar said despairingly. "We're scraping the bunkers now."

Hob pointed to a spout that appeared off the bow. "A big blue," he cried. "He's feeding. He'll give us blubber to burn under the boilers, and whale beef to eat. He should be easy to get."

A Norwegian—the man that Hob had lugged through the blizzard—made the shot, sending the harpoon home as the

small dorsal fin broke water when the whale sounded. The bomb in the harpoon's nose did its work instantly. The air compressors inflated the carcass, and the flensers, laughing as they worked, began sending slabs of blubber down to the boiler room.

Their luck had changed. Soon the *Adelie*, towing the carcass that was her food and fuel supply, had set her course for the Ross Sea and the Cape that would be their haven until spring brought the whaling fleet south again.

Hob's wounds had not been serious. He turned now to Lundra, who stood on the bridge, her eyes shining, color flowing back to her cheeks.

"Why did you do it?" Hob asked again.

Her eyes dulled. Finally she drew from her parka a tiny, leather-backed diary, and from that she drew a slip of paper. She handed it to Hob and walked away.

Hob unfolded it, and saw that it was a clipping from a San Pedro, California newspaper—evidently from the society section. It carried a picture of a smiling and pretty woman, with two young children at her side. Beneath it was the caption—"Mrs. John Hobson Slade, and her two children, John Hobson Slade, Jr., and Marilyn Hobson Slade. They are sojourning in San Pedro for the winter while Captain Slade is at sea."

Hob read it again. His face darkened. Then he grinned. He followed Lundra, who had headed for her quarters.

"Who gave you this?" he asked.

"Mr.—Mr. Williams gave it to father," she said haltingly.

"I'd like to keep it," Hob said with a twinkle. "I haven't got a picture of my brother's family. You see, *my* first name is Alderdyce. For obvious reasons I use the family gift name—Hobson. My older brother, Jack, is a skipper on a Dollar liner out of San Pedro."

She finally lifted her eyes, shining again.

"He—he—I never would have—" she began. "Father was wrong. Williams tried—"

To the north a dull rumble arose—a rumble deep and penetrating as though nature had unleashed mighty forces. The White Giant had plowed into the pack. But they did not hear it.

With Pearls Worth a King's Ransom—

CADBURN ESCAPES FROM PERMATA



By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

CADBURN knew that the schooner in the bay would sail in the morning. She was the *Sydney Express*, Captain Rand. After selling her cargo of trade goods she cruised among the easterly islands picking up jungle products. Cadburn was determined that he would escape from Permata Island in that schooner.

Captain Rand should be in good humor. It was nearly noon now and he was drinking gin and bitters at Ah Mock's place. The skipper had spent the night gambling at Ah Mock's and won two hundred dollars.

Whigham, a passenger in the schooner, lost two hundred. Ah Mock's crooked wheel turned the trick. The sly old Chink simply put two hundred dollars into Captain Rand's pockets as grease money to get a low price on turkey red trade cloth. Whigham paid the grease and took his losses as a part of luck.

Cadburn had mate's papers. He had been on the beach at Permata for seven months. He had what he came for. But his chief reason for wanting to get away from Permata was that his life was in danger.

Rand would have to be caught out of Ah

Mock's earshot. That would be a dangerous game. The skipper was peppery and he had no liking for beachcombers. He was likely to be grouchy when he was drunk and at all times he talked with a roar like a hurricane.

Ah Mock would not want Cadburn to get away. But Ah Mock must not know. If he found it out and Cadburn was left behind when the *Sydney Express* sailed, Ah Mock's killers would have a job on a dark night down in the palm groove. They used knives for such work. Bristol Al, too, must not know Cadburn was trying to get away. There was a good chance that Bristol Al, who had been living aboard the old wreck on the beach with Cadburn for the past month, was a spy hired by Ah Mock.

BRISTOL was below now in the wreck getting a belated breakfast. Cadburn, under the awning on the sloping quarter-deck, watched the distant trade shed of Ah Mock, where Captain Rand and Whigham, the young passenger, should appear presently on the veranda for tiffin. Whigham was a hard-faced chap who tried to play at being a gentleman with a suit of white ducks, buck shoes and a helmet.

The wreck, in which Cadburn and Bristol Al made their home while they operated a trepang boat for Ah Mock for a bare existence, lay on her bilges on a reef, her masts pointing to the jungly hills at a crazy angle. They were only stubs, those masts. So as Cadburn now made sure Bristol was not watching it was necessary to move forward carefully. Bristol Al's fire was going. He was rattling pans. His head was heavy and his feet were inclined to tangle. He was boiling turtle eggs and making coffee. His fire was coconut husks which sent a fragrant blue smoke up the galley stack. There was a small open hatch over his head and he might pop up at any minute to call Cadburn to breakfast.

Making sure Bristol was busy, Cadburn returned to his hammock under the awning. There he had hidden beneath a pile of scrap canvas a grappling hook attached to fifty feet of small line. He got this outfit clear, taking care to make no noise that would draw Bristol's attention. He began to lower it over the side toward the bay. There were thirty feet of water on that side, with a bottom of coral and waving kelp. But it had to

go down slowly, or Bristol would hear it scrape along the side. The hull seams were wide open, having spewed their oakum long since.

Finally it touched water and the grapple was lowered swiftly. He then drew it aft a little, walking a few steps. The hooks of the grapple caught in the wire loops from the teapot. It was brightly visible in the clear water, in among a lot of other junk.

Up came the teapot. Cadburn edged it up over the bilge. He had to keep watch on the small hatch over Bristol and the open companionway hood farther aft. Once the dripping teapot was in his hands, he covered it with old canvas. Then he got the grapple free and hid it. But as he rose from his knees he had a sense of being watched. He caught a movement at the galley hatch. But there was nothing in sight when he turned from hiding the grapple.

Cadburn went forward to the hatch and looked down. Bristol was hanging up a mirror. His ears showed lather. His razor was on the mirror shelf. His bald spot, redly sunburned, was sweating with the heat of the galley fire. He turned to a bucket of fresh sea water as Cadburn watched and began to wash his face.

Returning to his teapot, sure that he had been mistaken about Bristol having his head up through the hatch a minute before, Cadburn got to his knees again. His canvas belt lay handy on the deck. He had sewn that belt himself. It was a tube of fabric, open at one end. He began taking the pearls from the teapot and slipping them into the belt. He counted as he worked hurriedly. There were fourteen. If Ah Mock learned about that secret fortune in the hands of Cadburn he would never get away from Permata Island alive.

He put the wet rags back in the teapot and hid it with the grappling iron. Then he ran the belt through loops inside his canvas trousers about the waist, and through the outside loops put a wide old leather belt.

No one could suspect him of concealing treasure on his person. His straw hat was holed in the crown showing a patch of his brown hair. His feet were shod in cloth shoes that lacked heels. He was cleanly shaven but his skin sun-blackened. His hair curled about his ears. The worn trade shirt was so transparent that its blueness was

darkened by his browned shoulder under the fabric. Ah Mock gave him a shirt like that for about two weeks of hard labor.

FOR all the wealth in his belt, Cadburn lacked cash. He did not have a dollar. As most trading vessels and copra schooners carried native crews it was almost impossible for a white man to ship in their crews. And no master wanted to take a beachcomber. It would be fatal for Cadburn to show a single pearl. He would be under suspicion at once. Ah Mock would be told about it.

Cadburn stepped to the galley hatch and looked down. "How soon will the coffee be ready?"

Bristol Al looked up. The sweat was running down his thin cheeks. A middle-aged man, he wore old dungarees, once blue, now black. Cooking and fishing stained his clothing.

"Took a shave and spilled the 'ot water," he said in disgusted tones. "Such a 'ead I've got on me this mornin' I never saw." He grinned upward and shook the offending head as if uncertain that it would remain in place.

"Too much gin last night. How did this Whigham man come to be buying you drinks?"

Bristol chuckled. "'E was proper drunk. On account of me 'avin' that good coat of mine on, 'e didn't know in the dark that I was a beachcomber. Couldn't see my blinkin' trousers."

"Ah Mock didn't drive you out?"

"Wot, the big Chinkie? Not 'im! Polite to me as if I was a toff myself—and look at the cash 'e took on wot I 'ad. My 'ead feels like a barge that's proper sunk." He shook it again, one ear low down.

"What kind of a chap is Captain Rand?"

"Skipper? Ow, 'e's kind of offish. Don't tell 'im nothink 'e don't want to 'ear, or 'e'll likely bash you one."

"I'm going up for some tobacco. Be back in a jiff."

Cadburn went down the sloping deck and stepped out upon the sand. He hurried up the beach toward Ah Mock's. Two Malays were in the shade of the palms. They were the crew of the boat on the shingle waiting to take Captain Rand back to the *Sydney Express*.

The trade shed was set well in among

the palms. It had a wide and low veranda but in fair weather it had no front wall. Captain Rand was on the veranda, pacing up and down, but slowly, and he seemed to be making bad weather of it. He staggered as he paced.

Rand suddenly left the veranda and started down through the palm grove. He was making for the boat. He was not staggering so much now. He would have to pass close to Cadburn, almost abreast of the trade shed, but considerable distance below it. Cadburn halted, and stood with a palm tree between him and the trade shed.

There was no one in the central bamboo cage inside the trade shed. That cage was Ah Mock's cashier desk, throne room, and fortress all in one. He locked himself in and his waiters turned their cash takings over to him when the place roared with pearling crews on the way up from the southern islands. Cadburn knew that he was in luck to catch Captain Rand when Ah Mock was not watching. All the other Chinese, bar boy, roulette wheel operators and clerks of the store were probably asleep. The place was almost deserted, but a white figure in the interior gloom was moving. That would be Whigham, Rand's passenger. For nearly a week the pair of them had been on a spree since the *Sydney Express* arrived in the bay with her trade cargo.

RAND advanced with a rolling gait, his short legs waddling, his feet not always in the hard path down to the beach. He wore a wide straw hat with a limp brim that hung down all around. He could see only a few feet ahead of him even when he threw his head back. He was not aware of the waiting Cadburn behind the tree.

"Captain Rand!"

The skipper halted. His feet stopped but his shoulders threatened to keep going. He recovered his balance by throwing a hand out against a palm tree.

"On deck," he said thickly. He had a cigar between his teeth. It jutted upward so the ash almost touched the bottom of the hat brim. If they met there was certain to be a straw fire on Rand's head.

"I want to go along to Sydney with you."

"Sail in the mornin' with the land breeze. And be damn' sure you're aboard. Clean

and sober." Slowly the straw hat brim lifted as Rand's head went back so he could look at Cadburn. He puffed at his cigar three times and ashes fell on the front of his shirt as he leaned backward.

"What's this?" he demanded gruffly "Blasted beachcomber?" he swayed on his short bowed legs as if he were on the deck of a vessel rolling in a seaway.

"I've mate's papers," sir. If I could work my way to—"

"I've seen plenty of the likes of you! No time for beachcombers. No time at all." He puffed at the cigar to make sure it was going.

"I want to get to Sydney, and—"

"Seventy-five dollars!" barked Rand. "Cash down. Hard money. No shell money. Gold. I only take gold. Simple thing, go to Sydney with me. Gold! Slap it down and make it ring."

"I can pay you in Sydney, if you don't want to ship—"

"Don't want you in the ship. Most likely bring bed bugs aboard. Had a man once with a bag full of scorpions. Never know what you get. Now get to hell away from me. You made me forget where I was going. Coffee with my own rum in it, that's what I wanted. My own cook. Any time today, mister. Sheer away from me. I'm going on the starboard tack." Rand waved both hands before him, lowered his shoulders and got under way for the beach.

THERE was nothing more that Cadburn could do. He hoped that none of the Chinese had been listening. He turned back toward the wreck. Captain Rand went on to the boat, talking to himself. He kept saying over and over, "I ain't had a drink since breakfast."

As Cadburn walked up the beach Rand's boat was taking him out to the schooner. She lay in the greenish water near the point, white against the background of palms beyond, her hull and yellowish spars duplicated in shadow. There was no escape in her for Cadburn. And it might be three months before another vessel was in which would take him where he wanted to go—if he could manage to go with her.

With a fortune in his belt, Cadburn was a marooned man, for all the good the pearls

did him. Worse than merely being a prisoner at hard labor, his life was in danger if Ah Mock learned about the pearls.

"I can wait," he told himself as he neared the wreck. "It is more important to conceal what I've got than to risk it all by telling any of these ship masters that I've pearls."

Ah Mock was suspicious. No doubt of that. While the trepang boat caught and smoked trepang along the shores, men watched from the hills. They were Chinese. But Cadburn had gathered his pearls before the watchers were on the job. He believed that it was only a few weeks before Bristol Al was put to work by Ah Mock that the spies in the hills watched the trepang boat.

Ah Mock wanted more than trepang from Cadburn. The Chinese knew that years before he arrived on the island a Japanese had lived secretly on the shore of Permata, experimenting with pearls in imported pearl oysters. Permata had no pearling grounds. The Japanese scientist had injected a grain of sand into each oyster and put the oysters in shallow water. It was that bed of "planted" pearls that Ah Mock wanted Cadburn to find, though the Chinese had never mentioned pearls to Cadburn. But had come looking for them himself. Those pearls had been growing for twenty years and the secret of their location had died with the Japanese on his way home in a schooner lost in a hurricane.

HE HURRIED aboard the wreck. Working hastily, he got the pearls out of his belt and into the teapot and dropped it overboard. The cover was wired on so it could not open. He watched the silverish metal sink into the purple and green and red of the marine gardens of the coral. The rusty hooks of wire took hold of the coral branches as the slow tide dragged it over the bottom.

He was about to swing down the companionway when he saw the red tablecloth hanging from the end of the veranda stanchions at the trade shed. That was Ah Mock's private call signal. He wanted Cadburn.

Looking seaward, the boat alongside the *Sydney Express* was empty. Rand was doubtless below getting his rum and coffee. Cadburn hoped that the skipper would remain

aboard the schooner until sailing time in the morning. That would lessen the chances of Ah Mock finding out that Cadburn wanted to get away from Permata. It was possible that the Chinese knew already of the conversation in the palm grove. The call signal hinted as much.

"What do you say to a bite of tucker?" asked Bristol as Cadburn went below. The messroom, like all other parts of the old wreck, was on a crazy slant. The table had extra lengths to its legs to make it level. Anything hanging seemed to be at a wrong angle. It seemed that the ship having heeled far over under the force of the wind, was about to return to a level keel. Cadburn often found himself waiting for that return roll.

Bristol had the table laid with clean cloths, polished tin dishes and iron knives and spoons. He had been kicked out of a copra schooner for drinking the last bottle of the skipper's gin. He stood now with a towel over his arm, grinning at Cadburn.

"Head better?" Cadburn sat on the bench that was spiked to the flooring.

"Clear as a bell, thank you, sir. That corfee's the ticket."

"How would you like to get away with the *Sydney Express*?"

"Wot, me? You don't mean it!"

"I think I can fix it to sail in the morning. I just spoke to Captain Rand, and he seemed agreeable." Cadburn was testing Bristol. He doubted that the Cockney wanted to go.

"Did skipper say as 'ow 'e'd take me?" Bristol shot a wary eye at Cadburn. This was information Ah Mock would be glad to get.

"No, I didn't mention you, but I think I can make it work. Think of it, in a couple of months we could be in Sydney and out of this slavery."

A SHIVER ran along Bristol's shoulders. The soup spoon in his hand quivered. "I daresay," he remarked. "But I can't say I'm in a 'ell of a 'urry to get out. Fair's fair, and w'ile we ain't makin' no forchun 'ere, we're livin' comfortable enough."

"Not for me. Want to stay here the rest of your life?"

"No, sir. It ain't that I'm thinkin' of. Wot I wants is a vessel straight for Sydney. This *Express*, now, she'll most likely stop

at a lot of islands. I'm particular. I don't want to be put ashore at some island worse'n this is."

"I thought you told me last week you wanted to get out of Permata. You've changed your mind, I can see that."

Bristol coughed. He had an inbred respect for authority and he held the attitude that Cadburn was in command. "You're sharp, sir. 'Ow'd you come to know it? 'Ave I been talkin' in my sleep?"

"I know. No matter how. Here I arrange things so I can get away, and I offer to let you in on it. And you want to stay. What's your game, Bristol?"

"I was a-goin' to tell you, sir. Been 'avin' a look around while we was fishin'. I knows somethink—something valuable."

"You do, hey? Well, what do you know about Permata that's valuable—and kept to yourself?" Cadburn's shoulders hunched forward over the table. His eyes blazed at the Cockney, boring into Bristol's.

"What's your reason for wanting to stick at a hard job for poor pay—working for a Chink?"

"I'm—I'm stayin' 'ere on account of pearls, sir."

"Nonsense! These are not pearling waters. What pearls could you stay here for?"

"I don't rightly know, sir. It was a segrit that was told me."

"Told you where?" Cadburn knew that he was wringing from Bristol some information which had long been suspected—that Ah Mock had told Bristol about the planted pearls and to watch what was being done about hunting for their location.

"I was told in Sydney. I wasn't drunk on no gin when I was beached 'ere. I dranked the skipper's gin, yus, but I 'ad 'im find the empty bottle when we got to Permata. That was my game, to be put ashore 'ere. So I made out I was blotto drunk. So I goes about singin' and makin' a fuss, and as you might say, who the 'ell was to stop me. Wot I wanted to do was 'ave a look about for pearls."

"Bilge! You could have walked ashore if you'd known there were pearls here."

"No sir. I shipped as cook in a frog island. You knows wot the French are. I couldn't 'ave landed 'ere and stayed on the beach, seein' as 'ow I come from a frog island. But the skipper could log me as goin'

ashore at a frog island—and that's most likely wot 'e done so 'e didn't 'ave to pay no fine for not landin' me back in a frog island. So Ah Mock sends me to work with you—and that's just wot I wanted."

"You're damned late telling me about it."

"But you always said you was tryin' to get away. Wot good would it do to tell you? You'd only make a joke of it—and also go and tell Ah Mock wot I was talkin' about. I'd be left 'oldin' the bag, as you Americans say, when you sailed out of 'ere. Then Ah Mock would take away from me any pearls I'd find."

"What makes you so sure that Ah Mock isn't in on the know about your pearls?"

BRISTOL'S face reddened and his lips quivered. A new crop of sweat, not from the heat now, grew upon his brow. "Ow could the Chinkie come to be knowin' about 'em?"

"I believe we're being watched from the hills when we're out with the trepang boat."

"You don't mean it!" Bristol pretended horror at the idea that they were under observation.

"I'm not sure," conceded Cadburn. "But I've had my suspicions. I'm going to ask Ah Mock about it. And I'll make it my business to go up there after breakfast to do the asking." He was going anyway, and he wanted to draw Bristol out.



"Please, sir, don't do that. You'd put our game in the soup. Now, I goes and lets you in on my segrit, and you goes straight off to the big Chinkie."

"Then you mean to let me in on this pearl hunt, hey?"

"I'll go 'alvers with you. We can do a

lot of lookin' about with the boat, and none of Ah Mock's spies know wot we're doin'. When we find the h'oysters, we can get 'em of nights and nobody the wiser. Is that a go?" Bristol was eager.

"There are no pearls in these waters. If there happened to be, the regular pearling outfits would have combed the oysters up long ago."

"There *are* pearls, I tells you."

"Where did you get this nonsense into your head? You need divers to fetch up pearl oysters. And you're lucky if you get a pearl out of ten thousand oysters—on regular pearling grounds."

"The h'oysters we want was planted. A Jap that they thought was balmy put 'em in the water twenty years ago."

HAVING the pearls in his teapot over-side, Cadburn had to pretend interest. He felt sure now that Bristol got the story from Ah Mock—and was hoping that Cadburn would help find the pearls and give the fat old Chinese the double cross on the job. There was no doubt in Cadburn's mind that Bristol was lying when he said he got the story of the pearls in Sydney.

"Why didn't the Jap come back for his planted pearls?"

"'E got hisself stabbed in a argyment or 'e was lost out of a ship. Wot's the odds if we finds the pearls?"

"Keep your mouth shut, and we'll find 'em."

"Then you won't tell Ah Mock wot I've told you?"

"Not a chance." Cadburn finished his coffee and rose. "Any pearls around here we'll get 'em. I'm not going to Sydney with the *Express*. I'll stick here with you and we'll hunt while we're out after trepang."

"Good for you, sir! Our forchun's made."

"Stick here until I come back."

Cadburn climbed to the quarterdeck and made off up the beach. He saw at once that Captain Rand's boat was on the beach again and the two Malay seamen idling in the shade. So that was it! Rand was back ashore, had told Ah Mock of the request to ship aboard the *Sydney Express*, and Ah Mock wanted to question both of them and make sure Rand was telling the truth.

As he approached the trade shed Cadburn could hear Rand's voice booming with-

in the gloom of the barroom. Whigham was talking in a lower tone. There was an argument about borrowed money.

CADBURN walked in. He saw that Ah Mock was in his bamboo cage. That meant trouble was brewing. The fat old Chinese had his brass-bound square-lensed glasses up on his forehead. Another sign of trouble, for Ah Mock could not use an automatic pistol when his glasses were over his eyes. The door to the cage was padlocked behind him. His shining bayonet was beside his button board. The bar boy was polishing glasses nervously. Rand and Whigham were arguing across the stone-topped table but they became silent as they saw Cadburn. Whigham's small bag was on the table close at hand. When they recognized Cadburn, they resumed their discussion. Captain Rand was out of temper. Apparently his rum and coffee aboard the schooner had sobered him.

"But I thought you'd pay that money back, Whigham."

"I thought so myself. Anyhow, you're not out of pocket."

"How do you mean I ain't out of pocket?"

"I paid you in advance to the round trip to Sydney. I borrowed sixty dollars. You owe me a trip to Sydney—or did until I lost the sixty on Ah Mock's wheel."

"You mean you can't pay me back, that's what you mean!"

Whigham shrugged his white shoulders. "Why put the bite on me about it. When we get to Sydney I can settle with you, so—"

"Oh no you can't!"

"What do you mean I can't?"

"You can't git no boat ride from me to Sydney on tick."

Whigham's face showed his astonishment. "Why not?"

"Because you can't. My sixteenth reason is that I said so."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"What the hell you think I am? An information bureau?"

"I can't stay here broke."

"Oh yes you can. You gambled what cash you had away on the roulette wheel. You borrowed on your return fare from me. Now you expect to borrow a trip to Sydney and pay me there. Then I could look up a

windy street for my money—which I ain't in the habit of doing. Not for passengers. They pay me. I collect on the dot. If you're broke that's your trouble. I don't carry passenger trouble in my ships. You got a problem. It's simple. All you got to do is find a place on this island to sleep and eat—on tick."

"Your lecture ain't helping any."

"Mister, it ain't a lecture. It's a sermon. Lectures charge admission. When I preach I mostly pass the hat. But you're broke. So I might as well save my breath to cuss the crew." Captain Rand rose. He offered a hand to Whigham. But the passenger would not take it. "We've had a pleasant time. I sail in the morning. If you go with me, seventy-five dollars in gold."

"But I only borrowed sixty from you. If I give you that, you owe me a trip to Sydney."

"You ain't a round trip passenger any more. One way from Permata is seventy-five. For all the good it does you, it might as well be a million. You ain't got a brass nickel. If you'd rather watch a wheel roll around with a little ball in it than ride with me, you've had your fun. So long and I wish you luck." Rand waddled from the table, waved a hand to Ah Mock, ignored the presence of Cadburn, and went rolling down the palm grove path toward his boat.

CADBURN moved to Ah Mock's cage. "I forgot tobacco last night." That gave Ah Mock a chance to tell why he had put out the tablecloth on the veranda end.

Ah Mock picked up a brush, moved it across the ink slab, then painted on a yellow slip of paper a simple character. It was an order on the bar boy and a debt against the next lot of trepang brought in by Cadburn and Bristol Al. It meant about three days of hard labor in the sloop. Thus Ah Mock kept his bondmen in debt.

Whigham walked across the floor toward Cadburn. The passenger was only a little over thirty. Only the lower part of his face showed tan, proof that he was new to the tropics. He was all in white, his suit being well tailored, but he looked as if he had slept in it. He had not shaved that morning. He had seen Cadburn several times about the trade shed but had ignored him.

"Say, bud, where can a man hang out

here without money until he can send for some?"

"I live in the old wreck you see down the beach."

"What chance to stick around with you?"

Cadburn did not like the man. He would not expect to help with work. Besides, Bristol Al knew about pearls, though he was not aware Cadburn had any. This stranger would be a new danger if not a nuisance.

"It'll take you probably six months to get mail out and back from Sydney—if you're lucky. Captain Rand may feel different about it in the morning and take you along on tick."

Whigham shook his head. "That guy wouldn't trust his own brother for a nickel. What I want to do—"

Ah Mock broke in. He was sharp in tone as he pointed to Whigham. "This man sleep your place, eat your place—he go on job with you."

Whigham turned to the old Chinese. "What! You think I'm going to work in a stinking boat—for you?"

"Can do," said Ah Mock. "You go now."

"Why, you old hellion! You won two hundred dollars of my money—and sixty I borrowed on my fare from Rand—and now you want me to work for you!"

"You owe one week eat and sleep and wine. Forty dollar. You pay. Then you go Sydney."

"Get your gear," said Cadburn. "That's orders the old man is giving you. Don't make him madder. Forty dollars to you and forty dollars to him are two different things. You'll find out how much difference after you've worked at trepang fishing."

WHIGHAM went for his small bag, swearing under his breath. He walked out with Cadburn, turning to shake his fist at Ah Mock.

"How long will it take me to pay him off?" asked Whigham as they walked down through the grove.

"Couple of years."

"To pay off forty dollars?"

"Yes, at the prices he'll charge for what you need out of his store. You'll cut down on your smoking or go deeper into debt. And if you drink his trade gin, you'll never get out of debt."

"That's slavery!"

"Makes little difference what you call it. No skipper will take you unless Ah Mock wants you to go. They come here to do business with him and they've got to keep him sweet. That's why Rand wouldn't let you sail."

"I'll be out of here in a few weeks. I'll get a letter away with Rand in the morning."

They walked swiftly through the dry sand, Cadburn in the lead. As they approached the wreck Cadburn's eye caught the flutter of old canvas in the breeze. It was scrap stuff on the quarterdeck which should not be loose. He stopped in his tracks and stared. He turned and said to Whigham, "Wait here for a few minutes." He ran for the wreck, bounded over the low bulwark and dropped down the companionway to the messroom.

Bristol Al was seated on a bench. Water was dripping from the edge of the table. Wet rags were in a heap there. The aluminum teapot with its twisted spout and its wired-on cover wrenched loose was beyond Bristol Al. He was putting pearls in a saucer in front of him. He rose to his feet with a gulping cry as he saw Cadburn.

"So you got 'em, hey Bristol!"

The Cockney bared his teeth in a snarl of rage. He made no reply. With both hands he clutched pearls from the saucer.

"Watched me this morning when I brought 'em up. Saw how it was done with the grapple."

Bristol backed to the bulkhead.

"That shaving mirror you took off the shelf. Used it to watch me, I suppose."

"I'm fair caught," said Bristol.

"Drop them pearls or I'll add your teeth to the collection."

"Not so blinkin' fast, matey. I was pickin' 'em up to give 'em to you. But you won't keep 'em, I'm 'ere to say."

"Whose going to take 'em away from me?"

"Ah Mock knows about 'em."

"Yes? And I suppose it was Ah Mock who told you about how I might be getting the pearls too. Yarn about hearing of it in Sydney and—"

"Sure 'e told me. I'm 'is man. 'E told me to watch out on you. I was to get 'alf." Bristol still held the pearls in his hands.

Cadburn lunged across the table. Bristol ducked. Then he pocketed his right hand, left the pearls behind, and came up with an automatic pistol.

BRISTOL never got a chance to aim or fire. A blow caught him below the ear. A hand wrung the pistol from him. He fell backward over the bench and sprawled on the floor. His left hand discharged pearls. He scrambled upward, snarling. Cadburn gave him a right and a left, the right holding the pistol as it went home to the Cockney's jaw. He went down flat and was out while Cadburn was hunting up the scattered pearls.

Whigham came down the companion-way, his eyes blinking in an effort to see well after the strong sunlight of the beach. "What's the trouble?" he asked.

"I told you to wait."

Whigham's eyes fell upon the pearls in the saucer. "No wonder you did. But I find it more interesting here." He picked a pearl from the saucer and squinted at the pinkish sphere with critical eyes, turning it over and over in his fingers.

Bristol staggered to this feet, one hand on his head. He stared at Whigham. "Wot're you doin' 'ere?"

"Why bother to ask? So you found 'em I see."

Cadburn had Bristol's pistol in a front trouser pocket. It was out of sight. He put his hand on it and spoke to Whigham. "So you're another of Ah Mock's spies. That game about being broke was all rigged. I suspected something of the sort."

"Take it easy," said Whigham. "Bristol told Ah Mock yesterday that he's seen no pearls—and that you were not on the look for pearls. Ah Mock didn't believe him."

"I didn't see no pearls till this morning. 'Ow could I tell about 'em yestiddy?"

"Go tell Ah Mock that. I ain't interested. But this—well it looks worth bothering about." He held up the pearl. "Worth close to five thousand. We don't want to get in a hurry about this business."

"What kind of hurry do you mean?" demanded Cadburn.

"Telling Ah Mock."

"If you think you're going to turn my pearls over to Ah Mock you've got another think coming."

"What I'm thinking Ah Mock would kill me for if he found out about it."

"There you go!" cried Bristol. "You'll trim the Chink, too! It wasn't in my mind none to tell him."

Cadburn held a hand toward Whigham. "I'll take that pearl."

Whigham handed it over. "That's O. K. with me, bud. I play with the man who's got the pearls—not the Chink."

"And w're do I come in? I've been knocked about proper for doing just wot W'ig'am intends to do."

"Why should we let you in?" demanded Whigham.

"Who the 'ell let you in, if I might awsk?"

"You mean if we don't let you in, you'll make a squawk to Ah Mock."

"Not me. I won't say a crimson word."

"You bet you won't," said Whigham. He spoke with a surety that made Bristol Al wince.

"I don't want no pearls. All I wants is to get out of this place. *Sydney Express* of the mornin' for me."

"That so? You'll stick here until we're all ready to go. And it won't be in the mornin'."

"Who said you was my boss?"

"You heard me say it."

"But who invited you into the pearl business? I ain't 'eard Cadburn say nothing appertainin' to it."

Whigham turned to Cadburn. "More pearls where these came from?"

"Plenty." Cadburn lied easily. He had cleaned the planted oysters. But these men must believe that there were more pearls to be picked up if he was to get away alive.

"You ain't never looked for no pearls while I was on this job 'ere with you."

"Because I knew you were spying for Ah Mock."

"Why can't we work together?" asked Whigham.

"Why not? Working together, the three of us could clean up in a few months if we're lucky. Then let Ah Mock try to stop the three of us when we're ready to go."

"I won't 'ave no 'and in it!" screamed Bristol. "You two won't give me my share. I knows. I'm sailin' in the morning with Rand."

"We could get along easy enough without you," said Whigham. "But you won't go until you've told Ah Mock. You've no money to pay for your fare with Rand."

"I'll go straight out to the schooner now." Bristol was pleading in desperation.

"And tell Rand—and Rand'll come ashore and tell Ah Mock we've got pearls," retorted Whigham.

"You've no money," said Cadburn. He knew that Whigham was right—Bristol would take revenge before he sailed, even if Rand took him to work a passage.

"You ain't got seventy-five cents, not to

talk of that many dollars," scoffed Whigham.

Bristol Al reached into a pocket and drew out a red trade handkerchief. The four corners were tied. He opened it with nervous fingers. Five big gold pieces slithered down upon the scrubbed table top.

"Ah Mock paid you first, eh?" said Cadburn.

"And that means he won't let you sail until you've reported about these pearls," said Whigham.

"To 'ell with Ah Mock. I'll wait for dark and 'e won't know I'm aboard the schooner. There's a 'undred dollars—in gold. That'll make Rand take me—and not tell Ah Mock I'm goin'."

WHIGHAM'S right hand shot out and his fingers shut over the gold coins. "You'll stay with us—and keep your



mouth shut to our style. Then we'll know what we're up against."

Bristol plunged forward and grabbed at Whigham's hand. Whigham hurled him away and back against the bulkhead. "You stay here—and if I hear any more out of you, I'll shut your mouth so it'll stay shut."

Cadburn began to gather up his spilled pearls, taking care that he did not turn his back to Whigham. But he knew that Whigham's greed was roused.

While Bristol whimpered in the corner, Cadburn put pearls into the saucer. "We'd be foolish, Whigham, to skip out now and leave a couple of fortunes here in shallow water. It's like picking beans in a garden, bringing up those oysters—and all of 'em have pearls. This is no hit or miss game."

Whigham counted what was in the saucer. "Twelve—and all good and big and round."

"Two more somewhere around here," said Cadburn. "Look out where you put a foot."

"E's got more 'id away. Smart 'un, 'e is. Jolly fine time you'll 'ave with 'im. If you knows wot's good for you, don't play 'obby 'orse with 'im, as the Americans say."

"He's trying to make trouble between us already," said Whigham.

"It'll be rare sport to see you two go partners! Ho, I s'y!"

"Keep your lip out of this," warned Whigham. He reached out and picked up the saucer with the pearls.

"No you don't!" cried Bristol.

"Don't what?"

"Git away with 'em easy like that. Cadburn, 'e's takin' 'em to keep." Bristol slipped through the galley door. He came out with a long knife from the breadboard. He hurled himself against Whigham.

The knife caught Whigham in the shoulders as he swung to fend off the unexpected attack. The saucer fell and smashed, pearls flying over the floor.

Whigham whipped an automatic from his back pocket. His face was twisted with pain. Blood streamed down a wrist and stained the cuff of his white coat.

Bristol did not stop at the sight of the visitor. Hissing through his bare teeth, he attacked again. He drove the blade downward as Whigham fired. Whigham fell backward as he fired. Bristol's body, close

upon the falling man, smothered the sound of the report.

Bristol's knife, slanting downward, sheathed its steel to the hilt in Whigham's throat. Bristol's leg hit the corner of the table. He fell across Whigham's feet, the Cockney's head toward the companionway. A burst of blood reddened Whigham's collar and the front of his shirt. He lay on his back, gasping out his life. Bristol's teeth were grinning at him. The Cockney only showed signs of life for a minute. His knees drew up slowly. Then he sighed heavily with the last air in his lungs making red bubbles on his blue lips.

CADBURN gathered the scattered pearls. From Whigham came the gold pieces seized when Bristol showed his money—Ah Mock's spy money. Both the pearls and the money belonged really to Cadburn. Ah Mock knew nothing about the pearls when Cadburn arrived at Permata. He had them before his own cash was all gone for supplies at Ah Mock's high prices. Then Cadburn entered the employ of Ah Mock to earn enough to leave the island. His wages were so poor that no surplus could be gained, though Ah Mock made a high profit on the trepanng.

He had no more than put the pearls in his belt when Cadburn saw a shadow across the flooring. He turned and looked up, gun in hand. A yellow face looked down. Cadburn backed away from the foot of the companion.

The bodies of Bristol and Whigham lay mostly away from the companion against the after bulkhead of the room. Cadburn knew he was trapped. Ah Mock had sent his men to the jungle near the wreck. The open seams of the old hull had let the voices of the three white men filter out in their arguments—and the firing had been heard. Now Ah Mock's killers wanted to know why there was sudden silence in the wreck.

Bare feet appeared at the top of the companion. A short Chinese ran down—another followed him. The first, startled by the stepping on one of Whigham's feet, turned to look into the corner of the room. He held a knife in his hand.

The second man, his loose queue down his back, held one of Ah Mock's automatics. He wore a faded blouse, with short trousers

and a pouch hanging in front from a belt.

Cadburn knew them both. They were men rarely seen about Permata. They were employed by Ah Mock as executioners. They were ready to kill. Ah Mock was ready to destroy the three white men. Bristol probably had been seen bringing up the pearls in the teapot. These Chinese killers no doubt knew that some of the white men were already dead. Their job was to get the pearls from the man left alive.

"What do you want?" asked Cadburn. He only wanted a minute or two. He could escape forward to the hold and up through an open hatch. But that hatch might be guarded by another Chinese.

The first Chinese lifted his arm to throw his knife. The man behind him fired over his shoulder at Cadburn. The bullet struck into the bulkhead and plowed up splinters.

Cadburn pulled his trigger. The knife thrower dropped. Before the other man could fire again, Cadburn fired twice. He lunged forward through the smoke over the fallen Chinese. He did not stop to look back. More men might be on deck. Or men would be concealed in the jungle.

In the bright sunlight of the deck he peered about him. No one was in sight. He heard snarling cries below. Yellow hands clawed at the companion steps. The man with the gun was coming up. But his efforts at climbing were feeble. He was badly wounded but determined to get a bullet into Cadburn.

It would give the alarm if shots were fired on deck. They would be heard in the jungle and at Ah Mock's trade shed. Cadburn seized a bamboo pole. He waited until a yellow hand appeared at the top of the companion's coaming. Then he lunged forward, thrusting the end of the pole downward as he would let go a harpoon. The yellow man toppled over backward and crashed down into the messroom.

Cadburn leaped ashore. He ran for the trepang sloop's dinghy. Then he rowed

swiftly out into the bay. In fifteen minutes he was alongside the *Sydney Express*.

He went up the ladder and over the side. Then below to look for Rand. The captain was asleep, but he roused when Cadburn grabbed an arm and shook it.

"What the hell's this delegation!" spluttered Rand.

Cadburn thrust a pearl toward him—a perfectly round pearl of excellent orient, resembling somewhat a hailstone that caught a pinkish glow from the sunlight through the porthole.

"What's this pearl worth, Captain Rand?"

Rand stared. He took the pearl in greedy fingers and looked at it in disbelief. He sat in his bunk, feet hanging over. He turned his head like a parrot, he twisted the pearl in the light. "Boy!" he exclaimed. "Where'd you get this?"

"You know what that pearl's worth. You can't buy it."

"I ain't got money enough—but I know a Chink—in Sydney who would—"

"That pearl's yours if you get your anchor up and sail as quick as you can, Sail! And sail at once if you want that—"

Captain Rand bellowed up toward the skylight. "*Serang! Saub! Saub!* Anchor up! Make sail!"

The schooner was all a-clamor in an instant with the chain coming home and the mast-hooks creaking and the Malay crew running about. The wind slammed into the canvas before they were clear of the point. A boat was putting off from the beach before Ah Mock's place. Only Cadburn gave it any attention. He saw it turn back. Not till then was he sure that he had beaten Ah Mock, his spies, and his killers.

Captain Rand slapped Cadburn on the shoulder. "I thought you were a blasted beachcomber, m'lad! With that pearl I'm going to buy me a schooner. But I'll keep away from Permata." He winked a solemn wink. "And so will you, I dare say."



GIVE TILL IT HURTS

By FRANK J. LEAHY

SO I gave the man a dime. He had appealed to the largeness of my heart for a quarter, but, with curt apologies, I crossed his palm with the thinnest of ten-cent pieces and gestured him on his panhandling way.

"Now, you've done it!" my friend, Jerry Quade, made caustic criticism of my philanthropy. "You've not only encouraged a moocher to make up his deficit by preying on other innocent bystanders; you've low-

ered him in his own estimation by fifteen cents worth. You should have given till it hurt. But did you? No. You held out on him—even as he may hold out on you some day if ever he gets the chance."

We were sitting, at high noon, in the cool dark of the diminutive edifice where I officiated as wharfinger. Outside, deep-water men roamed, brushing shoulders with husky longshoremen, looking for a drink, a brawl, a berth in a freighter to

*X Marked the Spot for Pirate-loot;
Anything Might Happen on
Tin Can Island*



anywhere; and it was from among these swaggering soldiers of fortune that I'd plucked Jerry for to engage him in conversation similar to some we'd had on a lonely midwatch or on a palm-fringed beach or at a rollicking bar-rail down the years; but until this crack about my parsimoniousness, he'd sat tilted back against the wall, buried in a newspaper, as tight-mouthed as a clam.

"I suppose you know," said I coolly, digging into my lunch bucket for a bolognaron-rye, "whereof you speak?"

"I know," said Jerry, "and I can prove it by telling you about me'n Boston Al Card, down on Tin Can Island, a couple of tropic afternoons ago. If you've a moment—"

"Shoot!" I commanded. "I've till the whistle blows."

WELL (he began), this Tin Can Island belongs to the Tonga group, and lies some six hundred miles off the nor'east Australia seaboard, about halfway between Fiji and Samoa. Niuafou is its rightful name, but it's been nicknamed Tin Can because it's so high and sheer on all sides passing schooners send once-in-a-blue-moon mail ashore by dropping it overboard, in a tin can, to a swimming native.

I was there by reason of being a victim of circumstantial evidence, you might say, I'd been cookie in a trading schooner that'd called, and I was unceremoniously beached because I'd left a sore-finger bandage of mine in the skipper's sea-pie.

Anyhow, one day—about two months after I'd established myself as a beachcomber in a spare thatched hut—there came some guys with whiskers and spectacles and education in a chartered schooner, the *Alice Mae*.

They called themselves scientists and physi-something-or-others, and they were all steamed up, and loaded with rock drills and magnetic instruments, to study the volcanic and seismic conditions on the island. The big shot of the bunch was a little guy, named Dr. Horatio Redmark, who had a string of knotted-up capital letters trailing after him like a log-line.

Me'n him gets acquainted right off, and one day he takes the lid off a bottle of brandy in my sole presence. He came to

that, I figured, so's the scientific data he ruminates on will slip down my throat with less disinclination if spirituously greased.

And he was right.

But I wasn't to get away with such high-toned conviviality for long, alone. There was, besides me, on Tin Can Island, another beachcomber, of more degraded stratum. That was this Boston Al Card, an habitual parasite of the lowest knob on the spinal column. He knew hemispheres and big words and isms, but he used 'em only as a means to an end—to degenerate.

NOW I kind of had to assimilate with him, you understand, me'n him being what we were, but I didn't have him tied to a leash when I mingled with Doc Horatio Redmark. But Boston got to sniffing the fumes of brandy on me and then to tailing along to horn in on them and my good thing. Which is the impolitic way of a chiseling beachcomber.

"You muzzle-dunking son of a low-born highbinder!" I snarls at him once in private. "Why don't you find an oasis of your own and leave mine to me'n Doc?"

"A Bostonian," says he, "drinks only at the founts of the upper stratum—and the doctor's it."

After about ten days to a fortnight, though, I noticed that old Horatio was starting to look askance at me'n Al. Nor did I wonder. He was a good enough little guy, but we'd taken advantage of his private stock and public interest. Boston, mostly. That egotistic, non-union nonentity not only imbibed too freely, but talked too frequently.

He revealed his ignorance by displaying his intelligence in a series of scientific arguments and fist-pounding speeches on culture and ethics till the old boy didn't know his specimens from his degrees.

Came the dawn of the day, then, when Doc confronts us with fire in his spectacles. One of his outfit, I figured, must have buzzed him that if me'n Al had other than a spirituous interest in science there wasn't an instrument on the lot magnetic enough to detect it. He stands and hurls educated invective at us till we gather our tails between our hind legs and discard ourselves from his camp.

"You see," says I to Boston, irate, "what you've done?"

"Now, now," says he, "don't pass the buck."

"Well, Al Card," says I, "you're a hole-card of no intrinsic value."

AND when we ventured around again to Campo Horatio, we found no sign on the doormat nor bottle on the doorstep nor smile in the doorway that spelled w-e-l-c-o-m-e.

"Thanks to you!" says I to Boston, bitter. "You with your insatiable capacity and bigger bazool!"

"Stop!" he complains. "You've insinuated that sufficient."

But I kept it up for two or three days more, we having nothing else to occupy our unemployment. And then comes another schooner, the *Ookala*, to anchor off Tin Can, and after some hours of negotiating the ship to shore transfer, via ship's boats and outrigger canoes, another outfit lands—this one with a lot of trade goods. Trading with the natives, knick-knacks for pearl shell and copra, is the racket, and the cap'n's name is Tannen Shagrew.

He's a big guy, is Shagrew; a kind of a second edition Simon Legree, with a roll to his gait like a torpedo boat in a typhoon. He didn't look like a good thing to me, but Boston speaks up to work him first for any alms or beverages such as Doc Redmark had put out upon first acquaintance.

"Help yourself," says I. "Comb him dry with your Boston commonisms, and I won't muscle in on you, either."

So he takes his given opening with the trader. And, pretty soon, he comes back, and his tongue's hanging out a foot, tee-totally speaking.

"How'd you make out?" I puts it to him, sardonic.

"I didn't," says he, "for Shagrew's not putting out. But," Al adds, emphatic and sudden, "because the man and I seem to dovetail neatly—outside of the refreshment question—in certain worldly branches of conversation and society, I hope to soon convince him that I'm something more than a common and ordinary beachcomber."

I curled a lip and spat, disdainful.

"As if," says I, "you could!"

Then, that night, when me'n him are foregathered outside my hut, and he's gnawing a stick of sugar-cane, and I'm measuring the scarf the moon's laid down from Tin Can half way to Hong Kong he says to me:

"Quade, the more I think of it, the better I'd like to take that little Doc Redmark out and dunk him beyond the coral reefs. And," he says, "if you were anything but a jelly-fish, you'd have given me some moral support when he called me a loafer of the genus Parasite."

"Well," says I, "ain't you?"

"I'm a Bostonian," says he, "and let me tell you something: this Shagrew-bird's not only a trader, but the holder of a paper, dated 1858, which gives certain directions for finding a chest, filled with old gold, silver and copper coins, which is buried here on Tin Can."

"So," says I, unimpressed, "just what, if anything?"

"This," says Al. "Hereafter, I'm deserting the parsimonious Redmark expedition and devoting my time and natural ability to encouraging Tannen Shagrew in his purpose of unearthing buried treasure. And," he adds, "if you've any masculine gender and resentment in your carcass, you'll snub, as I snub, this Doc Redmark and go along with me'n Shagrew."

"Al of Boston," says I, meek and mild, but vicious, "if you have any shoes, don't bet 'em on it I'll go anywhere with you and, especially, Shagrew. I'm a man," I goes on to assure him, "who has deep-dived, high-flown, fry-cooked, cold-decked, ranged afar and come near to riding range. I'm a jack of all trades and master of them all, and it's my secret ambition to separate my tendrils of behindhand opportunity from the mud to do something, sometime, that'll ring somebody's doorbell for love and kisses. That," I concludes, "is why I'd count ten and, maybe, twenty before I'd debauch myself upon any excursion commanded by Tannen Shagrew—a man with a crooked look in his eye that Diogenes could have seen with his lamp out."

"You'll go along with me'n him," Boston reiterates, "or you're not what I think you are."

"If I do," says I, "you'll still be what I know you're not."

ANYWAY, for three or four days thereafter, Tin Can Island's busier'n a beehive in a fig grove. Doc Redmark continues to study the volcanic structure of the land with his associates and drills and such instruments, and Tannen Shagrew pitches in to find the buried treasure with the help of half the native populace and picks and shovels and Boston Al Card. All Boston does, though, is to lie on the shady sidelines somewhere and tell 'em how he'd go about deciphering the code of the 1858-dated paper if it were left up to him.

"Looks like to me," says I to him once, "if that paper's worth the wrinkles in it, even Tannen Shagrew could have figured out where's the cross marking the spot by this time."

"There's a piece torn off the sou'-sou'-east corner of it," says Al, "or we'd already have had large results, my man."

I laughed loud, sardonic and at length.

"You!" says I. "You impecunious deep-sea squid, what are you but a hanger-on? But tell me," says I, "where's this remnant of paper been all its three score and fifteen years?"

"In the possession of kings," says Boston. "In the hands, that is, of several past and present woolly-headed Solomon Island head-hunters of negroid, but royal, extraction. Shagrew just bought it," says Al, "for a bolt of red calico and three pounds of trade tobacco. The kings couldn't read it, anyhow, and had been using it as stuffing in a mounted rainbow-crested cockatoo."

That sounded reasonable enough, but still, right then or at any other time, I couldn't see Tannen Shagrew as anything but a swaggering pirate of the knife-'em-in-the-rear variety.

"I'll stick to Doc Redmark," says I to Al, "whether he chooses to be stuck or not."

"What'll it get you?" he asks. "That four-eyed little bottle-cuddler'll never amount to anything—nor will his science, mark my words."

BUT was he wrong? Ha! Was he wrong! The words weren't twelve hours off Boston's tongue than there starts enough excitement in one of Doc's sub-camps to prick up the ears of all hands on the island. Even me'n Al rouse out of a noonday

lethargy to join the rush to learn what's up. And little Doc Horatio, who's standing by a hole in the ground, explains personally.

"The oldest rocks of this island are a trachyte," says he. "This was followed by an extrusion of basalts, then by basic lavas, scoriae, paragonite tuffs and, finally, basalt flows. Now," he goes on, glancing at Tannen Shagrew through his spectacles and directing his words at him, "the party, or parties, who coded that paper, dated 1858, which you have in your possession, buried the chest of old coins in the stratum of paragonite tuffs."

"Who're they," speaks up Shagrew, "these toughs you talk about? And where are they at?"

"Paragonite tuffs," says Doc, patient, but annoyed, "are fragmentary volcanic bits of sodium mica, varying in size from fine sand to coarse gravel, and a layer of such may be found some few feet under the surface of, at least, this section of Tin Can Island."

"But what's that got to do with the chest?" growls Shagrew, dumb as hell.

"Since the burial of the chest," says Doc, "there seems to have been a basalt flow from some one of the old craters forming this island. This flow," says he, "covered the paragonite and the chest buried therein with a crust that you, with your picks and shovels, would, I'm here to say, never have penetrated."

"Who told you so?" barks Shagrew.

"I'm telling you," says Doc. "And if you think I'm not, look down this hole here and learn something."

WELL, sir, Tannen Shagrew sidles forward and peers down the fifteen to twenty-foot hole and almost tumbles into it. For the chest—an iron, trunk-sized affair—is down there, sure enough, and some researchers are down there with it, bending stout lines around it. And when it's hoisted up out of its grave and the lid's pried open, there, true to Shagrew's paper's promise, are old gold and silver and copper coins. Eighteenth century, Spanish coins, minted, according to their inscriptions, in the reign of King Philip V, and stacked right up to the chest's gun's.

"Well, now, thanks to you!" chuckles Shagrew, fingering the find like as if it's al-

ready his for the carrying away. "Thanks plenty, Professor Mudlark!"

"Doctor Redmark," corrects Horatio. "And, furthermore," says he, immediate, "not so fast! This unearthed lucre now belongs to, and shall be used for the benefit of, me and the science which outwitted the game of blind man's buff you've been playing with it. And as for you, Cap'n Shagrew," he winds up, "you can take that paper you have and use it in whatever way you may, sooner or later, see fit."

SHAGREW looks black as forty fathoms down for a second, and then he explodes. He names Doc some of the most unscientific formulas unknown to research. And when Doc ignores him to the point of prancing off at the head of a working crew carrying the chest, he himself goes to Tin Can's native king and starts getting the king and some of the king's men drunk on gin, in preparation for an uprising. And the threat of having to do battle to retain possession of the chest scares Doc a little, for he orders the damn thing transported from the island out to the comparative safety of the *Alice Mae*, offshore.

Now, that might have been a scientific, as well as a strategic, maneuver if the chest had safely reached the schooner. But it didn't. A kind of a cross-running sea takes the ship's boat unawares and overturns it and dumps the chest into fourteen fathoms of water.

Shagrew, drunk and disorderly, laughs to do his black heart good when he sees, hears and understands what's happened. And Doc looks like he's going to cry in his spectacles for a minute, but then, sudden and grim, he proves he can take it. He shrugs and sighs an "Ah, well!" and turns to go on about his interrupted researching.

"Philosophical, ain't he?" I remarks to Boston Al. "Easy come, easy go, that's Doc."

"The unshaven little grave robber!" growls Al (still sore from the lacing he got). "He should be hung to the highest limb. Even if his ill-gotten coins hadn't dropped definitely out of circulation, as they have, he'd have hoarded them with the tight-fistedness of paragonite tuffs."

The next day, with the threatened native

uprising quelled by reason, you might say, of insufficient funds, Doc hires a dozen or so of the king's best diving boys for to try to salvage the chest. But old Davy Jones chuckled deep in the locks of his locker, little doubt of that; refusing to let any one of the naked swarm sink deep enough from their outrigger canoes to get a line around the chest, or even get a glimpse around it. All that day the boys tried, and it got to look like whatever pirate buried the coins in the first place still had his fingers crossed.

MEANWHILE, although Tannen Shagrew gloated, his loyalist, Al Card, wore a wrinkle between his shaggy brows.

"Some scientific hard lines," says I to him, feeling him out, "ain't it?"

"Go 'way!" says he, irritable. "I'm trying to formulate a plan that'll maybe afford me some much-desired personal satisfaction, jubilation and remuneration."

"Al," says I, parental, "whyn't you give yourself up?"

On the second day of the futile salvage activities, I had a sudden bright idea, and I made shift at once to see if it'd work. I went to the Redmark camp—where I was still looked upon and talked to with acrimony, you understand—and procured a five-gallon molasses can. I cut the bottom out of it, shaped the undersides to fit the shoulders, cut a round hole in the front, sealed that opening with a piece of glass, and fitted a long length of rubber tubing into the spout for an air line. With it, I had a couple of natives paddle me out in an outrigger to where the would-be salvors were still diving, naked. Holding a couple of big stones in my hands to weight me, I went over the side in my phony helmet, to kind of test its possibilities. But they sure didn't amount to a nickel's worth. I hadn't descended more than four or five of the fourteen fathoms than I gave a frantic signal to be hauled. That molasses can was pressure-flattened around my face like a death-mask, and I realized there was either a flaw in the metal or my mentality.

"T'hell with it!" I says, disgusted. "I quit."

When I got back on shore I kind of looked around for Doc Redmark to be waiting to greet me with a kindly word or

a friendly glance or, possibly, a jolt of brandy. But no, I might have been a beach-comber of the Al Card worthless variety for all the orchids that were cast at me, and right then and there I wanted to crunch a certain pair of spectacles under my heel.

"Down with science!" says I to myself, bitter. "Down to the paragonite tuffs with it!"

ON THE threshold of my thatched habitat I found Boston Al picking his teeth with a splinter of bamboo. And, inside, was an amplitude of food—canned willie, baked yams, sea-biscuits, yellow-clings and drip-coffee—which he had left spread for me and my arrival.

"Where'd you comb all this aristocratic mulligan from?" I asks, suspicious.

"From Cap'n Tannen Shagrew," says he. "Me'n him are amiable, and our worldly possessions are interchangeable."

"Phooey!" says I, turning to on the chow. "What of value have you to compensate for one diminutive sea-biscuit?"

"Service," says Al. "The services of a Bostonian."

"Don't irritate me with your stereotyped repartee," I teils him. "I've had a trying day, and if I could have salvaged that chest with my damn fandangled helmet, I'd not have to stop at your festive board and look and listen to you."

"Tell me about it," says Boston, derisive. "All about the brain storm that blew you into contorting a molasses can for good old Redmark, white and blue."

Well, I told him, all right, but with the pleasantness of a lifting safety valve. And I defied him to offer a better suggestion for plumbing depths below man's denatured element.

After running a calculating eye up and down me as I attacked the yellow-clings, he produced a long, black, fat cigar. When he'd blown a whiff of it in my face, he says with a smirk:

"Also a donation from the cap'n who came peacefully to unearth treasure legitimately. Not bad, eh?"

"All right," says I, "I call your hand, Al Card. What've you got?"

"A straight," says he. "A natural. "Can you beat it?"

"No," says I. "But, cards on the table, please, faces up."

"First of all, Quade," says he, "you were an unmitigated fool for over-estimating the volume of due appreciation of effort which usually oozes from the Redmark type of scientist. Secondly," he goes, "you should not have tried to pry open Davy Jones' Locker in anything but a formal diving dress of recognized manufacture."

SO SAYING, he pokes the mate to his stogy at me.

"There is such a dress in existence," he continues, "and right here on Tin Can Island, at that. It was willed to me about a year before you came to pollute the 174th meridian with your presence and childish inventions. There was a man," says he, "from an observatory—of which you couldn't possibly know anything—who came to study certain phenomena in the central lagoon. The weather upon his departure was unfavorable, so the dress, along with some other excess baggage which might contribute to an unsafe passage out to his schooner, was left behind. And that, my good fellow," he concludes, "is why you were a fool for resorting to a mere molasses can."

"Where's this prize possession of which you speak?" I asks. "Now that I'm in a state of mental and physical disruption from wandering afield, tell me Boston, where is it?"

Al shrugs a shoulder and burns me with a look that has its hooks out for information.

"Quade," says he, "I am a man who never wasted time on the inferior branches of learning, as have you and types peculiar to yourself. You have been a diver, and a diver is what is necessary to the recovery from sea-sickness of that chest of rare old coins—see?"

"No," says I, immediate, "I don't fully gather why I should further volunteer to rescue the specie interests of the Doc Redmark parsimonious expedition."

AT THAT, Boston's physiognomy kind of lights up.

"Most assuredly not," says he. "Now, listen. This Shagrew-bird may be a black-hearted, king-intoxicating son of these

beaches, but he also has his other good points. Which is to say, when I whispered diving dress to him, he talked intimations to me that he'd like very much to come into possession of the chest momentarily out of reach."

"He did, did he?" says I. "Well, who wouldn't?"

"Shagrew," says Al, "will donate his very own schooner to the cause—shift anchorage to the spot of recent disaster and tend to a diver as could not be done were a diver to attempt to descend from a frail outrigger canoe. Now, Quade," he goes on to say, "I thought that very considerate of the cap'n—particularly the way he sent me on my way with food and cigars for two. What do you say?"

"First," I says, "what'd Shagrew say he'd pay us for this small matter of delivering a chest of coins at his private entrance?"

"He'll pay," promises Al, "handsomely. Depend on me to have arranged that to our satisfaction."

I nodded, thoughtful, while I cogitated at length.

"When," I finally asks, "would you care to have this low act of high seas roguery take place?"

"Tonight," says Boston, "while the enemy sleeps."

"I see," says I. "And I also seem to see that you—not to mention the unspeakable Shagrew—are, after all, nothing but a kind of hybrid *nux vomica*. But," I adds with a shrug, "I suppose a man must not let opportunity slip him by."

"Then you'll help us?" asks Boston, elated.

"A man," I repeats, "must not let opportunity slip him by."

THAT night, then, while Tannen Shagrew's slipping anchors and easing his schooner, on the tide, to a position over where the plural quantity of coin is down, me'n Boston and a couple of the king's subjects haul out the chest of diving gear from under the mattress of well-worn palm fronds he's been snoozing on of nights and fetch it down to a waiting ship's boat.

It's along about midnight before passage is negotiated out across the bounding main and we're aboard the *Ookala*. Then, while

Shagrew, irritable as hell, is bawling orders at his Kanaka crew, and I'm being dressed for a dive, Boston sprawls himself out on a hatch and looks on with the air of a man gloating over the promised fruits of ignoble retribution to little Doc Redmark. And, sudden and diabolical, he waxes eloquent.

"Now don't air any of your lop-sided personalities," says Al. "You know yourself that Doc Redmark dissevered me with phrases that, laid end to end, would reach from Tin Can to Medicine Hat and back half way to Bora Bora."

"Yes," growls Shagrew, "and what'd the short-sighted little scissortail do to me?"

"And to you, too, Quade," says Boston. "What became of your ingratiations once Doc saw his brandy wasn't going to age with you around? How many leis did he stack on your shoulders when you showed your relativity to Einstein in the molasses can episode? And what," he continues to ask, "would the old curmudgeon give me'n you and Shagrew for the salvage of his hope chest of ancient specie? Not even a glance through his spectacles, I'll bet."

"You are prejudiced," says I, calm and collected, "in favor of Tannen Shagrew here—the scum of a low tide, who chooses to chisel without benefit of daylight. You should be ashamed of your Boston commonness."

"Close 'im up!" Shagrew orders my dressers. "And throw 'im overboard."

DOWN under it was blacker'n a vat of octopi sepia. You know what I mean? It was that dark it hurt my eyes; and that still that I could hear myself think. I was in a self-contained dress—one, you understand with a knapsack containing caustic soda and oxygen chambers which regenerated my exhaled breath as it passed 'em.

I had no telephone, no torch; I was independent of the topside, except for a descending line. The end of this I rove through my belt when my feet struck bottom, and then I started groping around through the sea-foliage. There was a tide running, and it kind of lifted me off my feet and dropped me again, now and again. I had to lean against it, and what with bucking it and handling the weight of my dress and the pressure of fourteen fathoms, I

started to weaken before I'd been down five minutes.

If I could have seen where I was going or where I was coming from, it wouldn't have been so bad. But I kept tripping over humps of coral, and once I bumped smack into some kind of a huge beast that gave a flip of its tail and almost knocked me for a row of flags at half mast. Another time, I stepped on something that jumped out from under me—a sleeping searay, I guess it was. And if I hadn't been getting a little dizzy in the head and fuzzy in the mouth and shaky in the legs, I might have had sense enough to get scared. As it was, I was about at the point of sitting myself down on a coral bush to rest and relax when I bumped into something that had the chesty feel to it of the very thing I was after.

"Success!" I mumbles to myself, at the same time kicking some species of a crawling reptile from off my sta'board leg. "Again the booty's in the bag."

To my descending line, running down parallel with it from the topside, was attached a quarter-inch cable. This I brought into hand, and after swearing at it a while, I managed to get a couple of good hitches round the chest, and it was ready to be hauled. As was I ready to be hauled; so I gave a four-jerk signal on my descending line, telling the topside about it. When they dragged me over the rail and got my helmet off, I replied to Boston's and Shagrew's anxiety with an aspect as solemn as the Emerald Buddha of Angkor's.

"Take it up," I tells 'em. "King Philip V's coinage shall not, after all, remain longer out of circulation."

"Good!" cries Al, jubilant. "We're in the money!"

IN A minute the chest's wrested from the deep and wrestled over the rail.

"Take it aft!" Shagrew orders his Kanakas, sharp and immediate; and then he turns to me'n Al. "Now, you two birds—" he begins.

"Sure," Boston cuts in. "Now we'll take ourselves aft, too, for the payoff, is that it?"

"No, that's not it," snarls Shagrew, and he snakes a hand into a pocket and jerks out a revolver and levels it at me'n Al. "There'll

be no payoff," he announces. "I'd have to use that salvaged coin, and if I used it there'd be evidence against me. And there's to be no evidence. You two birds," says he, "can pile off this schooner, right now."

He calls to his mate to have the dinghy lowered.

"Well, you wolf in a sheepskin coat!" storms Boston. "You won't get away with this. There's a law."

"I'll say there is," I adds. "And there's also little Don Horatio Redmark. That chest of mazuma is his, and you know it; and when he finds out you've made off with it, he'll hound you down to the end of the world."

"Don't tell me," says Shagrew. "I've got a Certificate of Ownership in the form of the 1858-dated paper I bought from a certain kinky-headed king, and what can Doc Redmark show but a hole in the ground? Now, you two birds," he says, jabbing his artillery at us, "get into that dinghy before I blow your heads off."

AND into the dinghy me'n Boston got. There was only one oar in it and, true to form, Boston refused to have anything to do with it. He just planked himself down in the stern, swearing like a defeated Tammany Haller.

And we weren't a hundred yards off when sounds of weighing anchor and making sail on the *Ookala* reached us; and, pretty soon, the shadow of the schooner faded and the stars shone where she'd been.

I stood Al's unpunctuated ravings for just so long as it took me to scull the dinghy to a landing place on Tin Can. It was just breaking day, and we came ashore like two ragged and dirty crabs. Then I turned on him, arms akimbo, to surround him with my righteous indignation.

"Stand where you are," I says to him, you impecunious offspring of Benedict Arnold and all the tabooed, tattooed vermin of science and history, and meet your Waterloo and Jack Dempsey. You've sold out your Boston culture," says I, "and though you didn't get paid the price demanded, nor any part of it, I'm not going to let you go on thinking you'll further get away with having been an accessory before and during the fact of robbing Doc Redmark of his unburied treasure."

"Stop!" protests Al.

And right then I let go a left from the waist and hooked it on his bewhiskered chin and bowled him over. He'd been set upon before, however, in places of harder metal than Tin Can Island, and he came back at me with ferocity and gusto. But, in five minutes, I had him horizontal and groping for daylight.

"Now rise up," says I, prodding him with a foot, "and come along with me."

HE SO did, and he was still smearing at a torrential nose when we'd transmigrated up a couple of sheer bluffs and through a coconut grove to the Redmark camp and across its threshold. And when I called for Doc, I forced our two-man disreputable blockade on him.

"Well, gentlemen," says Horatio, looking at us over his spectacles, "aren't you up before breakfast this morning?"

"Breakfast had nothing to do with what we've been up to," says I. "Doc," I goes on to explain, "look upon us with scorn and utter contempt. Look upon us as a pair of multi-legged reptiles who, at one time, clinked glasses with you, and then traded you off for Tannen Shagrew. Doc," says I, dropping my eyes, shameful, "last night I salvaged your chest of coins, in Boston's diving dress, and Tannen Shagrew is now fleeing for parts unknown with the booty."

For a second there's only a kind of a little grunt sounds in Doc's throat, and then he starts to laugh. It's a funny kind of a laugh, too full of amusement to sound safe and sane to me, and I start to thinking maybe I've dished him a blow he can't take when he says:

"Let me show you something, my friends."

He turns into the main tent, with me'n Al at his heels, and lifts off the lid of a big packing case standing in the corner. And there in that case was the rare old specie. Every penny and dollar of it, there it was, so help me, Allah!

"What the hell!" blurts Boston.

"Yes," says I, "what the hell, Doc? I thought—"

"You thought as Tannen Shagrew did," Doc cuts in. "But, as you see, you were wrong. After I had the contents of the chest dumped into this case, I ordered an accident happen to the chest, en route to the Alice Mae. In view of the trouble brewing on account of it," he says. "What I did might be considered a strategic maneuver."

"I know, but Doc," says I, worried, "that chest was pretty heavy out there last night. Are you sure you didn't leave some of the stuff in it?"

"Stuff?" says Doc, chuckling. "Call it tuffs and be scientific. It was loaded with paragonite tuffs."

"Ha, not bad!" says I. "And that leaves me'n Boston here innocent of evildoing, don't it?"

"Oh," says Doc, "I suppose so. You're no angels, that's evident, but you've done me the good turn of being instrumental in driving Shagrew off the scene. So," he says, "maybe you both had better come have a little nip of brandy with me."

JERRY ceased spinning his yarn; laughed a little; and I with him. And then, suddenly, the whistle blew.

"Well," I sighed, "there she goes."

"And there he goes." Jerry pointed a finger to indicate a shuffling figure among the swarm on the front. "The moocher."

I started; hesitated, but only for an instant; and then I stepped quickly to the door.

"Here, my man!" I called. And then, "You're no angel, that's evident, but here's the fifteen cents I cut you on that quarter you wanted."

Jerry chuckled.

"You get the idea," he said. "Give till it hurts."

"Why not?" said I. "That fellow may be in the position to do me a good turn some day. Who can tell?"



6

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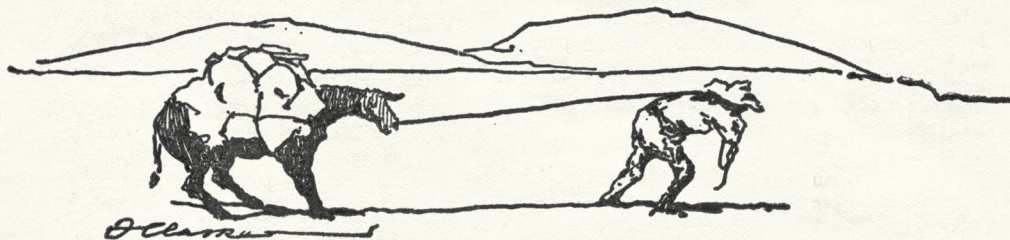
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*Dan Was a Prospector With a Lot of Good Ideas, but Sometimes,
He Was Led to Opine, It's Dumb to Be Smart*



THE MILLION-DOLLAR BURRO

By GEORGE ROSENBERG

"HOLY jumpin' Judas!" exploded my partner, Dan Mayhew, that morning at our Wolf Creek camp. "Mike, come arunnin'! Look what's happened to Taft!"

Taft was a big bronc we been using for a pack horse—a swayback sorrel with a Roman nose, pot belly, and hoofs like stumps draped with feathers. 'Most anything that *could* happen to Taft would be an improvement, I figured; so Dan's yelp of alarm struck me as mighty queer. I dropped my pan of bacon into the fire, did an about-face in the air and lit sprintin' up the bank to the flat where we'd staked out Taft.

There stood Dan, eyes popping like he'd seen a stick turn into a snake. I looked at what he was gawking at; I blinked, and blurted, "My Gawd, Dan, I can't believe it!"

Cropping at the grass, Taft's halter knotted about its neck, grazed a burro. No, a *burrito*. The saddest, homeliest, mildest cross between an Airedale pup and a Scotch gran'pa you ever saw! Not as big as a horse, not as small as a mouse: just halfway between. On its back a little saddle was cinched; but to ride to town on the critter, a grown man would have to make two trips.

"Some hombre," I realized, "needin' a hoss real bad, swiped Taft and left this insect in its place."

"Damn it all," Dan swore. "Taft was a good bronc!"

"Good in his way. He ate like a remuda."

"Whoa, Henry," said Dan, approaching this token left in Taft's place. "Nice little jackass, Mike. Got a kind face. Favors you some." Just then the beastie wheeled and drove a pair of little heels at Dan, quick as a lady saying, "Sir!" Dan backed away, swearing.

"The name," I suggested, "is Henrietta."

"Would you call me Mabel?" Dan rasped.

"What I'd call you—"

"Never mind!" This time he grabbed the halter without any love taps. "Whoa, Goliath! If you wasn't so old in the ways of sin, I'd want to feed you from a bottle. Instead, you're goin' to earn your keep by packin' a load. Mike, let's start breakin' camp."

DAN MAYHEW and I are old partners. Together, we make a couple average hombres. Dan was a tow-head when he was young, and I was dark-complected; but sun and wind and rampagin' years have scarred and weathered us till we look like brothers. What he lacks in size and beef, I make up. What I lack in brains—but why go into that. We're prospectors, now, working on our second million. We tried, till our hair turned gray, to make our first million at cattle raising. We failed. We're trying a second time; at prospecting you don't have

to work so hard to fail to make your million.

As Dan suggested, we started breaking camp.

While we were packing a load onto our Tom Thumb burro, a stranger rode up the creek bank toward us—a big, ruddy-faced hombre on a pinto horse.

"Light down, partner," I invited when he stopped nearby.

He started to dismount, then froze; just stood in stirrup, gawking at our burro. His eyes popped so you could've laid a stick across 'em and his face drained white and his jaw hung down like he was used to doubling for a fly trap in dull seasons.

Suddenly he barked, "I want to buy that burro!"

"Got a penny?" I asked, hopeful.

He reeled off his horse, whipped out a wallet, snatched forty dollars cash from it. "Enough?" he barked, tense-like.

I reached for this sudden wealth, but Dan blocked the deal. "Sell Goliath?" he yelped. "Never! Friend, we hand-raised this burro. He's a model pack animal."

"Model is right!" I blurted. "A small-sized imitation of the real thing. Dan, let's sell 'im!"

Dan's gray eyes snapped and he drew himself up to his full five-feet-six. "I'd as soon sell my gran'pap!" he insisted to this stranger. "How high can you offer?"

"Forty dollars, and my bronc to boot!"

Dan said nothing. The stranger's mouth twitched; and if ever I saw itching greed and desperate, reckless want of something on a man's face, I did then. He blurted, "Lissen, this pinto is a top ropin' hoss. And I'll throw in that new saddle, hair rope, and my bit and bridle! Is it a deal?"

Manna from heaven! But Dan refused it.

"Sorry," he said, "but Carnegie is a pet and closer than a brother. No sell."

Would you believe it, this stranger seemed to expect to be turned down! He didn't argue. Simply vaulted into saddle and spurred down-trail toward Tres Piños like a Paul Revere spreading red-hot news!

THE look I gave Dan would've shrunk an elephant to size of our burro.

I said, "That stranger is crazy as a bull-frog in a keg of beer for wantin' to buy this donk'. But alongside of you, who re-

fused to sell, he's a regular Noah Webster! Is that a head on your shoulders or just a hub for your ears?"

"Mike," Dan insisted, his lean face real earnest, "Mellon, here, is no ord'nary burro! That stranger knew he was offerin' a price for the critter that was cheap."

"Why cheap?" I asked. "How-come?"

We tiptoed around the beastie, staring hard, real respectful. Plainly it had been somebody's pet, for it was curried like a race horse and even shod.

"Dan, maybe it's got gold in its teeth?" I guessed.

Dan looked. "Nope."

"Maybe it's shod with gold shoes?"

Again Dan looked. "Nope. But still," he insisted, "the critter is worth real money to somebody. Big money. Why?"

"It's over my head and hands!" I had to answer.

THIS puzzle faded out of our worries in the next few days. We shifted camp to the Pot Holes in Bouquet Canyon. We prospected, made trips in every direction from camp. Not until we hiked into Tres Piños for a load of supplies, a week later, did the mystery about our burro again grab us by the ears.

We tied the critter to the hitch rack in front of Bonny's General Store. Pronto a commotion kicked up. Men gathered about us, jammed the sidewalk and overflowed into the street. Whispers hissed and sizzled through the crowd. More hombres came from the store, saloons, the post office—fattened the mob like buzzards gathering for a feast! Nobody was noisy; but everybody seemed excited and suspicious. Catching their hostile looks, I felt an icy tingle spiderleg up my backbone.

"Where'd you git that burro?" somebody shouted.

"Found 'im in my sock last Chris'mas," Dan said.

What was coming next, I wondered. Accusations? A charge of robbery, mayhem and bloody murder?

"Give you a hundred dollars for him!"

Dan and I looked at each other, flabbergasted.

"Take it!" I hissed, but Dan acted stone deaf.

"Hundred and twenty!" yelped another

madman. And pronto the ante jumped. "Two hundred, cash on the nail!"

Dan still said nothing, but I noticed sweat beading on his forehead, and realized that he was just as thunderstruck as I was at these offers for the little sin of some jackass we owned.

Casual-like, we looked again at the burro's teeth and hoofs; but nope, they hadn't come out of a jewelry shop. We raked our hands through Rockefeller's mane and tail to see if any pearls or diamonds were tangled there like drops of dew. None were. We pried into his ears; maybe some high-grader had cached a lot of gold in those horns of plenty. We found room enough for a ton of coal, but nothing else.

Meanwhile the bidding swelled. "Two hundred and seventy-five dollars!" was shouted at us.

"Dan," I whispered, "let's sell!" And when he shook his head, I rasped. "You two-legged mule, if tickets to heaven were sellin' three-fer-nickel you'd hold out for a rain-check!"

"I won't sell. There's something big behind all this!"

"Dan, t'hell with speculatin'. Let's grab the cash!"

He didn't argue; just walked through the crowd into the store. That mob got bigger by the minute. Those hombres milled around me and the burro. Cowmen, prospectors, counter-jumpers, sheep herders—they all seemed straddled and hard-spurred by a crazy hankering to own our *burrito*! It was uncanny; it was sickly-queer; it had something awful about it. Bid by bid the ante was raised until a couple hombres pooled their money and offered me three hundred dollars. Three hundred separate and bona fide cash dollars for our amblin' tidbit of coyote bait. I nigh broke down and cried.

But Dan, when he came out of the store, still shook his head. No, he wouldn't sell.

"Why not?" I said into his ear. "Don't let the family resemblance keep you from partin' with the critter—he ain't proud of you!"

Dan said nothing, just loaded our supplies onto the burro.

Three hundred dollars and a gold watch we were bid.

"What more d'you want?" I raved at Dan

under my breath. "A house and lot? Sell the jackass! If you miss 'im, I promise to replace him!"

"You could, at that," snapped Dan, "if you learned to flap your ears." And he growled at the burro, "Git along, Mike! Hop, you dumb, obstinate, nat'ral-born sucker!"

Out of town we started. And behind us, the crowd seemed to let out one long, aching groan of disappointment.

WHEN we reached camp, Dan explained a bit.

"Mike," he said, as solemn as if he and St. Peter had made medicine talk about admitting Piñon County folk into heaven and come to a sad decision, "I don't want to sell the burro because those Tres Piños jaspers are too damn anxious to let us rob 'em. I figure that if they're willin' to pay a hundred bucks for the critter, it's because they count on gettin' back a thousand."

"Fifty thousand!" I jeered, not believing.

"Likely you're right," he said softly, "and I'm anxious to pocket a half share of that bank roll myself."

"Birds in the bush," I rasped, "lay no nest-eggs!"

Dan didn't answer; just staked the burro in a patch of lush grass beside the creek. We ate supper; turned in.

I didn't sleep real well that night. I dreamed of a line of camels walking through the eye of the needle—only, looking close, I saw they were burros of the exact size and markings of our own pocket edition. Of a sudden a wild howl of grief yanked me awake. It was Dan's voice I heard, full of condemnation.

"Mike, the burro's gone! Slipped his halter."

I shot out of my blankets, voicing my opinion of Dan. Blinking against the morning sun, I looked around. The burro was gone. I elaborated my opinion of Dan.

"You should've sold the varmint yesterday!" I wound up. "Three hundred dollars lost out of our pockets! A jackass on two legs, sired by Calamity out of Wrath-of-God—that's what you are!"

Dan shouts a pretty fair insult himself; and in half a shake my ancestors were down with his, shoveling coal for dear life while

the devil prodded 'em with the same pronged tail.

"Listen," I said finally, coming to my senses, "we'll trail the critter—"

Dan suddenly pointed over my shoulder, his eyes opening wide. I bit off my words, turned to look.

A mob of men were riding toward us, from Tres Piños.

Dan whispered, "Keep your mouth shut. I'll handle this!"

Some thirty-odd hombres were in the crowd. Grim-faced they were, and quiet—too quiet. Nearby, they reined up; and a burly man with a pock-marked face dismounted and approached us.

From his pocket he drew a roll of paper money fat enough to derail a train. Right under our noses, without explaining, he counted out the cash. It added up to seven hundred dollars!

"Our limit, absolutely!" he barked. "Give us that burro!"

I started to say we didn't have no burro, but Dan grabbed my arm, and shouted, "No! We won't sell!"

This pock-marked hombre didn't seem surprised. Turning, he made a sign. And all those riders dismounted and gathered around us so quiet and business-like that I felt like a lamb surrounded by a pack of real efficient wolves.

"We got no time to mess with you!" the leader snapped at us then. "If you won't sell, you'll rent that critter to us for three days, and like it. Or else—"

What he didn't say was plumb eloquent.

Dan looked 'em over, his gray eyes hard. Then he shrugged. "All right. We'll rent you the burro for three days. Rent'll cost you seven hundred dollars. In advance."

I looked for the mob to jump him like a landslide. They did jump—at his offer.

"It's a deal!" yelled the leader, and shoved the bale of money into Dan's hands. "Where's the burro?"

I got set; now the lightning would strike!

Cool as you please, Dan said, "I turned 'im loose—"

"You did *what*?" those hombres shrieked. Thunderstruck they were. Plumb horrified! "Where? When? Damn you, talk!"

They were going to lynch us, after all!

Dan snorted. Guts—he's got plenty.

"I loosed him last night, so he could rustle wider. I ain't your wrangler. Round 'im up yourself. I'll show you his tracks. Your three days' use of 'im will start from the time you catch 'im."

He led them to the creek bank, where the burro usually drank; and in a soft spot he showed 'em the beastie's hoof marks; one hind shoe was broken, its mate was smoothed flat to the hoof on one side. Near front shoe was missing, and the other front iron showed a cleft. This done, he led the crowd to the grassy flat where we'd staked the burro, and showed 'em its trail. And like a pack of hounds nosing after a fox, hell-fer-leather, those men followed a plain trail east toward the maze of timber-grown canyons!

Just as fast, Dan and I started in the opposite direction—toward Tres Piños with seven hundred cash *pesos* in our jeans!

Dan said, "We'll celebrate a few—then head for Yuma!"

"Hombre," I shouted, "you're slick as paint and twice as bright! A man partnerin' with you has got Lady Luck scratchin' for him like a hen with one chick. I'm sidin' you close—you got brains!"

"Yeah. Maybe they're catchin'."

At Tres Piños, we stomped into the Casino Saloon.

"Set 'em up for the house!" I whooped.

The barkeep grinned impolite, and said, "You sold that burro?"

"Naw. The critter ran off last night, so we just sold its tracks to a bunch of innocents! Tell me, barkeep! If a burro's tracks are worth seven hundred dollars, what's the burro worth?"

"Nothin', net," said the sud-shoveler.

"A cool million, timbertop!" I rapped.

"Huh-uh, nix, not any," he differed.

"Old-timer, for seven hundred bucks you sold a bonanza that 'ud make the Mother Lode look like what a Scotchman puts into a blind man's hat."

"*W'assat*?" Dan and I chorused.

"That burro belonged to Tip Lemoigne. How-come you got the critter, or what's happened to old Tip, we don't know. Lemoigne was a little, white-haired wisp of a hombre. Twice a month he'd come to town, ridin' that wisp of a burro. Twice a month he'd show us a poke of dust and

nuggets he'd washed out, up at his camp; and he'd go on to Logan to sell the stuff. On his return trip, he'd stop here and buy himself some drinks. Come nightfall, he'd straddle his burro and sleep in saddle while it started home with him. He always said that if he fell off, he wouldn't fall far enough to hurt.

"Natur'ly the boys tried to find out where he got his mineral. He wouldn't tell. They'd watch him start for his camp, a-snoozin' in saddle, and they'd try to follow—but sometime in the night he'd wake up and hide his trail as clever as an Injun. Nobody ever located his diggin's. He never filed claim on his find, either; so we've guessed it must be over north, on national forest territory, where you can't stake out a claim, though nobody will stop you from washin' placer dirt."

Dan muttered, "Those men rented our burro so's to—"

"Turn it loose and follow it to Lemoigne's diggin's," put in the barkeep. "You hombres have surelee short-changed yourselves!"

Did Dan and I feel cheap? You could have bought us for thirty cents a dozen.

"You plumb ruint us!" I blazed at Dan, so mad I was a little unreasonable. "You ought to be twins; no one man has a right to be so dumb! You could put your brain in a gnat's eye and it wouldn't even blink!"

"Partner, I—"

"Don't partner me!" I raved. As a partner, you're what that burro is to a hoss—just a mouse-size imitation of the real thing!"

"Is that so?" barked Dan, his gray eyes glintin' sparks. "When I refused to sell Goliath, I was a jackass on two legs! Now that I have sold the burro, you say I got no more brains than you could put in a gnat's eye. Make up your mind, hombre! What do you want?"

"I want that mine, that's what I want!"

"Okay," he said, running a hand through his gray hair, weary-like. "Come along. I'll lead you to the gold."

"Say, you plumb loco?" I burst out.

"No, fore-handed," Dan retorted. He turned to the barkeep, then, and handed him our seven-hundred-dollar nestegg, and explained: "Max, the boys will be trailin'

back here, sloppin' over with disappointment. They tried to rob us, but we're not lowdown enough to mire 'em in their own dirt. Return this money to 'em; and tell 'em that the next time they want to make suckers of a pair of old-timers, they'll be wiser to get drunk and stay drunk till the temptation wears off. Tell 'em we cut our teeth on pick handles and went to school with Jesse James. Tell 'em we were gray with sin while they were still wearin' flour sacks for pants." Turning, he stalked toward the door. "Come on, Mike!"

But I couldn't move; I was too flabbergasted.

"Mike," he blurted out, fast, "those hombres won't follow the burro to Lemoigne's diggin's. Because I sold 'em the *wrong tracks*!"

WELL, I can see through a ladder if placed in front of me on a sunny day. I stared at Dan and, old heller that I am, I blushed. Blushed hot. "P-partner," I stammered, "I'm a blame' fool—but you're a genius, that's all! The hombres who gyp you will have to practice on Morgan D. Rockefeller!"

"Come on!" he jerked out. "Let's go!"

We left the saloon, ran to the livery stable, rented a couple brons and rode back to camp, hellity-larrup.

There, Dan led to the spot where he'd staked out the burro last night. We got down and looked for tracks as if they were jewels.

"Mike," Dan said, "I sold those men the best tracks I could give 'em for their money. Tracks made on one of our prospectin' trips while the burro was shod. A plain trail that'll lead those hombres so far east that we'll have time to make a getaway if we want. They would've had a hard time followin' the signs left by our burro last night, because he ain't shod no more. Only a real desert-wise hombre can track 'im now."

"How-come?" I demanded, my head spinning.

"When I staked 'im out, last night, he kicked me again. Skinned my ribs with iron-tipped heels. So I threw 'im and yanked off those old shoes. Trimmed his hoofs, too; they needed it. Now we got to look for prints of his bare feet!"

We found 'em. Four neat little unshod

hoofs leading up-canyon—not west, where the mob of gyps had ridden—but north.

These tracks we followed.

On north, through the chaparral lining the bank of Bouquet Creek we traced the burro. To the crest of Bouquet Canyon, and onto the level plateau that circles Mt. Tappan. Straight toward that peak the signs led us.

It wasn't easy, picking up the marks of those small hoofs. But Dan and I have hunted wolves and panthers for bounty, and trailed rabbits for stew when our stomachs were hunger-twisted like hangman's knots.

On flinty soil those hoofprints were just scratches—but luck, instinct, and a nose for money led us on.

Straight toward Mt. Tappan we headed, along the bank of the north fork of Bouquet Creek.

"Dan," I thought aloud, "old Lemoigne must've found a pocket. A pot-hole full of dust and nuggets."

"Huh-uh. He'd have cleaned it out in short order and skedaddled. He found a placer bonanza! No measly pocket."

"Big money, huh? A thousand. Maybe fifty thousand?"

"Piker. Quarter-million, anyway!"

"Hell, a half-million if there's a nickel. Remember what that barkeep said?"

"A million, a cool round million—"

Then we both shut up, awed, our breath took by the thought.

"Dan," I said, "I think maybe I'll get married."

"That money's gone to your head already!" he snapped. "But go ahead—squander it any way you like!"

And then I yelped, "Say, there's the burro!"

DAN saw it, too. Up ahead of us, a narrow canyon opened into the side of the peak. In the entrance, grazing on the bank of the little creek flowing out of that gulch, stood the burro.

Beyond him, we saw a lean-to in a bunch of aspens. A stack of firewood. Stones circling a fireplace. A slicker and blankets draped on limbs to air. A box cupboard hanging by a rope.

"Lemoigne's camp!" I exclaimed.

The burro sighted us, and brayed. Be-

trayed us, too, but we didn't know it just then.

"Ain't that sweet music?" Dan raptured. "When little Napoleon dies, I'm goin' to have 'im stuffed and set up in my front parlor—"

"With the other family portraits," I snapped. "Come on, let's look for Lemoigne's diggin's!"

"Right! You look in the lean-to to see if Lemoigne is to home, while I—"

A sharp command cut the words off his lips.

"Jack 'em up, up two!" someone whipped at us. We stiffened, petrified. "Hoist 'em, damn you, or I'll dust your jackets with lead!"

We hoisted. Heart in my throat, I watched a hombre step from behind a tree and approach us, business end of his rifle yawning our way. And I nigh swallowed said heart when I saw that this man wore a deputy-sheriff's badge!

"What th' hell you pullin' off?" Dan shouted.

"Easy, easy. Get tough, and I'll put bracelets on your hands," drawled this law-johnny. "I been waitin' five days for you hombres. Lemoigne got away, but was nabbed at the border; and now, with you old hell-benders caught, your whole outfit is scotched. Git off them hosses!"

"What in time you ravin' about?" I yelped. "We don't know Lemoigne! We're prospectors and—"

"Save your breath, old-timer, Lemoigne left too much evidence here in his lean-to. Take a look!"

We dismounted. He prodded us ahead with his rifle. We stared into the lean-to—and then we realized, Dan and I, why Tip Lemoigne had been so careful to hide his trail and never let anyone follow him to his camp. For inside that lean-to we saw a box of papers, inks, acid and shears, plates, engraving tools, a tiny press—a whole counterfeiting outfit!

Lemoigne didn't have a placer mine. He had a mint, an outlaw mint. He'd been printing his own money!

"That old he-wolf," the deputy-sheriff went on, "sure enough fooled the boys 'round here. Kep' showin' up several times a month with a bag of dust and nuggets. Only it was the same mineral he had with

'im each time. He'd pretend to ride down to Logan to sell the dust for money to get drunk on. What he really did on his trips, was pass a bunch of home-made money to his partners. Meanin' *you two!*

"He found out I was watchin' him, and scattered in a hurry. Real nervous, he was. Didn't take time to bury the evidence. I figured somebody would mosey back here to cache it, so I waited. You two walked into my trap.

"Get busy, now; pack the stuff onto your burro, and we'll ankle on down to jail."

"W-where's Lemoigne?" I stuttered, thinking that he could clear us by revealing we weren't his partners. Then I realized he might claim we had been working with him, to shield his real side-kicks!

"He's in prison, where you'll meet him before long."

Dan and I looked at each other.

AS ORDERED, Dan roped the burro, tossed the lariat to this deputy-sheriff. Then Dan and I picked up the counterfeiter's stuff inside the lean-to and packed it to load on the burro.

The deputy hauled on the rope and yanked the critter toward us, saying, "Put that pack-saddle on 'im. And he turned to point to it, just as the burro let fly with both hind legs. Caught that law-johnny smack in the middle. He doubled up with a howl.

And Dan and I landed onto him like a couple wolves.

He struggled. But a jail sentence stared us in the face and we were so scared we fought like heroes. We bowled him over; my knees rammed home where the burro's heels had thudded, and with one hand I pushed his rifle aside. *Wham* it barked once,

slug hissing past my ear. Then Dan clipped him alongside the jaw so hard his head rang like a gong—and he was so dazed I easy snatched the thirty-thirty from his grip. He yelped quits then.

We hogtied him, and sat him back against a tree.

"You'll rot in jail for this!" he threatened.

"Hombre," snapped Dan, "you want to convict us on no more evidence than the fact that we strayed up here—"

"Which is aplenty, considering that nobody knows the way to this camp but myself, Lemoigne, and his partners—meanin' you men!"

"If that's so, you'll sit by that tree till you rot!" The law-johnny's face turned white. Dan went on: "But that ain't so. Us two are just the first pair of a whole parade of suckers that'll be trailin' up here before nightfall!"

The deputy stared hard at us. Wetting his lips, he conceded, real low, "If they come, I admit I got nothin' on you that'll hold in court."

Dan and I straddled our rented broncs. Driving the burro ahead of us, we started back to Tres Piños.

"Dan," I asked, "what we goin' to do?"

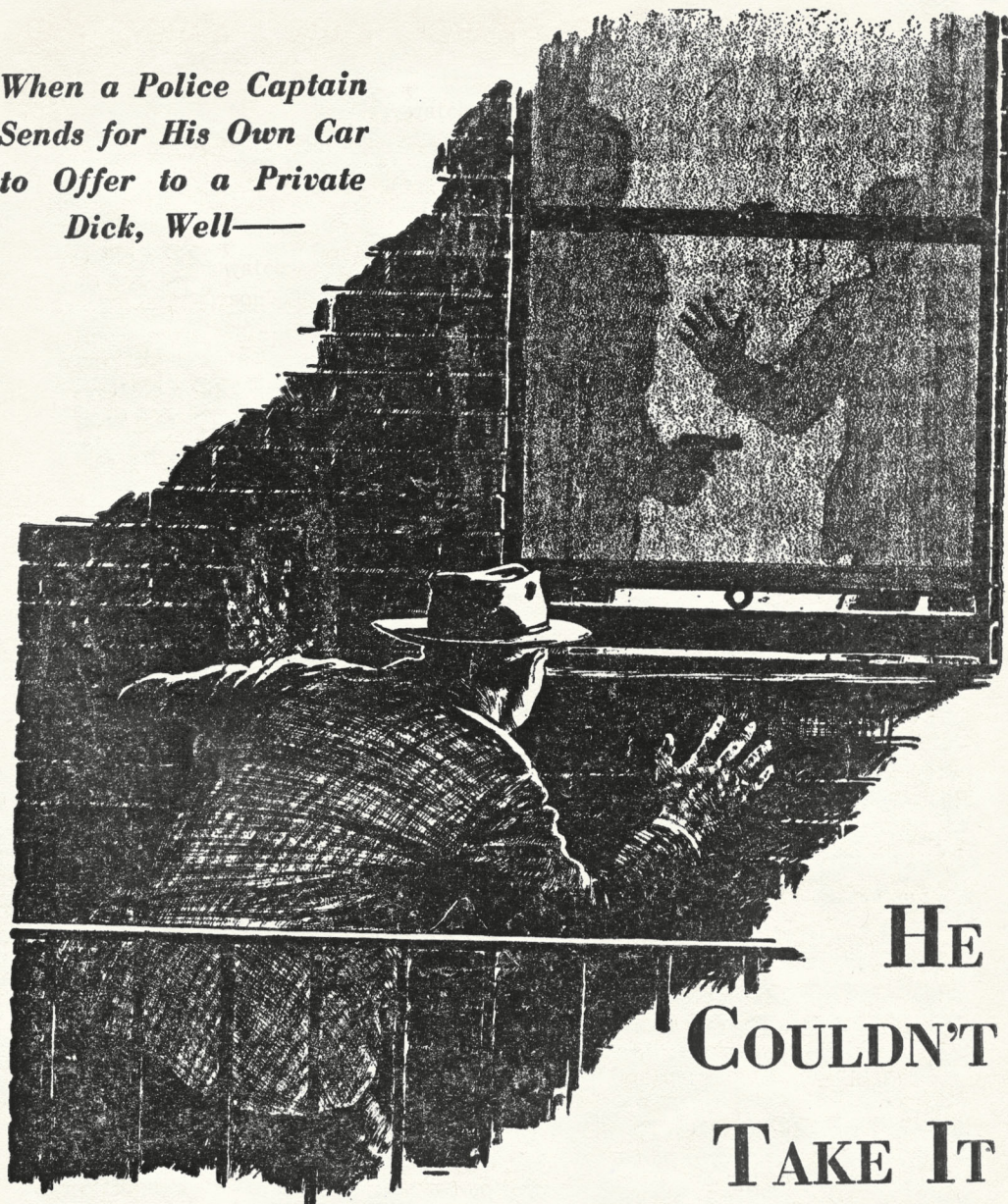
"We're goin' to catch up with those Tres Piños rannies who paid us seven hundred dollars rent on this burro—and give 'im to them! They'll turn him loose and follow him to Lemoigne's camp. We won't let on we been there already."

I heaved a sigh. "If only we'd given 'em the critter in the first place! We'd be seven hundred dollars ahead."

"Yeah," and Dan's sigh echoed mine. "But I was too smart to let 'em gyp us out of a bonanza. Sometimes," he realized sadly, "it's dumb to be smart!"



*When a Police Captain
Sends for His Own Car
to Offer to a Private
Dick, Well——*



HE COULDN'T TAKE IT

By ROBERT H. LEITFRED

JAKE GLASPER left the elevator at the seventh floor. A metal door clicked behind him. The car shot up. He took a few slow steps down the hall, glancing at names on frosted glass panels.

He was tall. His face was darkly tanned, square. China-blue eyes stared unblinking beneath heavy brows. His gray mustache was clipped short. He wore a gray suit and

carried a topcoat on his arm. His face, at the moment, was benevolent, serene.

He found the name he looked for on the glass panel of the last suite of offices down the hall. The name read: SIMON CROLE, SPECIAL INVESTIGATOR.

He went in.

Etta smiled rosily from behind her guardian desk. She was bland, plump and keen. "How do you do," she said.

The man said: "I'm Jacob Glasper. I want to talk with the boss."

"Sit down," said Etta, "I'll see if he's free." She went through another door to the right of her desk and closed it behind her.

Simon Crole, special investigator, had his heels on the desk and was expounding an obscure section of the Penal Code to Matt Ridley. He was bald, red-faced and ran heavily to beef. Fanwise wrinkles radiated outward from the corners of his eyes. His lips were slightly twisted, creating the illusion, and falsely, that he was in a state of perpetual surprise.

"Jacob Glasper," said Etta, "is in the outer office."

"And who," said Crole, removing his feet from the desk, "is Jacob Glasper?"

Etta said: "I wouldn't know—"

"Which doesn't help at all," said Crole. "Send him in, Etta, precious. By all means, send him in."

"Precious; what do you mean, precious?"

"Ah," said Crole, rubbing his pink hands together, "something I cannot get along without. A gem. A jewel—"

"Nuts!" said Etta, her hand on the door knob. "I'm a slave." She flounced through the door. Her bland smile raised Jake Glasper from his chair. "Mr. Crole will receive you now, Mr. Glasper."

He nodded. Crossed the room to the door. Entered.

SIMON CROLE looked up from his desk. He looked Jake Glasper over from felt hat to polished shoes. He smiled his perpetual surprise at what he saw, said, "Have a chair, Glasper."

Jake Glasper sat down. Placed the overcoat across his knees and his felt hat on top of the coat. Hands free, he took a panatella from a chased case, clipped it, stuck it between his teeth, said, "You're Simon Crole?"

"Yeah," said Crole.

"I have," said Jake Glasper, benevolently, "an associate in my business, who, I have reason to believe, has become untrustworthy."

"You mean crooked," said Simon Crole.

"Speaking bluntly—yes. I want this man followed for two or three days to find out

what he's doing with his spare time when not working for me."

Simon Crole rubbed his bald head. "Tailing a man is tough work, Glasper. It's a twenty-four hour job. It'll cost you a hundred and fifty a day, plus expenses. Our service runs high."

Jake Glasper never even blinked. He opened a wallet. Counted out seven twenties and a ten. Laid them on Crole's desk. Leaned back in his chair. Waited.

Simon Crole chewed morosely on his lower lip. He eyed the money on the desk but made no motion to pick it up. He said, "You mentioned an associate, Glasper. Who is he? What has he done to arouse your suspicions? And what do you expect me to do?"

"You will," said the benevolent Mr. Glasper, "have him followed. You will see that he does not elude you for a single minute, and you will report to me every six hours. It's not what he's done in the past that concerns me. It's what he does when your man is following him that interests me. If you will send your operator to the Continental Hotel, I will point out the associate in question. His name is George McLaren."

Simon Crole sighed ponderously. Picked up the money and stowed it in his pocket. "Very well, Mr. Glasper. We'll handle your case on the basis I mentioned to you earlier."

"That's quite agreeable."

"Our Mr. Matt Ridley will take charge at once. Matt, report to Mr. Glasper at the Continental Hotel."

"At noon," said Glasper. "The man I wish you to follow will be with me at that time. We'll be somewhere in the foyer. It won't be necessary for you to report to me. Simply be in the foyer at twelve noon. McLaren will be with me."

"And this McLaren," said Crole. "Does he room at the same hotel?"

"No," said Jake Glasper. "No. He's staying at the Alamac, two blocks down Spring Street." He got to his feet. "I guess that's all."

"I guess it is," said Simon Crole. "I'll keep a man tailing McLaren until I get orders from you to lay off. That right?"

"Yes," said Glasper. "That's right."

Crole rubbed his bald head. The fanwise wrinkles around his eyes deepened. His

twisted lips smiled their perpetual surprise. "Okay," he said.

Jake Gasper went out.

Ridley turned to his boss. "What do you make of that guy?"

Simon Crole selected a butt from an ash tray, lighted it, inhaled, said, "He's a slick article. But that's no business of ours. A cash customer is—a cash customer. All right, Matt. Go to work. And keep me informed. I'll be here till eight. And in my rooms from then on."

"Okay," said Ridley. "I'll be seeing you."

ETTA took the call. It was four o'clock. "Hello," she said.

A voice said, "The Boss."

Simon Crole cut in. "Yeah," he said.

"Matt," said the voice.

"Shoot."

"I'm having a hell of a time with this guy, McLaren. He's half wise that he's being tailed, but I'm hanging on to him. He gave me the slip once at the post office, but I picked him up again. He's been in several pool halls. Made a couple phone calls. One of them was the D. A.'s office. He got an appointment for tomorrow morning. That's all. Call you later." He hung up.

Simon Crole pondered. He leaned forward, his beefy body sprawled on the desk. He drummed with his fingers on the flared edge of an ash tray. He ran a finger down a printed list of hotel numbers. He dialed the Continental. Asked for Jacob Gasper. Got him, said, "Simon Crole, Gasper. Making a report."

"Go ahead. I'm listening."

"McLaren is cagey. He's giving my man plenty exercise. Have you had him tailed before?"

"No. But tell me. What's he doing?"

"He's been in several pool parlors. Also the post office. He's made some phone calls. One of them to the district attorney's office."

There was a sound at the other end of the wire like a half-bitten curse. Simon Crole resumed. "He made an appointment with the D. A. for tomorrow morning."

"Silence flowed over the wire. Crole said, 'Well?'"

"Nothing," said Gasper. "Follow my instructions as I outlined them in your office."

"Okay," said Crole. He hung up.

At six o'clock Etta came in dressed for the street. She wore a silk raincoat and carried an umbrella. "Good night, Mr. Crole."

Simon Crole blinked. He went to the window. He stared at the glistening streets. He returned to where Etta stood in the doorway. "That's what I like about you, precious. You always know about things. We haven't had rain in Los Angeles in six months. Yet, when it comes, you're prepared. How do you do it?"

"It's a gift," said the girl. "Bye."

At eight, Matt Ridley called in a second time. "I'm in a cigar store across from the Alamac. Looks like our friend is holed-up for the night. Damn glad of it."

"Where's he been?"

"Where hasn't that guy taken me! We just got back from the oil wells at Signal Hill. I lost him for a second time, but picked him up again. Gee, it was miserable and black down there."

"Stick around," said Crole. "Eight o'clock is early."

SIMON CROLE, in dressing gown and slippers, was pouring a nightcap of gin and bitters when a heavy fist pounded the door leading to the outside hall.

He surveyed the drink sadly, set it on the table, and opened the door. Police Captain Jorgens and Sergeant Keebles, dripping wet, stood in the opening. "Lo," said Simon Crole.

The two police officers pushed into the room. "Nice place you got here, Crole," said the captain. "Must take a bunch of jack to keep up an establishment like this."

"Yeah," said Crole. "It sure does. But I make plenty. What's on your mind? I know damn well you didn't plow through this rain just to say hello. Have a drink first."

"No time," said Jorgens. "Get dressed. You're wanted over in the D. A.'s office."

"So?" said Crole. "How about you, Sergeant? You aren't turning down a drink, are you?"

Sergeant Keeble was flustered. He had always been friendly with Crole. "I'm on duty," he said.

Simon Crole nodded. "Suppose, Jorgens, I come down in the morning. A man has to sleep sometimes."

"No," said Jorgens. "That's final. It's

murder this time, Crole. You've kept close to the legal line in the past, but this time you've overstepped it."

"All right, Jorgens. Now I'll tell one. Get the hell out of here. If you're not already drunk, you're crazy."

Jorgens laughed harshly. "Crazy? You'll be crazy yourself before you get out from under this murder charge."

Simon Crole unwound a heavy fist. It had been his intention of planting it in the police captain's face. "Murder, eh?" he said. "Who?"

"Guy named George McLaren. We got your op Matt Ridley down at the office. Oh you can't crawl out from under this time, Crole. We've you and Ridley on ice."

"Well, well, well," said Crole. "Interesting. I'll have a drink, Jorgens, then I'll go down and have a look at things."

District Attorney Minifie was alone in his office when the two police officers with Crole arrived. His eyes were heavy, blood-shot. His lower lip hung down. His manner was petulant.

"Crole," he said, "we've got you this time. Going to talk, or do we have to resort to—"

Simon Crole yawned, said, "What is this—a pinch?"

"Call it anything you like."

"If I'm pinched, I ain't got nothing to say, Minifie. How do you like those apples? If I'm here just to make a friendly talk, I'll make that talk. Otherwise, everything's up in the air. And you can all go to hell."

The D. A. bit his lower lip. "Don't get nasty, Crole. You've got away with things in the past. But that's—"

"Am I pinched," said Crole, "or is this just a talk?"

Minifie's eyes glowed redly. "Just a talk."

"All right. But the next time you needn't send half the police force to my rooms. Where's my man, Ridley?"

"Locked up. Charged with first degree murder."

SIMON CROLE shoved his hat to the back of his head. His lips twisted into their smile of perpetual surprise. This time it was real.

"Who's pulling the strings?"

"Man named Jacob Glasper. Oil man from Oklahoma. He and McLaren were in

the city for a few weeks on business. Legitimate, too. They were to close a deal for some independent wells in the Signal Hill district."

"Glasper told you that?"

"And more. McLaren was top-heavy with cash. Ten thousand dollars. He went down this evening to inspect the derricks. If everything was okay he was to make a down payment of ten thousand and the balance when the leases were drawn."

"Well, he died suddenly with a bullet through his side. It pierced his heart. He died instantly. The field watchman found the body and notified us. We found plenty of identification papers on him. We also found his boss, Jacob Glasper, and your man, Ridley."

"Quick work," said Crole, nodding his big head slowly. "Nothing like cleaning things up when they're hot. But you're overlooking some angles, Minifie."

Minifie smiled tolerantly. "All right. You listen to me, Crole, and I'll tell you some more. We found a parcel check from the Union Pacific station on Ridley. I sent a man after whatever was waiting for that check. The man brought in a package. Glasper was here. He told me what it contained—the down payment on the oil leases. He identified the money. The point is this. Ridley had seen the money when Glasper gave it to McLaren in the foyer of the Continental. Are you still following me?"

Simon Crole shook his head. "Nope. I'm way ahead of you. You're wishing right now that you hadn't overlooked a bet this afternoon when McLaren phoned your office for an appointment. You're wishing you hadn't put him off till tomorrow morning. You aren't sure that Ridley flattened McLaren even if you and Jorgens are talking big. You're wishing you knew what McLaren had on his mind when he called up, and you're kicking yourself all over the place for being so dumb."

"You're all wet, Crole."

"Listen, Minifie. Ridley called my office at eight o'clock. He called from a cigar store across from the Alamac. That was after he got back from the oil district. So far as he knew he had tailed McLaren there and back. All right. Suppose he got the money from McLaren. Suppose he wanted to get rid of it temporarily and put it in

the parcel room, as you're trying to tell me he did. Say McLaren was bumped off between seven and eight. Now, call up the U. P. Get the guy who took in the package. Ask him what time it was brought in."

Minifie wet his lips. He picked up the phone. "Operator," he said, "get me the parcel room, Union Pacific." He crowded the receiver close to his ear so that no sound leaked out. After a time he set the phone down. His face was bleak. He said, "The package was brought in at three o'clock."

"That's one angle shot," said Crole.

"You knew of this, Crole?"

"Hell no! No more than you. I know my op, however. I knew he wasn't crossing me. Ridley's too dumb to think that far ahead. Now listen, Minifie. I'm in this the same as you are. But I'm on my own. My reputation is, after all—my reputation."

"You work with Captain Jorgens, Crole, and—"

"Now I know you're kidding me," said Crole.

"Me, too," said Captain Jorgens, sourly. "When I can't get along without the help of a private dick, I'll turn in my badge."

"You see how it is between me and Jorgens, Minifie. We just don't mote. However, that's jake, and I'm content. Now, if it isn't asking too much, I'd like a slant at the stiff you picked up in the oil field."

THE morgue was cold, damp. Simon Crole would have preferred the warm comfort of his rooms, and the gin and biters he had left on the table. But he gave no sign of it.

He examined the body of McLaren. The left side of the body was covered with mud and sump. The surgeon hadn't yet got around to extract the bullet, so McLaren was fully dressed.

Simon Crole found the bullet hole in a smear of crimson. There were powder marks plenty. Whoever had fired the gun had been close. Someone McLaren knew. Crole had to hold back the man's topcoat to look at the spot where the bullet went through. He frowned. The topcoat was brown. The maker's tags had been ripped out.

Sergeant Keeble was watching the agency man closely. "What do you make of it, Simon?" he said.

"Nothing," said Crole. "Nothing at all."

"You're a swell liar," said Keeble.

"Maybe so. I forget easily."

Keeble shrugged. "Gee, hurry up, will yuh?"

"I'm through," said Crole. "Take me to Ridley. I want to hear him curse Jorgens. It'll help warm me."

They got into an elevator. They walked along a concrete floor with cell openings on both sides. They came to Ridley. He grinned at his chief through the grating.

"Keeble," said Crole, turning to the police sergeant, "a little privacy, eh?"

"Okey," said the sergeant. He moved off down the corridor.

Simon Crole pitched his voice low. He said, "Don't get in a yank, Matt, about getting out of this dungeon. It's rainy and miserable outside. You wouldn't be happy."

"The hell I wouldn't. In my room it ain't miserable. What's the idea putting me in here anyway?"

Simon Crole smiled benignly. "The idea, Matt, is not mine, believe me. Now shut up and listen. Where did you get that parcel check?"

"McLaren dropped it. He was carrying his coat on his arm when he got out of the cab at the Alamac on our way back from the oil wells. It was in the pocket. It slipped out. Fell in the gutter."

"What color was the coat?"

"It was some kind of light stuff."

"Sure it wasn't brown?"

"Nope. It was light—it was tan."

"When McLaren got out of your sight at the oil field, how long was he gone?"

"Four, five minutes."

"When you found him again did you see his face?"

RIDLEY shook his head. "I couldn't see when he got there or when he went away. I was tailing him by the color of his topcoat."

Simon Crole pursed his lips, said, "McLaren had a brown topcoat on when the police brought him in. Got it on now. He was shot in the side. The bullet should have pierced his coat. It didn't. He couldn't have been shot without his coat being held wide open, and not have the bullet hole through the cloth. Ummmm! Matt, the coats were switched."

Ridley considered for a moment, said, "You got Glasper in mind?"

Simon Crole shook his head. "No. I can't figure him in this at all. There doesn't seem to be any motive. Glasper could have killed him easily without dragging us into the mess. No, Glasper is out. There's someone we don't know about. Tell me, did McLaren go to the parcel room of the U. P. during the afternoon?"

Ridley shook his head. "No."

"Did he talk to anyone when he went into those pool halls?"

"I couldn't follow him into every dive without him getting wise I was tailing him. I did see him talking to a rat-faced man in a chili joint on South Main. Small guy. Thin. A hophead from the color of his skin. He wore a blue serge suit, and a cap with a crooked peak."

Crole nodded. "Sit tight, Matt. I'm not putting on any pressure to get you out. There's a reason. I want certain guys to think that maybe the police have really got something on you. It'll make it easier for me during the next twenty-four hours."

"How about me though, hey?"

"You're getting paid, aren't you? Sit tight and shut up. Bye."

"Bye," said Ridley.

FROM the police station, Simon Crole took a taxi to the Alamac. The night clerk nodded recognition. "Lo, Crole," he said.

"Lo, Mannie," he said. "I'm asking a favor. I want to get into the room George McLaren had. Do I get in?"

"You're too late, Crole. The police have beat you to it. They were here over an hour ago."

"Tough break, huh? Still I'd like to look in. How about it?"

"Front," said the clerk. "Take this man to 319."

The bellboy unlocked the door a few minutes later and started to push in.

"No," said Crole, "not this time. Leave the key on the outside. Here's a buck. Run along."

Alone, he looked around. There was a large room and bath. There was a single bed and a chest of drawers. The drawers were on the floor, their contents scattered wide. Crole sat down on a short bench at

the foot of the bed. He rolled a cigarette. He lit it. He inhaled.

After a time he got up. Crossed to the bathroom. Confusion here. He returned to the bench and eyed the debris on the floor. He pawed amongst it. There wasn't a scrap of paper anywhere. Nothing but clothes, shoes and linen.

His eyes strayed to a waste basket. There were several newspapers in it and a magazine with a lurid cover. He picked up the magazine. Skimmed through it. Tossed it back. He saw some pencil marks on the back cover just as the magazine left his hand.

He leaned over and picked it up a second time. The pencilings were faint. He frowned, took a pencil from his pocket and made a copy. When finished, his notation read: 621R4.50:L7.50.

Simon Crole pushed his hat back on his head. He half closed his eyes in concentration. "R and L," he said. "R and L. Right and left. This is a combination of some kind. One that's simple. Not a safe. Then what? Ummmm. Post office box? Two number series. One to the right. One to the left. Getting warm. The first three digits would be the box number. Simple. Combination right to four point five zero. Ah. Four and a half, then left seven and a half."

He straightened his hat. Went downstairs. Turned in the key. Thanked the clerk and grabbed a taxi. He got out at the post office. He searched the box section till he found 621. He looked through the glass. There was mail inside. He twisted the dial fastened to a blunt arrow pointer. The door opened. He reached in, took out the mail, scanned it. Saw it was addressed to George McLaren. Grinned and slammed the box door shut.

The post office was deserted. But he didn't dare risk opening the letters then and there. He left the building, took a cab to his office, went in. Locked the door and switched on the lights.

He had a special kettle with a long snout. It fitted above an alcohol stove. He held the letters over a thin spout of steam. One by one he opened them, laying them flap side up on his desk.

There were two from oil promoters. One from a woman named Sarah. The fourth was a receipted bill from the Great West-

ern Warehouse Company. Simon Crole resealed all the letters except the one from the warehouse people. His face was puckered into a frown. He switched off the lights, sighed and went home.

SIMON CROLE shaved and dressed with meticulous care the next morning. He ate a leisurely breakfast, called a cab and went to the post office where he returned three of George McLaren's letters to box 621. He rode from there to the Alamac and called a number.

"George McLaren speaking," he said. "I'm at the Alamac Hotel. I have some things in storage. I'm leaving town. Will you send them to the hotel? Yeah. Right away. Thanks."

He engaged another cab and held it in front of the hotel, motor running. After a time a van from the warehouse arrived. Crole was just coming out of the lobby when it drove up.

"I'm McLaren," he said to the driver. "Put those things in my cab. I've got only a half an hour to catch a train."

"Okey, mister," said the driver.

A trunk, a battered suitcase and a portable record changer completed the list. Crole signed a release for the things, tipped the van driver, got into his cab and instructed the driver to take him to the Santa Fe station.

Here he changed cabs and was driven to his office downtown.

The trunk, suitcase and phonograph being deposited inside the door by a sweating cab driver, Crole grunted his relief, grinned at his secretary, said, "Morning. Everything serene?"

Etta purred like a smug cat. "Serene as a madhouse," she said. "By any chance, have you stolen these things?" pointing at McLaren's property.

Simon Crole pushed his hat to the back of his head. "No," he said, "not in so many words."

"The D. A. is wild, positively wild. So is your friend, Captain Jorgens. It seems they went over to the Great Western Warehouse for certain articles only to be told that the dead had come to life and removed them but a short while ago."

"A miracle come to pass. What an age we live in."

"It will be a miracle if you get away with it."

"Ummmm!" Simon Crole smiled his perpetual surprise. "Give me credit for trying, anyways." He lugged the trunk into his inner office. He returned for the other things and took them in. He said from behind a partly closed door, "If anyone comes, stall them off. I'm gonna be busy and I don't want to be interrupted."

The phonograph he examined cursorily. It came equipped with two records ordinary in shape and light brown in color. Not being gifted with a fondness for music as entertainment, he passed them up.

He examined the battered suitcase. Hopeless. Old clothes, shoes. He picked the trunk lock. More old clothes. McLaren must have saved everything he ever owned. There were a couple books inside and three issues of an engineering magazine.

Baffled, he sat down and rolled a cigarette. The telephone on his desk made a barely perceptible click. A warning that someone was approaching the door to the outer office. He moved towards the inner door and listened.

"How do you do, Captain Jorgens." That was Etta speaking.

"I want to see Crole. Where is he?"

"Mr. Crole is out. Called out suddenly on a case. He's a very busy man, Captain. Any word you wish to leave?"

"Several," said the captain. "You tell him that I want that junk of McLaren's he copped from the warehouse people. We got a good description of him from the van driver. Get it? We want that stuff pronto or there's gonna be one hell of a stink raised in this office."

"You police are so rough and profane," said Etta.

"Rough!" The captain snorted contemptuously. "Listen, woman. I'm positively kindly right now compared to what I will be if your boss ain't in touch with my office in another hour." His hand fumbled the knob.

"Dear me, Captain, must you leave so soon?"

"Can it!" said Jorgens.

The outer office door slammed. Crole opened the inner door. "Fine," he said. "Perfect. Am I keeping you from a place on the stage by any chance?"

Etta slid the wrapper from a stick of

gum. "Don't be facetious. I'm working for a raise in pay."

"I hope," said Crole, devoutly, "you get it."

He crossed to a front window. There was a small mirror adjusted to the wood sill outside. Through this mirror he could see the entrance to the building. He saw Jorgens leave and walk south. That would be towards headquarters.

The fanwise wrinkles slanting outward from his eyes deepened. He inspected his flat cigarette which had gone out. "Listen, precious," he said. "Somebody thinks a hell of a lot of McLaren's junk. I think I'll hang onto it a little longer. Keep the door locked. I'm going out."

"Where?"

"Hotel Continental."

JAKE GLASPER beamed genially on the agency man as he held his door open. "How are you, Mr. Crole. Glad to see you of course. Ummm! I had planned to come down to your office. Unfortunately, however, I was delayed. Business, you know."

"Yeah," said Crole. "Sure. We all get delayed at times."

"What's on your mind?"

Crole said, "You want me to close that case you hired me on?"

"Of course, of course, Mr. Crole. A most unfortunate affair the way it turned out. One never knows. It was only two days ago I was saying to George—"

"That operator of mine," said Crole, "is in a tough spot. I don't know what to say about him, Glasper."

"What can you say? Ten thousand dollars is a great temptation these days."

"You really think he croaked McLaren?"

Jake Glasper folded his hands. "The evidence, man. Think."

"I can't think. I don't believe he did it, Glasper. No, sir, I really don't. McLaren have any enemies?"

"Possibly," said Glasper. "I wouldn't know of course."

"No, of course not," said Crole. He watched Glasper's face closely without appearing to do so. "McLaren was seen talking with a rat-faced guy in a chili joint on South Main. Blue serge suit. Cap with a crooked peak. You wouldn't know a man like that, would you?"

Glasper hesitated for a fraction of a second. The muscles in his neck twitched. He said, "I never heard of a man of this description, if that's what you are trying to imply."

"Right," said Crole, his eyes shifting from Glasper's face to a smudge on the carpet. "Well, I'm sorry the way things turned out. I'll go back to the office and close the case. S'long, Glasper."

"Good day, Mr. Crole." He bowed the agency man out the door, and closed it quickly.

The thick carpet deadened Crole's footsteps. He went down the hall past three doors, wheeled and came swiftly back. He bent at the door leading to Glasper's rooms. He listened.

Glasper was calling a number. There was a long wait. Crole looked anxiously down the hall. He straightened. Took a few steps away from the door. Returned. Listened again.

He heard Glasper say, "That's right. I've changed my mind. Of course. I'll see that you get yours. Cash. Come at eight tonight. I'll be expecting you."

The clang of an elevator door caused Crole to straighten. He was adjusting his tie and walking down the hall when two men rounded a corner and passed into a room.

HE GOT into the elevator and went down to the lobby. He went through a door labeled Cashier, passed through to the manager's office. The manager looked up. "Hello, Crole."

"Lo, Mr. Burton. Is seven sixteen empty?"

"Seven sixteen," said the manager. "Come out to the desk, Crole, I'll see." They went out to the desk. "Yes, it's empty."

"Reserve it for me, will you. And give me the key. I'll be back, later."

"Divorce evidence?"

"Nope, not this time. Murder."

"Don't pull anything rough, Crole."

"Who, me? I never carry a gun. You needn't worry."

He went to a phone booth off the lobby. Called a number. Said, "Etta, precious, are you still working for that raise in pay?"

"Mr. Crole is out," said Etta.

"Say, you kidding me?"

"If you'll leave your number, I'll call you back the moment he comes in."

Crole said, "You're good, Etta. I'm where I said I was. Bye."

He hung up. Pursed his lips. He whistled soundlessly and went over to the hotel switchboard. He held a dollar bill in his hand as he grinned at the operator. "If a call comes for Simon Crole, I'll take it in booth three. Okey?" He handed the girl the money.

The operator took the money. He rolled a cigarette. He hunched down behind a newspaper. An hour passed. A second almost passed. The bell in booth three jingled. Crole took down the receiver. "Yeah," he said.

"You're in a jam," said Etta. "Captain Jorgens swears he is going to get a search warrant, a couple cops and give your office and apartment a thorough going-over. He just left after a two-hour wait. He was boiling."

"Good girl. Maybe you'll get that raise. I dunno. Hold the fort. Don't let anybody get near that stuff." He hung up. Waited. Called a number. "District Attorney Minifie," he said to the voice that answered.

"Hello, Minifie? Simon Crole. Listen. Don't crowd me. I know what I'm doing. Huh? No, I'm not pulling any fast stuff. Can't you get it through your head that my agency's reputation is worth something to me? Hell, you've spread it all over the front pages that one of my ops is being held for first-degree murder. Well, if you didn't, who the hell did. It's in the papers."

He scowled into the receiver. "Another thing. Don't pull any search warrant stuff on me. I've got this case sewed up. It's in the bag. Make a wrong pass at me, and I'll show you up plenty in the papers. No, I'm not sore. I'm just telling you. Bye."

He left the phone booth. Obtained the key to seven sixteen at the desk. Took the elevator to the sixth floor. Got out. Walked up the stairs to the next floor. Moved soundlessly down the corridor and let himself into the room adjoining that occupied by Jake Glasper.

AS THE elevator door clanged Simon Crole jerked from his chair to a kneeling position beside the door. There was a

swish of leather along the thick carpet of the hall. A knock sounded on Glasper's door. A knob rattled. A voice said, "You Jake Glasper, huh?" "Come in," said a benevolent voice. The door closing shut off their voices.

Crole left the door and crossed to an open window. It faced a hollow square court. The square was dark. But few windows showed any light. Most of the guests were away from their rooms.

There was a latticed fire escape a foot below the window. It ran along the whole length of wall of the seventh floor. Crole heaved his big body through the window. Voices flowed through a partly opened window.

". . . So that's what I figured. McLaren was a friend of mine, y'understand. And he got bumped off. Wanta hear some more?"

"It's all very interesting," said Glasper.

"I talked with him yesterday. He spilled plenty. He's afraid something might happen to him. So he says: 'Whitey, if anything happens to me, you shake down this guy. Get plenty.' That's what he told me, Mister. That's why I come to you. Do I get it?"

Glasper's voice was smooth, unctuous. "There'll be ten grand in it for you, Whitey, if—"

"You mean them records McLaren had made."

"Exactly."

"Gimme."

There was a rustle of paper, then Glasper's voice. "Ten thousand. Small bills. Now you'll keep your mouth shut?"

"Sure, unless I go busted. You wouldn't turn a guy down in that case, would you?"

"I'll pay blackmail once, Whitey. No more."

Whitey laughed thinly. "You shouldn't have bumped off them three guys, Mister. Right there's where you made your mistake."

"The records, Whitey," said Glasper in his benevolent voice. "They were part of the bargain."

"Not by a damn sight, Mister," said Whitey. "Them's my ace card."

There was a pause, then Glasper's voice—a voice that was not the least benevolent. "Listen, heel. You're covered. There's no

more sound in the explosion of this Web-ley than the pop of a cork. Come clean or I'll send a bullet smashing through your rat's heart."

"Listen, Mister," said Whitey whiningly. "You got me all wrong."

"The records," said Glasper, evenly. "Where are they?"

"They're stored in a warehouse—The Great Western—with a phonograph and some other junk. But listen—" His voice was suddenly cut off following an indescribable sound. Silence only flowed out the thin crack at the bottom of the window.

CROLE sighed ponderously and wriggled back into the room. He closed the window. Snapped on a light and reached for the phone. Hands gripping it, he checked, changed his mind. Sighed again. Went out into the hall and tapped on Glasper's door.

He waited patiently and knocked louder. The door opened. Except for flushed cheeks, Jake Glasper was the same benevolent gentleman as had appeared yesterday at Crole's office. His china-blue eyes were calm. His square face a mask of serenity. "Back again, Crole?" he said.

"Yeah," said the agency man, marveling at the other's coolness. "I thought I'd look in and maybe ask a couple questions." He looked around the room. There was no sign of the man called Whitey. So far as Crole could see, nothing was disturbed or out of order.

"I come here to talk," he said. "Mind if I look around? My say is important."

"Not at all, Crole. Look the place over to your own satisfaction. While you're doing so, I'll pour a drink."

Crole inspected a small alcove bedroom, bath and clothes closet. Whitey was in none of them. That was queer. He couldn't understand. He felt chilled. The shade of the window was pulled down. It bowed outward towards the court. The window behind it was wide open. He turned slowly. Glasper was uncorking bottles, setting out glasses.

"White Rock and gin," said Glasper. "It's all I've got. Mix it to suit yourself."

Crole filled the glass to the halfway mark with gin and finished with the White Rock. He sat down in a deep chair. Glasper sat down also. They stared at each other across the top of a table.

Glasper said, "I suppose you've closed my case as you suggested earlier in the day."

"I haven't closed it yet, Glasper."

"You will, of course."

"I'm not certain that it's ready to be closed."

Glasper took out a cigar. Clipped off its tip and inspected it closely. "Just what do you mean, Crole?"

"Just that."

"You mean you won't?"

"Exactly. Things have happened since I was here last."

"Are you," said Glasper, thinly, "attempting to shake me down?"

Crole twisted uneasily. He felt queer. The muscles in his chest, arms and legs seemed to expand till they ached. There was a thickening in his throat. He tried to rise up. To reach the door. His body hunched. He got to his feet. Swayed. Fell back into the chair.

"Dope," he said. "You put a sleep powder in my drink."

Jake Glasper shrugged, said, "What brought you here?"

"You. You killed George McLaren."

Glasper got up from the chair. From his coat pocket he took a long-barreled gun equipped with a silencer. "Big fat slob," he said. He smashed Crole across the temple, opening up a two-inch gash. "Talk," he said. "Man named Whitey one of your heels?"

"Put away that gun, Glasper. I got you cold."

Glasper hit him a second time. A third.

CROLE sank deeper in his chair. His eyes were glassy. His head throbbed with pain. He blinked and tried to straighten in the chair.

Glasper tapped the butt of the gun against his palm. "What do you know about those records, Crole?"

"Records? I wouldn't know anything about records, Glasper. I only know that I saw a smudge on your carpet. Sump, Glasper, from the mud you tramped through last night when you killed McLaren and switched coats with him."

"And that's your case, eh?"

"You can't beat it." Crole's voice trailed away to a husky whisper.

"And you never heard of the Great Western, Crole?"

"You're crazy, Glasper. I'm talking about sump. Oil. You tracked it in from the..."

Again there came that indescribable sound. It was made by a gun butt smashing against a human skull—Crole's. The agency man slumped deep in his chair, groaned and lay still.

Glasper eyed him for a moment with a frozen stare, put on his hat, locked the door and went down the hall to the elevator.

The eyes of Simon Crole opened a short time afterward on a groggy world. He inched his big body partly erect. He leaned forward, sprawled on his face and started to crawl. He dragged himself to his knees with the aid of the table legs.

He fumbled for the gin bottle. Crole got the neck between his teeth. Drank long and hard. The stimulant quickened his mind. By sheer force of will he reached and clutched the telephone. His voice was low, measured. He said: "Operator. I want Spring 6333. Yeah." There was a pause, then: "Etta. Listen. I'm still at the Continental. Do this. Do it quick. Get Captain Jorgens on the wire. Tell him Jake Glasper is on his way to the Great Western Warehouse to get those things of McLaren's. Tell him to grab Glasper."

He paused for a painful breath. "Tell him, precious, he'll lose his buzzer if he lets Glasper get away. I got all the dope. And listen. Grab that phonograph and those two records and rush them to the D. A.'s office. See you there. Bye."

JAKE GLASPER'S china-blue eyes were mildly questioning as Jorgens and Keeble ushered him into the district attorney's office. "What's the meaning of this outrage?" he said. "You've got no right—" His eyes hardened as they fell upon Simon Crole sitting at the end of the D. A.'s long flat desk. "What's this, a frame?"

"Sit down, Glasper," said Minifie. "Investigator Crole has something on his mind."

The head of Simon Crole was bandaged. His face was pale. But his eyes had their usual look of perpetual surprise. "Glasper," he said, "you killed McLaren as I told you a short time ago. You also killed a man named Whitey and threw him out your window into the court below. You killed this

Whitey because he was trying to blackmail you. Right?"

"Can I smoke?" said Glasper. No one objected. He lighted a cigar and relaxed in a chair. "I admit nothing. This man," indicating Crole with the glowing end of his cigar, "tried to blackmail me, himself. Failing in that, he attacked me—"

"Enough," said Minifie. "Go ahead, Crole."

Simon Crole reached under the desk and placed the portable phonograph between himself and Minifie. He also picked up the two records. He pointed one at Glasper. "It's all down here, Glasper. George McLaren recorded everything he knew just in case you—"

Glasper jerked the record from the agency man's fingers and smashed it on the floor. "Now I know I'm being framed!"

"Tsk, tsk!" said Crole. "You shouldn't have done that, Glasper. Destroying evidence." He rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes. There was a brassy taste in his mouth. He recovered and went on.

"The record you destroyed was a blank. The one with McLaren's voice on it I have in my hands. Before I put it on the machine I want to tell you what McLaren says." His eyes drilled into Glasper's.

"A couple years ago you were in charge of drilling a hole for a wildcat well on a worthless piece of leased land. You were using a cable rig with a drill that works its way through rock and shale by steady pounding.

"The hole suddenly began to go down fast. The driller noticed it. He wound up the cable and examined the drilling tool. Told you at the time that the bit was cutting through brittle stuff that covered an oil deposit. Within a short time, say an hour, the drill would break through."

"Rubbish," said Glasper.

"Listen," said Crole. "I'll tell you some more. If this well came in, you stood to gain nothing. But if you could stall off for another twenty-four hours, your backers would quit. They were just about broke as it was.

"In order to keep the drill working and yet not cut through the thin crust, you had your driller heave a couple armfuls of heavy rubber packing into the hole. And the drill drove it down and bounced upon it for two

days. As fast as the packing weakened you had more thrown into the hole. In the end your backers gave it up as a bad job.

"Working under cover you bought up leases and got control of the whole section. Then you let your drill cut through and brought in the first gusher in that particular part of Oklahoma. In other words you swindled a number of people out of a legitimate fortune."

CROLE rolled and lit a cigarette, his eyes hard on Jake Glasper. He said, "Later, when you had things organized on a big scale, the driller and the tool dresser on that first well asked you to kick through with something big. And you killed them."

"The tool dresser you sent into a boiler to chip off scale. While he was in there you closed the boiler door and turned on the live steam valve. The verdict, rendered by a coroner's jury, was accidental death."

"The driller was pushed into a storage tank of black crude oil. You were up on the rim inspecting it with him. You shoved him in. He hadn't a ghost of a chance even though he was a strong swimmer. He sank in its slippery lightness and smothered. His body wasn't recovered till some days later. That also was adjudged accidental."

"Get what I'm leading up to? Your field superintendent McLaren knew what was happening, but he kept his mouth shut until the proper time. Then he bore down for his share. You couldn't risk another accidental death around your wells, so you came here. You put it up to me to have McLaren shadowed. Then you pulled a fast one. My op got blamed. I didn't suspect you, Glasper. Not the slightest until I saw that smudge of oil on your carpet."

Crole smiled craftily. "I took the room next to yours. I overheard your conversation with Whitey. Your threats. They wised me up to the deadly evidence on those records! I already had them, but I didn't know their real value—not till you flattened Whitey and— Watch him, Jorgens—quick!"

Jake Glasper had jerked erect knocking his chair spinning backwards. The Webley was outthrust. It exploded with a brittle crack. Simon Crole gasped and crumbled sideways, caught at the edge of the table.

The gun cracked down a second time. A sliver of wood from the table top grazed the agency man's face.

Jake Glasper whirled and ran. Police Captain Jorgens yelled: "Stop!" Glasper half twisted in midstride. His Webley spat a snarling chunk of lead through the fleshy part of the captain's leg.

Jorgens' .38 caliber Colt thundered. Spearpoints of flame jutted outward. Glasper clutched at a spot above his heart, swayed, reached for the door framing, gripped it. His hands slid down. His body followed. Gently, as if lowered with a rope. He was dead when his body hit the floor.

Simon Crole pawed at a red smear where the bullet had torn away the flesh across his ribs. His twisted lips broke into their smile of perpetual surprise. He said, "Thanks, Captain."

JORGENS growled deep in his throat. "Gee, my leg. It's all right, Crole. I gotta hand it to you."

District Attorney Minifie wiped the sweat from his forehead. "I wouldn't have believed it, Crole, if you hadn't—the evidence on the wax record. You never had to use it."

"Yeah," said Crole. "There's an angle there. I got the records mixed. Glasper destroyed the one with the evidence on it. I played a game of bluff on him. He couldn't take it. He cracked."

"You mean, Crole, that the record you have in your hand is the blank one?"

Simon Crole moistened his lips. "Yeah, that's it, Minifie. If that guy had hung onto his nerve for two minutes more, he might have beat the rap. He was that close."

District Attorney Minifie swore softly, profanely.

Simon Crole got to his feet. He eyed the dead man on the floor without the slightest trace of rancor. He shook his head. He was suddenly unutterably weary. "I'm going home," he said.

Captain Jorgens was fumbling at his leg where the killer's bullet had smashed it. "Okey by me, fellow. Sergeant Keeble. Break out a quart of my best Scotch. Give it to this private dick with my compliments. Then take him home in my own car."

Simon Crole grinned. "Swell," he said.

*Breaks and Brakes—Both Necessary When They Turn the
Railroad Over to the Movie People*



THE CANNON BALL EXPRESS

By CLIFFORD KNIGHT

THE conductor was one of the home-guard who had never been off the line, but Bill was a rolling stone. Boomer is what they've always called his kind; and he'd been everything and everywhere in the train service. We would have been registered in at the home terminal by now, but the hoghead was over-cautious and had gone in the hole for the new stream-line train at a blind siding, and we were stabbed for a long delay.

"'Tain't every hoghead that's a runner," said Bill.

"Yeah," said the conductor. "We've got full tonnage—"

"Nothin' personal, skipper," said Bill to the conductor, as he stretched out on the caboose cushion. "I was just thinkin' of old Pop Rand."

"Never heard of him," said the conductor.

"You wouldn't. He was an engineer with rabbit in him. Out on the California Central. He was born runnin', but they forgot to tell him about it. He might never have found it out, if it hadn't been for the movin' pictures."

"What's that got to do with it?" I asked.

"Listen, kid," said Bill the boomer. "Your whiskers ain't long enough yet, or you'd know that it's the California Central that's went Hollywood. It's the railroad where they make all the motion pictures."

"Was this Pop Rand a movin' picture actor?" asked the conductor who had just finished writing up his wheel report at the little caboose desk.

"Not so's you could notice it," said Bill. "He was a big fellow, flat-footed and

smooth-shaved, and his hair was gray. He was kinda pop-eyed, so they called him Pop. He was a runnin' fool and didn't know it. You see he'd been on a yard engine so long that he'd almost forgot what speed was. And then the depression kep' gittin' worse and they finally had to pull off Pop's yard engine, and the old man had to look around for something else. He could of bumped in on another yard engine, because he is the oldest of them. But he didn't want that somehow."

"I found him wanderin' around in the yard near the shops one day and I asks him, 'What you gonna do, Pop?'"

"I don't know, Bill," he says. "I can't figure out where I want to bump."

"Why don't you try a road job?" I asks.

"I ain't been on a road engine in so many years I probably couldn't make the time. You know, Bill, speakin' of time," says Pop, "I was just lookin' at that old diamond stack over there behind the shops."

"That old scrap?" I says. "Why they just keep it around to rent to the movies when they want to make an old-fashioned picture."

"I know it," says Pop. "But it ain't a piece of scrap. That old high-wheel there is still the runningest piece of machinery on the California Central."

"What about them new forty-four hundreds, Pop?" I says. "They'll do a hundred and five on straight track."

"That old diamond stack can out run them forty-four hundreds," says Pop. "Why, she used to pull the Cannon Ball Express forty years ago. A mile a minute was just a stroll for that baby; if you throwed an extra chunk of coal under her boiler she'd run away with you—"

"Yeah, but that was forty years ago, Pop," I said.

"Yes, and they made engines forty years ago what was engines."

JUST then the roundhouse goat came around behind the shops and coupled into the old engine. We followed to the roundhouse and Pop says to the foreman: "What are you gonna do with her, Ed?"

Ed Jarvis says he is gonna look her over and see if she's all right for service. There is a movin' picture company that wants to use her in a couple or three days.

I catch a run over the division that afternoon and don't get back to L. A. until the second day after, and I'm loafing down in Clint Mayberry's pool hall that evening when the caller comes in, huntin' somebody for a 6 o'clock call next morning.

"What doin'?" I asks him.

"Makin' movin' pictures."

"I don't want it," I says. "It ain't safe around a bunch of actors that don't know nothin' about a railroad except how to ride in the observation car."

"Oke," says the kid and starts away. Then I hollers:

"Who've you got for engineer?"

"Pop Rand," he says.

"Come back here, then; I'll sign," I says. I want to see what Pop is gonna do with that old high-wheel.

Well, it was nine o'clock before we get away from town next morning. The picture people begin comin' at 5 a.m. but they have to wait on the star who'd throwed a party the night before and didn't get to bed until four-thirty. They had more junk to load on the train than a circus, and fellows are runnin' around in horse pants yellin' like farmers at a hog callin' contest. You'd think we was startin' an expedition to Little America or somewheres instead of just a little trip up the line to make a picture.

Pat Hinds is the brains and I see he is disgusted. He is a little red-headed fellow with a loud voice. "For gosh sakes, Bill," he says to me, "they are gonna try to act like railroad men and they don't even look like us." Old Pop Rand is busier than a cranberry merchant up around the old high-wheel, crawlin' under the engine and out again, runnin' around with his oil can and monkey wrench, wipin' her down, actin' like a kid with a new toy.

FINALLY we get goin'. Pat and me kind of dreaded it, because you never know what will happen with a bunch of actors. As soon as we start rollin' the makeup man for the picture company begins makin' up the actors to look like their parts. He put a wig on a big fellow who has his face all painted yellow and fastens on a pair of handle bar mustaches. And he looks just like some of the hogheads I used to know when I was a kid callin' train crews.

"Who's he supposed to be?" asks Pat

Hinds of a little short guy who acts like he knows everything.

"He's Casey Jones."

"Casey Jones?" says Pat surprised. "You mean the fellow in the song?"

"Yes," says the guy, and he starts singin' the old song:

*"'Casey Jones, he mounted to the cabin;
Casey Jones, with his orders in his
band—'"*

"My Lord," says Pat, "are you gonna make the story of Casey Jones?"

"Righto," says the little short guy, who turns out to be Morry Wolferman, the producer, "and she's gonna be a knockout, a super-special de luxe, the name of which is The Cannon Ball Express."

Well, this is the story the way they are gonna make it. The railroad is tryin' to get a mail contract away from its rival, and to do it they have to average better than sixty an hour over the division. There is only one engineer who has the nerve to run that fast and he is Casey Jones. Casey Jones is sweet on a little gal with yellow hair who works at the lunch counter down the line at a place called Greenburg. They love each other dearly. There is a boomer comes to work on the line who it turns out is hired by the rival railroad to stop Casey Jones when he makes his trial run for the mail contract.

The boomer falls in love with the gal and tries to get her away from Casey, but the gal is true to him. She learns about his evil intent to harm Casey when he makes his big run, and she warns Casey and begs him not to do it, but Casey says it is his duty.

WELL, the big day is here. Casey's engine is all shined up and ready to ramble and he climbs on and starts. The gal down at Greenburg is worried to death for her sweetheart. Casey is making a great run and everybody on the line is cheering him on and it looks like it is easy win for Casey and the railroad. But all of a sudden the gal finds out that the boomer is going to burn the bridge at Greenburg and if Casey don't stop he will be killed, and if he stops he loses the race. There ain't no time for the gal to tell headquarters; headquarters couldn't do a thing anyway, be-

cause it is too late. So she runs out of the lunch counter and gets on a hand car and goes pumping down the line towards Casey who is coming more than a mile a minute, to warn him and make him stop.

They meet on a curve. Casey sees her just before he hits her. He is horrified and thinks he will big hole his engine and save her, and then he knows it is too late. He covers his eyes as he hits her and the hand car, knowing that he had killed his sweetheart. Then Casey becomes a perfect fiend; he nearly tears the engine apart to get more speed out of her. Next he sees the burning bridge and is almost overcome because he knows now why his sweetheart give her life for him. He is a man of steel now and he hits the burning bridge with all he's got and gets through and wins the mail contract, but he has inhaled fire at the bridge and is in agony for the rest of the run and is rushed to the hospital where his life is despaired of until the little yellow headed gal shows up at his bedside and gives him something to live for, because it seems she didn't get a scratch when the hand car got knocked off the track. And everybody lives happy afterwards.

"Is that what you're gonna make?" Pat asks Morry Wolferman.

"Sure," he says. "It will be a sublime interpolation of an immortal story."

"Hell," says Pat, his voice sounding like a fog horn, "that's all clinkers! Casey Jones was a respectable married man on a railroad down south. Diamond stack engines was gone from the roads in his day. And Casey was doubling back for a friend who got sick, and was killed when he sideswiped the rear end of a freight train that hadn't cleared the main line. That's all there is to the story."

"What of it?" says Morry Wolferman. "We can't use the original story. It ain't dramatic enough. You've got to dress it up for the box office."

Pat sees it is hopeless to argue and shuts up. We get up to a place called Temple City, which the movie scouts has decided will do for the town of Greenburg in the story. There is a bridge just beyond the town, and a curve where the gal gets dumped off the hand car. So we are all set to go to work. A movie company don't work like a railroad. They do everything a

dozen times and then ain't satisfied. I'd like to railroad and get paid for it if every time I cut a couple off the head end and set 'em on the team track, the brains would say, "Now, Bill, we'll do that over again, and raise yer left eyebrow a little more when you give that signal."

We are at Temple City two days, and they ain't got a start on the picture. All they do is rehearse. They finally get the gal on the hand car being dumped to suit them. Only they used a dummy that flopped up and down tied to the handle bar, the hand car bein' run by a motor underneath. The car and the engine wasn't goin' five miles an hour when they hit. But they speed up the fillum to make it look fast.

THE railroad agent at Temple City, he just folds up and quit; he can't get none of his own work done. But the movie company is payin' him on the side to let them mess around. All this time old Pop Rand is havin' the time of his life monkey-in' around that old high-wheel diamond stack. She looks like she come out of the ark. I ain't seen one in action since I was a boy. Pop says he's got her in shape so's she would roll over and lay down if he say the word.

"Bill, she's an engine what is an engine," he says, and his eyes shine. We're dodgin' them big forty-four hundreds every little bit, because we're protectin' both ways against all trains, but old Pop never seems to notice them. It was on the second day that Pop had a run in with Morry Wolferman and the director who is shootin' the picture.

"Get off now and let Mr. Heaps get up there in your place," Wolferman hollers up to Pop.

"Who's Mr. Heaps?" asks Pop.

They point to Larry Heaps, the actor, who comes bustin' up.

"I'll kick his pants off of here if he gets up," says Pop, gettin' hard.

"But he's the engineer in the picture and we have to shoot the scenes he's in."

"If he's an engineer," says Pop, "then I'm a little holy Moses in the bulrushes."

Well, we argue an hour with Pop to let him leave Heaps get up and have his picture took holding the throttle. He finally give in. But that's all that Pop would stand

for. As for crackin' the throttle and runnin' her even a car length with Pop in the background lookin' on, wasn't to be thought of. So they have to figure out some way to get the picture made. Finally the director who is a soft sissie that makes you think of custard pie and whose name is Carrington Bridewell, has a bright idea; they hire Pop as a movie actor at five hundred a week and the makeup man starts to work on him. Pop is the same size and build as this Larry Heaps and when the makeup man gets done they look like twins. Pop is twenty years younger, and old Casey Jones couldn't of told him from hisself, that is, providin' Casey looked like that to begin with.

I'VE told you about the engine, but I didn't tell you about the rest of the train. Well, it's about as old as the old high-wheel itself. Old wooden coaches with open platforms and hand wheel brakes. The coaches was all kind of bowed like a cat that's got her back up, and they are painted up with fancy stripes and fancy lettering. It seems the railroad Casey Jones was working for was the Atlantic & Pacific, for that's the way the coaches was painted.

"Pat," I says to Pat Hinds, the skipper, while we're settin' in the shade waiting for the camera men to change their cameras, "do you suppose them brakes are any good?"

"I guess so," says Pat. "They're inspected before we left L. A. The foreman oked them."

"I'm gonna take a look at 'em," I says, and walks over and looks at the rigging. She's old and the cylinders under them coaches is small, and they don't look good to me. "How about it, Pat?" I says to him. "If Pop gets her up over fifteen an hour and slaps the air on her, what's gonna happen?"

"Search me," says Pat. "If they don't hold, the weight of them coaches might push old Pop from hell to breakfast."

"Let's go ask Pop," I says.

We walks up to the engine and asks Pop. "Don't worry about the air," says Pop. "I know what this old engine can do. I've examined every nut and bolt and seam on this old grandma, and I know they're all right." And he twist his handle bar mustaches like a dude engineer from a way back. And wink at me.

"We better watch Pop," I says to Pat when we go set down in the shade again. "When that makeup man made him look twenty years younger he put young ideas in him; he'll be flirtin' with that little yellow headed actress next." And later on I seen Pop givin' her the eye.

IT WAS pretty soft for us rails just settin' round drawin' pay watchin' these movie people try to act. Pop was dyin' to get in on the love makin' when they took them scenes at the lunch counter, but Larry Heaps had the inside track there and Pop was elbowed out. And then finally on the third day the company gets ready to take the big scenes of the race through the burning bridge. They've had a couple of men setting down by the bridge ever since we got to Temple City, because the way the movies work you never know when the director is gonna get inspired to do some particular thing. He might of wanted to take the burning bridge scenes the first day, but he didn't, and them poor guys had to set down there three days in the sun with some barrels of oil which they are to set off and make a lot of smoke which was to blow over the bridge and make it look dangerous when the old high-wheel dash into it on her great run.

"All set for the race," hollers the director. "Places, everybody. Places. Silence! Silence! Silence!" Everybody quiets down, and Larry Heaps is at the gangway and the actor who plays the conductor comes up with some orders, and hands 'em to Larry Heaps, who, you remember, is supposed to be Casey Jones. He takes 'em and says, "OK, sir," to the conductor, looks 'em over and says, "The time is very fast, but I will make it, sir." "See that you do, Mr. Jones. Let us go," and he waves his hand.

Pat Hinds groans out loud and everybody glares around at him and begins shushin' him up, and the director hollers, "Cut!"

"Did you see that, Bill?" asks Pat.

"Sure I seen it." The blame fool movie conductor had give a back up signal when he meant the train to go ahead. But that's the way they do things in the movies. Well, they have to practice the scene a while and finally they get it right. And Carrington Bridewell, the director, says they'll take the

burning bridge scenes next and sends down to tell the men to set the oil on fire.

"You've only got thirty-five minutes before we'll have to clear the mainline for the Limited," Pat says to Bridewell.

"Oke," says the director. "That's all I'll need. We'll back up about a mile. Walter is already set up with his camera on the tender of the locomotive. Better get your men on now, if you want them on. I'll be through in time to get out of the way of the Limited."

"What do you say, Pat?" I asks.

"Better get on the head end, Bill. I'll catch the rear." Pat turns to the director and asks, "My engineer, Rand, is going to do the acting, ain't he, instead of yours?"

"Yes," says Carrington Bridewell. "As soon as the train is started."

Well, I catch the head end and Pop backs her up about a mile, so as to get a good start towards the burning bridge. The signal for us to go was when we seen smoke coming up from the bridge. We wait a couple or three minutes all of us lookin' for the sign, and then we seen it.

"OK, Mr. Rand, start her," says the director, and Pop widened on her and the camera man whose name is Walter and who is the only real guy in the outfit, begins to grind from the tender. I and the director and Larry Heaps are settin' together up on the coal beside the camera. I see the director nudge Larry Heaps and hear him say, "Get goin', Larry."

Before I could think what they was up to, Larry Heaps jumps down on the deck and yanks Pop out of his seat. Carrington Bridewell follows him down, and before Pop knows it they got his hands behind his back and handcuffs on him, and they drag him back up beside me, and Carrington Bridewell sets on him. And then Larry Heaps climbs up in Pop's seat and begins to play engineer. He gives the throttle a yank and pulls her wide open to the last notch, and the old diamond stack sounds like she's gonna blow her stack off and throw a tire the way the drivers spin.

"You can't do that," I says to the director.

"I've done it, ain't I?" he grins at me.

"Yeah, and I'm gonna sock you one, too."

"Is that so?" he says, gettin' ugly.

"Take them handcuffs off'n Pop," I says,

"or I'll knock you plumb off this engine." I'm mad and I mean it.

HE TOOK 'em off and Pop set up, rubbin' his side where he'd scraped against the Johnson bar when they pull him off the seat. He ain't sayin' anything, but I could see he is mad. Bridewell is tryin' to hand him something, and I see it is a hundred-dollar bill.

"This is yours, Mr. Rand," he says, soft soapin' Pop, "if you stay put where you are." Pop didn't say nothin'. I could see he was tempted. And then I see something else too. Pop was watchin' Larry Heaps. The movie engineer tried to ease the throttle in a little and she won't go. He takes both hands and shove, and she won't budge.

Pop commences to get on his feet, and I see his eyes gettin' bigger. The director figgers there's something wrong, and Larry Heaps turns around and hollers, "She's stuck!"

"You've played hell, you two birds," says Pop, taking a swipe at Carrington Bridewell and skinnin' a piece off his ear with his brotherhood ring. "Get off'n that box," yells Pop and he makes a dive at Larry Heaps and yanks him off. Pop gets up and tries to close the throttle but she's stuck tight.

"What do we do now?" asks the director, kinda scared. I don't pay no attention to him. "What do we do?" he yells.

"Shut up," I says. "Leave it to Pop. He knows what to do."

The director starts to holler cut to Walter the camera man, but changes his mind and it is a good thing for him or he wouldn't have got any picture at all. By this time the drivers have got a grip on the rail and we are beginnin' to roll. We got three cars behind us, just enough to hold the old high-wheel down proper. Pop settles down on his seat and starts to ride. We could see the smoke from the bridge plain ahead, and I nearly bust when I realize that Pop seen it and is beginning to act. He looks around anxious, then ahead, then rubs his eyes and looks again. He studies his watch and shakes his head.

"That's the stuff, Mr. Rand," hollers Carrington Bridewell. And he begins to coach Pop. Of course they ain't any sound stuff being took on the engine; the tender

is too small to set it all up, so they are going to put in the voices and sound at the studio. We can talk all we want here, but we couldn't at the depot where they was takin' the sound too. So the director hollers, "Keep it up, Mr. Rand. Now take another look back. Now lean out the window and try to get a better look ahead." Pop done it all just as though he'd been trained, and better than Larry Heaps could of done it, because he wasn't no engineer.

BY THIS time we are sure rollin'. The Temple City depot flashes by, and I just catch a glimpse of the agent and some of the movies folks all google eyed at the way we are going, and then we slam over the switch and are headed for the burning bridge. I could see what Pop was aimin' to do. He was gonna keep her rollin' till he got by the bridge and if he can't shut the throttle, he'll slap the air on her and bring her down. Carrington Bridewell is beginning to think things are comin' all right after all. But that smoke up ahead worries me. It looks too real.

"Are you sure them men of yourn ain't set that bridge afire sure enough?" I says to Carrington Bridewell. He gives me a dirty look.

"Hell no!" he says. "We don't do things that way."

I climb down off the coal to go talk to Pop. The makeup man he had put some makeup on me too, in case I have to get in the picture carrying out my regular duties. The director hollers where do I think I'm goin', but I don't say nothin'.

"Pop," I says, "there's more smoke down there than a couple of barrels of oil will make."

Pop keeps lookin' ahead. Finally he says, "I hope you're wrong, Bill."

Then I see a tongue of flame shoot up between the ties. We are gettin' pretty close now and runnin' like a scared greyhound with a can tied to our tail. Pop is right when he said that old high-wheel was a runnin' piece of machinery. Of a sudden there is a sheet of flame sweepin' over that bridge.

"Pinch 'er down, Pop," I yells. "That bridge is on fire sure enough!"

But there ain't no use tellin' Pop that, because he sees it too. He'd have to set her

on her tail, though, to get her stopped the way we are goin'. He reaches for the air to make a reduction, then big hole her; but there ain't even a whisper in them brakes. Our brakes are plumb clean gone, the air has all leaked off and we are like a piece of butter on a hot stove lid.

"Put her in reverse, Pop!" I yells, and grabs hold of the Johnson bar to help him hoss 'er over.

"Let it alone," yells Pop. "You'll blow them cylinder heads."

"What do we do then?" I says.

"Duck," says Pop. "We'll ride through it." And he slams his window so hard he breaks the glass. Just then we hit the bridge, and fire cuts in around us in the cab. The fireman and I and Pop all drop on the deck, keepin' close to the boiler head. I'm so I can see back up on the tender, and Carrington Bridewell and Larry Heaps are trying to dig theirselves into the coal, but Walter he keeps grinding the camera. He ain't never quit once. He did throw up one arm to shield his face. And then we are out of it before it is time to begin worryin' whether the ties are burned through or not. I don't want no more of that. There's a blister on the back of my neck, and my shirt is scorched. But Old Pop—I had to laugh—he come up like a frog for air, and his eyebrows is gone, and the right side of his handlebar mustache is burned off where that flame reached in at the window before he could git off'n his seat.

"What do we do now?" I asks Pop. For we are runnin' faster than I'd ever run before, and I've had some fast rides in my time. Pop gets back up on his seat and looks at his watch. And I take a look at mine. We have used up seventeen minutes of the thirty-five we had when we started. We ought to be gettin' in the hole for the Limited. But here we are out on the single track mainline with the throttle stuck wide open and no brakes.

"We got to get in the clear somewheres," Pop says.

I LOOKS back and I see Pat Hinds leaning out a couple of cars back signaling us to stop. I signal back to him what the trouble is, and he pulls his head in.

"You're darn right we got to git in somewheres, Pop," I says. "If that Limited hits

us with one of them big forty-four hundreds she'll smear us in this little old high-wheel like you'd step on a worm."

"Well, there's Hampton, just three miles ahead—"

"How you gonna get in the clear there, Pop, if we can't stop?"

"That's so," he says, scratchin' his head.

"How long would she take to die if you didn't give her any more coal?" I asks. I was thinkin' of flaggin' the Limited if we could get stopped.

"Half an hour, I guess. Too late," says Pop.

Old bald-headed Charlie Betts, the tallowpot, ain't said nothin' all this time. Silent Charlie is what they call him. His Adam's apple signals he is going to talk and he speaks up and it's the first time I ever seen a tallowpot that had an idea. "Why not throw off a note to the operator at Hampton," he says, "and have him ask the operator at Cameron to line the switch for us there for that long passing track. If we time it right we'll git there about the same time as the Limited."

Well, Pop studied over that a second and said, "OK, Bill, you write the note. And, Charlie, you begin leanin' hard on that shovel."

I wrote the note and wrapped it around a piece of coal and snapped it with a rubber band, and got ready to throw it off at Hampton. The time is short, and we're runnin' right against the fastest train on the California Central, which don't even know that we're in existence. If we don't get all the breaks now we're due for a cornfield meet as sure as hell. It was kinda hard to keep my mind on what I was supposed to do, because my scalp was gettin' cold and my tongue was awful dry.

THE depot at Hampton popped up ahead like a jack in the box. Almost before I could get set the depot went by, and I turned loose of the note. I made a good shot. Right through the operator's window where it must of hit him if he'd been settin' at his desk. But he wasn't. For when we got past the depot I looked across at his house, which is about a block from the depot, and there I seen him out in his front yard playin' with his dog. I hollered and waved, tryin' to tell him we was in trouble;

and finally he looked up, and thought I was just bein' sociable; so he waved back and went on playin' with the dog.

Well, there we was. Our last chance is gone. And we are runnin' now like a bat out of hell. The tallow had put a couple of shovels of coal under that old high-wheel's boiler and it was like she had a new set of glands. It's ten miles to Cameron, and we ought to be in the clear there right now. It's just nine and a half minutes by my watch till the Limited is due to leave there.

Just then here comes Pat Hinds. He'd climbed up on top of the coaches somehow and had come over the tops. He jumps down in the coal, and slides on down to the deck. "What're you gonna do now, Pop?" he yells.

"Gonna smoke in to Cameron," Pop yells back.

"What're you gonna do when you get there?" asks Pat.

"I don't know yet. I'm tryin' to think of somethin', though."

"Well, think hard," yells Pat.

"I am," says Pop, gettin' mad. "If you don't like the way I'm runnin' this engine, you can unload right now."

"I don't want to break a leg," yells Pat.

I notice Pop eyein' the water gauge and it is down considerable. Pat takes hold of the injector like he is going to bring the gauge up and Pop yells at him to let it alone. He turns around in his seat and hollers:

"Why don't you go back and get hold of the hand brakes on them coaches and when I start the whistle you begin to wind 'em tight?"

"OK, Pop," says Pat. "That's as good an idea as any. What you gonna do, try to kill 'er?"

"If I can. But I can't till we get to Cameron."

"And if we meet the Limited before that—"

"That's my business," yells Pop. "You go back and git onto them brakes!"

I start back with Pat over the tops, but Pat says there is three or four husky movie extras back there playin' poker and he will get them to stop and help him when the signal is given. "You stay here, Bill," he says. "Pop may need you."

I try to tick off the miles by my watch

to see how fast we are going. But I'm kinda rattled and can't figure in my head, but I know we run one mile in forty-eight seconds and another in forty-four. Charlie Betts is still leaning on the shovel, and the needle on the clock is standin' steady. Just then Carrington Bridewell comes down onto the deck and says to Pop:

"Mr. Rand, I think we've gone far enough. If you'll stop now and go back to Temple City—" But that's as far as he got. Pop whirls around on his seat and gives him a stony look. Pop has lost half his mustache and his eyebrows, and don't know it. He sure looks funny when he whirls around and glares at the director.

"Come up and see me some time, and I'll tell you one," says Pop, and flops around on his seat. Carrington Bridewell turns to me and says:

"What's the matter with him?"

"Better go on back and enjoy the ride, mister," I says, "because if you ain't found out yet what's goin' on, you never will."

"I thought he got the engine fixed," he said.

"Be ready to jump when the word is passed," was all I said. There are sure some dumb ones making movies. Here he'd been around us railroad fellows three days now and he ain't learned anything yet.

BOY, are we runnin'! The stream-line trains didn't have nothin' on us. If we'd been out to snare a mail contract like in the story we was makin', we'd 'a' won hands down. I ain't never run so fast, and it seem even faster because that old engine was built down close to the rail. We take a curve on two wheels, and I slam over against the fireman's side, and I see Bridewell who is climbing back up in the coal fall and Larry Heaps grab him to keep him from going overboard, but Walter, the camera man is still grinding. We're gettin' close to Cameron now. Two or three miles will tell the tale. Pop sets up a holler to Charlie Betts.

"Load your firebox, Charlie," he yells. "Fill her full. We're smokin' in." And Charlie crams all he can get in the box, and the old diamond stack begins to belch a big plume of black smoke that you could see for miles.

That water level, though, is gettin' awful

low; she's almost to the bottom of the glass and I feel like hanging out the gangway ready to unload. But Pop is watchin' it too. I see he's takin' a chance all right, but I figger he knows what he's up to. Just then we round a curve and get the first sight of Cameron. It ain't straight track clear to the depot yet, but we can see the town. There is a curve right at the beginnin' of the passing track, and you can't see around it till you are right on it.

Well, when we come in sight of Cameron it is less'n two miles and we are still runnin' close to top speed. Pop grabs the injector and puts about a bucket of cold water in the boiler, and I wonder if the crown sheet is gonna hold or let loose and blow us clean off the right of way. It holds. Pop grabs the whistle and ties her down. And then he lets more water in, and the steam begins to go down like the thermometer when a blizzard strikes on Sherman Hill. And we feel the hand brakes from the coaches begin to take hold, because Pat Hinds has heard the signal.

But what's worryin' me now, is a smudge of smoke there at Cameron, which seems to be moving. We'd missed out at Hampton lettin' anybody know the trouble we are in when the operator is off playin' with his dog. That smoke means it's the Limited. And she might be comin' around that curve ahead at 60 or 70 an hour. I make up my mind that when I see her poke her pilot around the bend I'm gonna unload, and I get out in the gangway, so's nobody can beat me to it. 'Tain't no joke tryin' to unload the way we still are runnin', but I was gonna do it.

THAT plume from the Limited is black and it's slanted the way it should be when a train is runnin'. I look at Pop and I see he is watchin' it. And up there on the tender is Walter grindin' away at the camera.

"Looks like we're gonna have to jump, Pop," I yells. But he don't answer. We're almost to the curve now. And the smoke from the Limited shows she is way this side of the depot at Cameron now, and still comin'. It looks like it is every man for himself.

We're losin' speed fast; but even if we was, there ain't a chance of me droppin' off

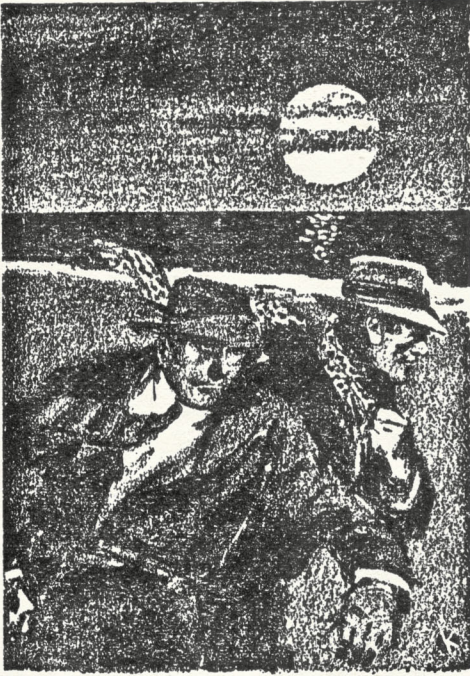
the pilot and runnin' it out to the passing track switch and throwin' it and lettin' us in before we tangle with the Limited. How many of us is gonna get killed when the Limited smears us is somethin' I don't like to think of. We'd done our best and it ain't good enough.

And then we round the curve and do I feel like cheerin'! I let out a yell, because the Limited is on the passing track, and the mainline is clear. Somehow they had got word of us. Later I hear the operator at Hampton got back to the depot in time and found my note. And at Cameron they decided to put the Limited in the hole and give us the mainline to get stopped on. I yell so loud you could of heard me back to Temple City, and then my scalp froze plumb solid, and I seen Pop's face get white under his makeup.

The Limited hadn't cleared the mainline yet! The observation car was hangin' part way out on the main on the cross over! They'd took a chance and instead of going in the hole back by the depot had run down to the crossover at the lower end and hadn't had time to clear. The flagman was on the ground by the switch wavin' his arms off at us, and Jim Hamilton, the hoghead on the Limited, was whistlin' to beat hell. I was thinkin' it was Casey Jones all over again sure enough, because that's the way old Casey died sideswipin' the rear end of a train that hadn't cleared the main. Pop is yelling at me and Charlie Betts. He is gonna hoss her over now, and see if we can't stop in reverse, because the speed is down to about thirty now.

WE GRAB the Johnson bar and begin to pull, and over she come, and zowie! The left hand cylinder head let go and a fog of steam begins to blow and we can't see nothin'. We're all divin' for the gangway tryin' to unload. Larry Heaps gets in Charlie Betts' way and they get jammed in the gangway. And then we hit. I see the old diamond stack smoke pipe sailin' through the steam, and the next minute there is a crash and the old wooden cab is lifted clean off the engine and it goes sailin' away. I have one look of Carrington Bridewell going off the tender, his heels flyin' high over his head. The rest of us stuck on

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Gang Hide-outs May Be Smoked Out; and When Rivers Go on the Rampage There Is a Chance of Their Being Flooded Out

AND HIGH WATER!

By ROBERT H. ROHDE

IT WAS still raining when Bradley at last saw the lights of his crossroads billet below Pennerton that night. He was wet and cold, tuckered out, ready to tell the world that when a sovereign New England state expected one lone trooper to police the whole length and breadth of two sprawling hill-country counties it expected a little bit too much.

Coming down from the north he had found the bottoms impassable a mile out of Drakeville, the turnpike handlebar-deep under backed up water from Barlow Cove. That had meant swinging back and coming the long way round; a miserable long way round over soggy dirt roads that were hell to negotiate on a motorcycle, and decrepit old wooden bridges that already were wobbling and by all weather signs would be somewhere else tomorrow.

It was weird weather; for valley dwellers, darkly calamitous weather. The other day, spring had suddenly backed in on the bitterest winter of recent years. Squarely in the middle of March, February and April had crashed and telescoped. Rain and more rain had followed the thaw. So now the little rivers were on a disastrously early rampage, boiling, racing, spewing out of their banks. And the Big River, black, brooding, inching up and up, slower to roil but a devil

when it came to lash its tail, was tonight an ominous question mark under the ice-jam overhanging the valley like a Damoclean sword.

That was all behind Bradley when he had thrown off his streaming slicker. The little inn where he headquartered perched high on a hill, wisely high. He could turn in there knowing that he wouldn't wake in the middle of the night to find the River in bed with him.

Downstairs, where a log blazed, he loosened his Sam Browne belt for comfort, hugged the fireplace while he swooped down hot coffee and listened to flood reports coming out of Boston on the radio. But he had missed what he wanted most to hear, and when the news bulletins gave way to swing music he asked:

"How about the ice up the line? How long before it lets go?"

Somebody told him, sober voiced: "Any minute now. We'll darn near hear it way down here. In the mornin' there'll be a lot of places you won't get to on any motorcycle, Trooper."

Bradley grinned moistly. "That's all right, too. I'm saddle sore from it anyhow. Waterwings'll be a nice change."

He thought then, calling for more coffee, that he was as good as tucked in; but before

he had his refill in the cup the telephone was ringing, and the call was for him.

"Corporal Bradley? Oh, thank God, Brad!" It was little Ronnie Hull, on the rural switchboard down at Gedd Hill. "Brad, come quick!"

There was trouble below the Hill. Ronnie didn't know what sort of trouble. But, "Something terrible has happened at Ledyard's," she said. "Hurry!"

Bradley was grabbing for his slicker with one hand as he banged down the receiver with the other, and ten minutes later he was roaring up Gedd Hill.

ABOVE, where half a dozen houses clustered, Ronnie was waiting for him in her racketty little coupe. Himself, he hadn't been much around the flats between Gedd Hill and the River; Ronnie, knowing that, had said, "You might have a hard time finding Ledyard's. Stop at the house and I'll drive you there. Half our lines have gone dead and Mother can take care of the board easily enough."

The downpour had lightened to a drizzle and on the far side of the valley a feeble starlight was fighting through the murk when Bradley jerked back the motorcycle on its stand and climbed in beside Ronnie. She said, as the car rolled off:

"I haven't heard another thing. Haven't been able to raise Ledyard's again. The line must have snapped. It went out before the woman had spoken a dozen words and I still can't imagine who she could be. The Ledyards themselves all went to Pennerton this afternoon; they're going to stay there until the River's down. Whoever they could have left behind, she's scared to death. Her voice was so shaky that I could hardly understand her. She said to get help to her, to send police as fast as they could get there."

"It wasn't a voice you'd ever heard before?"

"I know I never did. I'm certain, Brad, it's no one who belongs anywhere around Gedd Hill. She didn't talk the Gedd Hill way. If it was summer time I'd say she was somebody up on vacation. It was a city voice, plain."

Rattling along the ridge, the flivver made one turn and then another. Then it was slithering through deep mire on a down grade. Ronnie, Bradley was thinking, was no

slouch at handling a car. She was as good at the wheel as he had found her, those too few times at back country parties, on a dance floor.

When she spoke again, her own voice had a shake in it.

"Lord knows what we'll find at Ledyard's. All those poles going down and the lines breaking—you know what that means. The ice has let go, and the River must be all over the place now. Ledyard's—everything, lock, stock and barrel—may be on its way down to salt water by this time. And that poor woman in the house, helpless!"

And then in another moment Ronnie's foot was on the brake. A few hundred feet ahead water was gleaming in the shine of the headlights—water more than a mile from where it belonged, swirling across the road, turning that side of Gedd Hill into an incredible river bank.

Safely back from the wash Ronnie Hull brought the car to a full stop. The engine still was running and the windshield-wiper still squeaked busily back and forth as she leaned forward to stare through the cleared semi-circle on the glass.

"It's gone!" she gasped. "Ledyard's is gone!" Then at once she knew otherwise. "No, it's just the barn that's gone. The house stuck it out. It stands higher—but look, Brad!"

Bradley was out of the car, in mud to his ankles. He could see, several hundred yards across the dancing water, the roof of a rambling building—another of those farm-houses all broken out in ells and extensions, each marking a new rise in the section's popularity with summer boarders.

THE lower half of the house was under water now; only the many-angled roof and the upper story stood clear. Bradley called out, "Is anybody there?" But a stiff wind was coming off that sudden new lake and he knew his voice could not have carried against it. Ronnie Hull, herself slickered, climbed down from the car and stood beside him. Her feet—nice little feet in dancing pumps—were lost now in the depths of masculine rubber boots absurdly oversize for her. She had put a hand on Bradley's arm, and suddenly it tightened. "Listen!"

For a moment Bradley heard only sounds

of swishing, whirling water and the movement of the wind through the upper branches of trees lifting over the flood surface like grotesque huge aquatic growths. Then he caught a cadenced thumping and creaking, and knew there must be a skiff out there somewhere.

It was out of the swath of the headlamps' beam, invisible, still far off, but on the evidence of his ears it was coming toward them. Probably, he surmised, making for the light; perhaps with that frightened woman herself rowing it. He spoke his thought, and Ronnie Hull shook her head.

"No, Brad. If she isn't drowned she's still in the house, upstairs. There wouldn't be any boat at Ledyard's. Of course there wouldn't. Ordinary times, you can't even see the River from there."

Dimming the car lights, Bradley used his flash. It's cone swept over flotsam of the flood and then stopped, steady.

"Boat!"

The light had picked out a rowboat, but as it came into closer view, no one was rowing it. The skiff was half swamped, empty, rocking along sluggishly with the wind. With the light holding on it, it floated in toward the Hill, headed straight for that point where the descending road went submarine.

Bradley said, "You think she's in the house? Well, then, here's transportation."

It was—and then all at once, it wasn't. As Bradley spoke the rowboat, drifting broadside on, now between the Ledyard house and the watchers, was brushing by a half-submerged elm. A trailing painter and a spreading branch tangled, and he saw the skiff swing tubbily and hang there no more than a hundred feet away, facing the breeze like a ship hove to.

Staring at it, swearing softly, he heard once more the creak of oars. His light, searching, picked up a distant dark mass in motion and stayed with it until at nearer hand it resolved itself into a second boat.

In another moment it was in the dulled beam of the headlights. He switched them bright again and could see that this skiff carried three passengers, and that all were men. One sat in the bow, another on the thwart astern, and the third was amidships rowing.

They weren't River people! Bradley knew

that immediately. The man at the oars was making too clumsy a job for a practiced hand. And the raincoats that all three wore were not the kind favored in the valley. They were citified raincoats, cut with a swagger, raglan-shouldered, jauntily belted.

Bradley asked Ronnie, "Who are these people?" but she couldn't tell him.

"Strangers to me," she whispered when they were close in. "There've been a lot of places sold to outsiders the last few years. Folks from Boston and Worcester; even from New York. They come and go by car, so there's no keeping track of them and their company."

The skiff was nosing to the hillside below them. It grated on gravel where the road had become a beach, and one after another the three in the swank trench coats stepped over the bow. They hadn't troubled to pull the skiff behind them, and relieved of their weight it was floating away.

Bradley snapped out, "Grab that boat, will you? I want to use it!"

None of the trio made a move, and he went dashing and splashing past them. With the skiff recaptured, he was over his puttees in ice water.

"Thanks," he said, wading back with the painter in a gauntleted hand. "You lads are a big help."

They stood staring at him with hard unwinking eyes. Once of them said:

"You want the boat, huh? Well, you got it. Looks like we're done with it."

"What the hell happened?" one of the others wanted to know. "Where did all the water come from so quick?"

"From behind an ice wall upriver," Bradley said. Then immediately he wanted to know: "Where were you?"

AUTOMATICALLY, he was curious about these dapper flood-voyagers, wondering whether they had not been in some way connected with the telephone SOS. He didn't, offhand, like their looks. He knew the type, knew it both well and unfavorably. At the other end of this county, and in the next county, half a dozen out-of-the-way farms had been bought up by just such people, wise-eyed, close-mouthed gen-try who whizzed about in expensive automobiles and always had plenty of money—money, he surmised, easily come by through

big-town rackets of one kind or another. They were prone, all of them, to throw wild parties when they came week-ending up here, and now his instant thought was that the woman who had phoned Ronnie might have been recently in the company of the three.

That guess didn't seem to wash, though. An answer to his question came quickly and smoothly. The men in the trench coats had been in a house at least half a mile below Ledyard's. They were up in the country "on a little vacation" and had been thrown into panic when they found the flood waters roaring in about them.

The man who had done the awkward rowing was talking, his hat-brim pulled low and shadowing a rocky face.

"Lucky thing," he said, "the boat was handy. I was goin' to paint it. Had it up at the house, and when the water was pretty near over the porch we figured it was a good time to shove off. For a while we didn't know which way was which. Just sorta let the wind take us. Then we seen the light over here, and we were set. It had to be on dry land, see?"

Ronnie Hull had been an impatient listener; anxious-eyed, she cut urgently in: "Brad! Why stand here and talk? That poor woman!"

Bradley looked over again toward the Ledyard house, and still could see no sign of life there. The flood crest had passed; the water, risen no higher on the clapboarded side of the building, still stood below the sills of its second-story windows. All closed and with their shades drawn behind them, they blankly and enigmatically gave back the glare of the flivver's lights.

He stepped into the skiff and, bending for the oars, had an accident. His bull's-eye, carelessly jabbed in the pocket of the slicker, slipped out and bounced off a thwart and went overboard. Fishing for it, he could hear Ronnie talking. One of the city men had said, after a silence, "What woman?" and Ronnie was telling about that frantic appeal from Ledyard's.

Bradley called to her and she broke off and came clumping into the boat in her mighty boots. As he pulled away she leaned forward from the stern-sheets to whisper:

"I'm so glad you didn't leave me behind, Brad. Those men—there's something queer

about them. Something wrong with them. I know it's dumb, but I can't help it. They've somehow put a scare on me. Right this minute, Brad, I'm still all over creeps!"

BEHIND the blazing headlights, invisible from the water, one of the trio left ashore on the hillside had sprung to Ronnie's car and jerked the door open. He peered at the dash and called softly:

"She left the key!"

The thick-set man who had been so careful to keep his face hidden snapped back at him:

"She did, huh?" His voice suave and easy when he had talked to Bradley, had a rasp in it now. "So what?"

"So we blow the hell out of here. What else? Listen, Zolli, that dame is loaded with poison. If the flood didn't get her, you can be damn sure she won't rest until she gets us. Her hollerin' cop that way is the tip-off. There's no question about it. She's all set to blow the works."

The third man said, "Right she is. She was nuts about Keeler. All that rube trooper has gotta do is find her, and then our necks are in a sling for fair."

Zolli looked after the skiff, churning along the beam of the headlamps.

"A fine bunch o' suckers we turn out to be. We even hand him a boat so he can go out and collect the squawk. If I'd only knew what it was all about—knew it in time—I'd have been out there and shut up that moll of Keeler's myself."

"Too late now, Zolli," the slim man by the coupe growled. "If she's where Johnny Law thinks she is, it's a mess. And the sooner we scam the better we're off. We can all three of us crowd into this bus all right. Come on!"

Zolli shook his square head. "How far do you think we'd get before the heat was on us? How long before we'd be grabbed? Even if we made it to New York we'd have to hole in and stay holed in. We couldn't do business without showing ourselves, so we'd be sunk. Out of dough and out of luck, moping in a hide-out while other guys took over our graft, knowin' that the minute we stepped out to put up a battle the heat would strike."

The skiff was halfway to the islanded house as Zolli's flinty dark small eyes swung

again toward it. His heavy jaw, set hard, was like a block of granite.

"That's how we come out," he said after a moment, "if we take it on the lam now. But look at it another way and it was a break that we bumped into this state trooper. Now we know for certain what to expect from Keeler's sweetie, and we've got the chance to cure the rap right here before it goes any farther.

"What I mean, us three had ought to be able to take care of one trooper and two skirts easy and quick enough. The best thing is to give 'em all what we gave Keeler, the dirty rat. Then all we gotta do is slide back to the city and we're in the clear. There won't be anybody left that can even say they saw us up here. Of course, they'll find our car down below when the water goes out—but how the hell can they get behind that phony registration?"

The other two were staring at each other. Zolli shrugged a heavy shoulder.

"Well," he grunted, "would you rather burn?"

THEN once more he was looking out over the water. The skiff with the trooper bending to its oars had passed out of the light and was no longer to be seen. But another skiff, one with a trailing painter, half full of water but otherwise unladen, was drifting toward him down that white beam.

It came in stern first, bumped along at his feet. He stooped and saw a pair of long oars in it—oars that had lain in the bottom of the boat and had been kept by thwarts above them from floating away.

Zolli fastened powerful hands on the skiff's counter.

"Grab hold, you birds," he snapped. "Let's dump the water outta this tub. The hell with waitin'! We might just as well go finish it out there."

With ten feet of water under the bottom of his borrowed boat, Bradley just then was coming alongside the Ledyard house and discovering that his bull's-eye had gone on strike after that brief immersion. He shipped his oars and tried to use the flash, and nothing happened. Now he had no light.

There was no sound out here in the lee of the house but the murmur of the ice-tide against its clapboards, no stir within, no re-

sponse to his hail. On his feet in the skiff, Bradley shoved up an unlocked window and called again. Inside, somebody's alarm-clock was clicking tinnily. Otherwise there was dead silence.

"Nobody here," he said. Then he looked over toward the hill and stiffened. "What are those fellows doing? D'you see, Ron? That skiff that got caught in the elm—they've got it!"

"What if they have?" The girl's voice was quick, tight. "Please, Brad—don't let's go back until we know for sure the house is empty. I've got a feeling that we hadn't ought to. The queerest, strongest feeling."

Bradley said, "Well, as long as we've come this far!" and went through the open window. "You stay in the boat, Ronnie. Just hang on here for a minute. Stand up and catch hold of the sill. I'll be with you in a jiffy."

HE POCKETED his useless flashlight and struck a match. Then, directly, his eye was on a kerosene lamp on a table beside the noisy clock. He lifted the chimney and before his match burned out had touched the flame to the wick.

Behind him, Ronnie came scrambling through the window. Her face showed pale in the lamplight.

"One more 'please,' I don't want to be left alone."

She had brought in the skiff's painter, and Bradley took it from her and threw a swift half-hitch over a bedpost.

"Anything you say," he nodded. "Come along if you want to."

He picked up the lamp, opened a door and stepped out into a damp, empty hall. This was the north ell. To his left, at the rear end of the hall, an unshaded window looked out on blackness; to the right there was a turn, and beyond the turn a stairway leading up from the flooded lower floor. Only the uppermost step stood clear above the water.

The corridor into which the stairs rose was in the main house, broader and longer than the hall in the ell. Bradley lifted the lamp high, and a sudden, startled exclamation broke from his lips.

"Good for you, Ronnie! *There's* the answer to that queer feeling of yours!"

Down the hall, close under a window at its

far end, lay a crumpled figure—a dark, slim woman in wet gray sports tweeds and hiking boots and a drenched rose-colored sweater.

"Is—*is she dead?*" Ronnie chattered as Bradley, a moment later, stooped to the still form.

"No. She's in a dead faint, that's all. Run up that window, Ron, and get water. Here, take my cap to scoop it."

But water wasn't needed. The light on her closed, shadowed eyelids had roused the woman out of her coma. A little sobbing moan came, and black, haunted eyes were blinking up at Bradley.

"Trooper? I—I phoned. Tried to. And then—all the water in the world was coming. I ran for the stairs, and—and—"

The whispering thin voice broke off, and a shudder shook the woman.

"Oh, God! The water smashing in all around—and poor Jim!"

Bradley looked at Ronnie Hull, and she shook her head.

"I don't know who she is, Brad. Never saw her before."

Bradley bent lower, chafed the woman's limp wrists.

"Who's Jim? Where is he? You wanted help—and you've got it. Try to tell me, quick!"

Beneath the sputtering lamp, pale lips fluttered. "Jim's finished. They shot him up—machine-gunned him without a chance. That double-crosser Joe Zolli and two of his mob. Listen, Trooper, put it down in your book. Jim Keeler's knocked off—and it was Zolli that done it. Zolli and Nick Romano and Bill Engle. And me, they thought they'd get me too. But I got away and hid, and they couldn't find me. And I'm going to live—you hear me?—I'm goin' to live to see the three of 'em fry!"

Bradley said grimly, "I guess you will. I know where they are. Just left them. Give it to me fast, now. Where did it happen? Not here?"

THE dark woman lifted herself upright and shook her slim shoulders. Her voice came stronger.

"Not here. No. Jim and me—we had a place down toward the river. Bought it last year. I'm Jim Keeler's—his wife, see? Well, same thing; we trailed together a long, long

time, me and Jim Keeler. And he was aces. The grandest guy that ever walked.

"*You* wouldn't think so, maybe. That's because you're a cop, and you cops are always sore at anybody that uses his brains to chisel into the big money.

"Okay. Maybe you wouldn't of been as strong for Jim Keeler as I was. You'd of called him a racketeer. But murder's murder, Trooper. If you know where you can drop your hand on Zolli and Engle and Romano, you drop it.

"No; don't butt in now. Don't ask any questions. I don't need any prodding. You're goin' to hear the straight of it from the ground up. I don't care if I'm croaked for it. I'm evenin' up for Jim.

"Get this. You know what a numbers game is? Well, Zolli and Jim Keeler had the biggest play in New York. They were fifty-fifty partners, see? But Joe Zolli was always tryin' to snatch the big end for himself. He's a crook all the way through, Joe is. And Jim Keeler wasn't the guy to let anybody rub it in on him.

"So there was a split, and trouble. A lot of killings around the Bronx and Brooklyn that maybe you read about. You remember a guy bein' found in an areaway last week with a new penny in his hand? That was one of Zolli's guys. You see, I'm givin' it to you hot. The right lowdown.

"But Jim was on the short end. A lot of people he thought he could trust wound up by turnin' on him. Joe Zolli had bought them over, understand—fellers like that one that was squeezin' the penny when the cops came acrost him. But Zolli had bought too many. The Keeler end of the mob didn't have enough power on the showdown, and Jim finally saw he better duck out of town. It was me that made him see it. Himself, he'd of stuck it out and gone down fighting.

"We had this house up here, and nobody knew about it but a few guys I thought we could trust. Well, I just thought it; when it comes to a jam, you're a sucker to trust anybody.

"I and Jim pulled in up here last night, and tonight along comes Joe Zolli. Him and Romano and Engle drove up to the house, and Joe hollered in that he wanted to call the trouble off and make a fresh deal with Jim.

"I tried to argue with Jimmie that it was

a stall and they were out to get him, but he'd been sopping up a lot of Scotch and wouldn't listen. He told me to go on in back and mind my own business and let him handle his.

"I didn't go in back. I went outside and stood at a window, lookin' in. Engle and Romano came in the room first, came with their hands empty and sat down. The window was up a little, and I could hear Jim passin' a bluff at them. He told them: 'If it's rough stuff you birds won't last long. Mollie's back in that dark room there with a tommy-gun trained on you, and she won't miss if anything starts.'

"Then Zolli was at the door, and the bluff was called. Jim saw that Zolli had a machine-gun up. He snapped for his rod, but never got hold of it. Zolli let him have it, pumped him full.

"I saw Jimmie go over backwards, chair and all, and lay there crumpled. Then I was yellin' through the window. I don't know what I yelled. Seein' Jim bumped off in front of my eyes, I was clean out of my head.

"Zolli and the other two came rushin', but I got away from them in the dark. By the time they hit the air, I was back in the bushes. They hunted a while, and gave it up and went back in the house. I guess they thought Jim had a big bankroll hid away somewhere; anyway, I could hear them turnin' the place inside out.

"I didn't wait long. My mind was made up that I was goin' to pay off. I cut through the bushes over to the road, and when I got there I begun to run. I wanted to get to a phone before I weakened, and I knew there was one in this house here. Jim knew the people—Ledyard, their name is. Nice, friendly people that were down this mornin' to tell us a flood was comin' and we had ought to get up to higher ground. But they said our house was high enough so the water probably wouldn't come in, and they helped Jimmie hike a rowboat up on the porch when he decided to chance staying."

She paused in that breathless narration, and Bradley nodded.

"Zolli and his friends used the boat," he said. "Now I've got it. This young lady with me is the telephone operator who picked up your call."

The woman's eyes veered to Ronnie Hull. "Thanks," she breathed. "I was awf'ly excited. Hardly knew what I was doing or saying. There was nobody in the house. It was all dark, and I had to break in to get at the phone. I wasn't sure you heard, knew I was talking in jitters. I couldn't help it. I was pretty near crazy. There was crashin' outside that came closer every second, and I thought it was the Zolli bunch. But it—it was the water. It poured through the window I had broke, and other windows crashed. The phone was right at the foot of the stairs and I ran up. And then everything went black."

AS SHE concluded, Bradley had caught a sound outdoors. His chin shot up and he stood tense, listening. Then he was in swift motion, darting back to the north end of the wide hall, flinging up a window there.

The coupé still stood on the hillside, shooting the shaft of its headlights down over the rippling water. But the three trench-coated figures were no longer beside the car, and he knew that they hadn't gone up the hill. Out in the blackness hemming the beam, oars once more were creaking—and now, to Bradley, the sound was electric with menace.

His voice rang sharp through the hall.

"Snap! They're coming! Get into the boat!"

Ronnie Hull gulped, "Those men? Z-Zolli?"

Bradley had raced back. He swung the woman in the dripping tweeds to her feet.

"Zolli and company—who else? They know why we came out here; you told them yourself, Ron. But you didn't know then what you were giving away, and neither did I. Now there's a ruckus coming up—and I don't want you in it. Jump! To the skiff, you two!"

He snatched up the kerosene lamp, left on the floor as he dashed to look shoreward, and flew along the hall and around the turn. Ronnie Hull, pulling the older woman along, pounded after him in the titanic boots.

Beyond the turn she saw the light blink out, and then Bradley had her arm.

"Here we are," he said softly. "Quiet, now. This is the room we came in through."

A moment after that Ronnie found herself in the skiff and Bradley, above her, was helping the late James Keeler's avenging girl friend through the window. The creaking of oars was nearer; evidently, from the direction of the sound, the second boat from the hill was somewhere beyond the white beam, coming to the house at an off-angle.

Bradley leaned out the window and dropped the painter into the bow of the skiff.

"You take the oars, Ronnie," he whispered. "You row as well as I do, and you'll be all right. Right back of the house there's another roof sticking up above water. Get the boat behind it and stay there."

She gasped, "Brad! You mean—you're not coming?"

"I'm tending to business. Here. Take this."

It was his service automatic that Bradley had handed down to her, and curtly he cut off her protest.

"Keep it dry—that's all. And stick behind that roof. Remember! No matter what happens, stay there!"

Then he was shoving off the skiff, drawing down the window.

THAT other emerging roof was no more than twenty yards behind the house. A faint starlight showed it to Ronnie in a moment and she rowed crosswind for it, her heart thumping. At each stroke of the oars she was tempted afresh to turn back; talking to herself, choked by sobs, she was haranguing at Bradley.

"Oh, Brad, you fool, you lunatic! Three to one, Brad! What chance have you got?"

His voice had been compelling, though, when he ripped out his orders. She rowed on, didn't swing until the lower roof was between her and the main house.

The dark woman, sitting aft, had gone into a daze. She asked dully, "Where's the trooper boy? Didn't he come?"

Ronnie didn't answer. Her ears were with the low voices coming from the other skiff. They were hardly more than whispers, but she caught, "I'd give a grand, right now, for that tommy-gun we left at Keeler's" And then, "Pipe down, now. The house is right ahead. What happened to that light inside? Anybody see it?"

A little after that wood bumped wood. Ronnie knew that must have been Zolli's boat in contact with the house. She heard the oars slide softly in, and after that another sort of creaking came—the creak of a window being cautiously lifted.

Other sounds followed, lighter whisperings with them that told her the moppers-up were climbing through that window.

Then a long silence and a sudden uproar. There was a chorus of shouts, a clatter of running feet. A heavy voice boomed:

"There he is! There he goes in the boat!"

Guns began banging, and through their flame a white spear of light shot out from the side of the house facing Gedds Hill. It followed a drifting skiff, in which Ronnie's straining, horrified eyes made out the yellow of Bradley's slicker.

The woman in the stern blurted, "Good God! What's the shooting?"

"Bradley—the trooper—he got away in their boat!" jerked Ronnie. "He's lying in the bottom of it. They can't miss him. They'll kill him, they'll kill him!"

Her hand tightened on Bradley's gun.

"If they do, if they do—!" she blazed.

The skiff, no more than twice its own length from the thudding pistols, was being hit again and again. Splinters flew as bullets hit through the thin planking.

Other slugs had gone through the bottom, many of them. Or else, Ronnie thought, one of them had ripped out a plank. Perceptibly the skiff was sinking lower.

The gun dropped from Ronnie's relaxing fingers. Her strength had suddenly ebbed. She could only stare at the boat, slowly moving, slowly descending into the flood until after tragic minutes the spotlight from the Ledyard house showed its gunwales finally awash.

HER heart sank with it—and then it leaped. From darkness near by came a voice, and the voice was Trooper Bradley's.

"Good girl, Ronnie! Swing that stern around and give me a hand in!"

She cried, with his solid weight aft sending the bow up, "Brad, oh, Brad! Alive! They didn't hit you?"

Over that square stern she could dimly see his face.

"Hell," he said. "all they were shooting

at was my slicker. You didn't think I'd be riding that boat while they pegged at it, did you?"

A moment after that he was in the skiff, shoeless, putteeless, soaked, laughing through chattering teeth.

"They should've left a boat guard," he said. "But they didn't, and it was a cinch. I turned the boat loose and went another way myself. Now I'm getting a little chill, and it's pull for the shore, rower, pull for the shore. Gimme those oars, Ron, before I catch double pneumonia. Zolli and Com-

pany are right where I want 'em. They'll stay put, I guess, while I get some dry duds—and the sheriff's folks."

He sat on the midships thwart, and the oars clicked in their tholes.

Rowing strong, out of pistol range, he called back cheerfully to three cursing killers at a window of the water-isolated Ledyard house:

"Never touched me, sharp-shooters! The laugh's on you. Just keep your feet dry and wait a while. Are you listenin'? It's a promise, flood-sufferers—I'll be back!"

THE CANNON BALL EXPRESS

(Continued from page 103)

and we are riding now like we was out in the open drivin' a threshin' machine, for there ain't nothin' over our heads at all.

The old high-wheel is about dead. Her steam is fizzlin' out, and the coach brakes has pulled us down to a stop. We have knocked a little paint off the observation car, but that's all the damage, except to the old high-wheel herself. Carrington Bridewell is walking with a limp and one eye is gettin' a good shiner. And Larry Heaps has his shirt tore. Walter, though, is still up on the tender crankin' his camera. We hear a voice hollerin' at us, and we climb down, and it is the Old Man hisself who is ridin' the Limited.

"What the hell are you birds tryin' to do?" he begins, bawlin' us out, and he sure could do it, too. "Ain't you got any—?" And then he got his eyes on Pop who climbed down off the high-wheel like he was seein' a ghost. He sure looked goofy;

he ain't found out yet that he has lost his eyebrows and half of his handlebar mustache. The Old Man bust out laughin', it was so doggone funny to him, just to look at Pop. Morry Wolferman came runnin' up, and the train crew off'n the Limited, and we all gather around Pop.

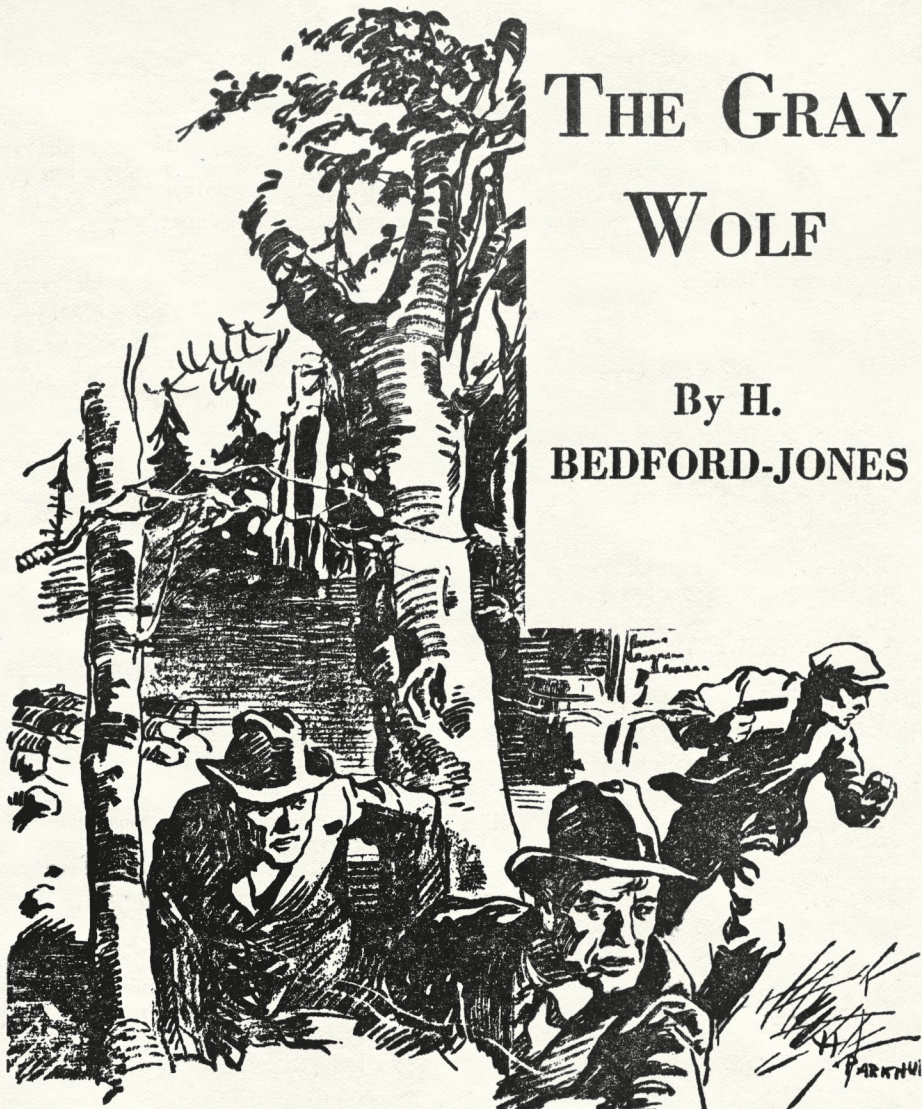
"I resign," says Pop, before anybody has a chance to say anything.

"You resign?" says the Old Man surprised.

"Yes, sir, I resign."

"What from?"

Pop looked funny for a second. Then he says: "From the movies. I'm through. But I'm tellin' you this—" and he catches sight of Jim Hamilton the hoghead on the Limited—"I'm not gonna go back on any yard engine. This is your last trip, Jim, on this run; I'm bumpin' in on you tonight. I can run these babies, the big ones as well as the little ones. I'm a runnin' fool."



THE GRAY WOLF

By H.
BEDFORD-JONES

I

LEAVING Simpson's in the Strand, that goal of epicures who desire a meal regardless of price, Harper lit his pipe and strolled toward Temple Bar.

For once he was unhurried. His business in London was finished. With evening he would get the night boat back to France, once more Paris correspondent for his chain of papers. He neared Temple Bar. Then as he neared the dark little entrance to the grounds, supposedly open only to members

of this legal fraternity, Harper came to a startled halt.

Directly before him, negligently leaning on a stick at the curb as though waiting for a taxicab, was the Gray Wolf.

Harper's pulses leaped. No doubt whatever! *Le Loup Gris*—the Gray Wolf, who ate little girls! That ghastly joke had lingered in his mind. Here was the man whom the police of Berlin, of Paris, of Antwerp, were seeking. He was known only as the Gray Wolf. His name, his nationality, were cloaked in mystery.

True, the mustache was now gone and a

monocle was screwed into his right eye, but Harper could not mistake. He had too often studied the photograph, insolently inscribed from the Gray Wolf, found in the apartment of that American girl in Paris. The girl was now dead, the photograph, broadcast to all police, had never been traced. The story was old and stale. But for Harper, here was a new story, a big story, a thrilling one!

"Same curve of the lip," he reflected. "Same peculiar droop of that left eyelid in profile; the monocle changes it unless one were looking for it. That's why he wears the monocle, of course! And the gray hair like silver, which they all described; handsomely dressed, all gray from Homburg to spats, perfectly groomed—"

Nine out of ten men would have hesitated, feared to take a long chance. Harper was the tenth man. He knew he was right. He knew there was no long chance whatever. And he knew that an authentic interview with the Gray Wolf would be catapulted into the front page of every Continental newspaper. Not into those of the sedate English papers, which were given over to advertising.

All this flickered through his brain in an instant, and then, plucking out one of his cards, he stepped up to the man on the curb.

"I beg your pardon," he said quietly. "Here's my card. I'd like to get an interview with you in regard to the death of Elie Ferguson last month, in Paris."

The other turned, stared blankly at him, and spoke in French.

"I regret, m'sieu, that I am a stranger here and do not speak your language—"

"That's all right, never mind any bluff," returned Harper in French. "You heard me the first time. I'm a newspaper man, not a policeman. Give me the interview, and I'll wait one hour before laying my information before the police. Refuse, and we'll start raising merry hell right here and now."

An ugly mouth like a parrot's beak, fully revealed now that the mustache was gone; two brilliant, piercing gray eyes, and a hawk nose above the cleft chin—this was the face that met Harper's cool and steady regard. The brilliant eyes probed him, then the man took the card and glanced at it.

For this man, too, the instant must have been one of swift decision. An instant

of tragic uncertainty, of quick and horrible appraisal. How much did this newspaper hawk know? On the instant hung everything; but so steady, so confident, was Harper's manner that any gallows-gamble looked like a very poor chance.

"Agreed, Mr. Harper," came the answer, in English. "There will be some things which I'll not care to discuss—"

"Oh, that's fair enough! We'll spare your feelings," said Harper drily. "Shall we step into the Temple, here? You're a cool one, all right! But I'll play square with you."

"So I decided, from your looks," returned the Gray Wolf, as they stepped through from the street into the cool green gardens of the Temple close. A thin smile curved the ugly lips, and the murderer twirled his stick airily. Harper did not observe that the vendor of newspapers in the passage, catching this gesture and one sharp look from the Gray Wolf, went hurriedly out into the Strand, waving a newspaper excitedly.

Thus, in the historic enclosure in the heart of old London, began the most fantastic interview in all of Harper's news-gathering experience. Harper had chosen his part deliberately but not carelessly. With no policeman in sight, any effort to apprehend the Gray Wolf must be futile. But during the interview, Harper expected to learn information of the utmost value to the police.

"First," he said casually, "let me ask whether you killed Miss Ferguson?"

"I did not," said the Gray Wolf coolly. "The police are fools! I sent them a telegram giving the name of the murderer. They suppressed it, tried to fasten the crime on me."

"All right, shoot the works," said Harper. On the immaculately kept nails was no mark, but in the whorls of the fingers themselves showed brown stain. The man was an amateur photographer, then. This was why the picture had not been traced.

"Who did it, if not you?"

"Baron Corvo."

Harper whistled. "The racing chap? The biggest all-around sport in Paris—"

"Exactly. Corvo was trying to shoot me—"

The Gray Wolf launched into a sordid narrative of extortion. He spoke rapidly, without emotion, as though discussing some impersonal matter. His eyes drove here and

there as though he sought someone among the men who passed along the paths.

Harper, too, was using his eyes, while his brain jotted down mental notes of the unfolded story. A vain man, this, who had refused to dye his silver-gray hair and brows; the gray did not come from age, however. The Gray Wolf could not be over forty. A gentleman. That is to say, a man of education, refinement, culture. No jewelry. French clothes. And on the silver band encircling the Malacca stick, the graven initials J. S.

THE Gray Wolf refused to discuss past murders. He did not conceal the fact that he had been in the extortion business for a long time. He spoke of his past callously, yet with a crafty evasion. He discussed the police of various capitals with scathing cynicism and exact knowledge. He showed swift interest in how Harper had recognized him, and Harper did not hesitate to elaborate slightly on the truth, giving the impression that he knew a good deal more about the Gray Wolf than he said.

Suddenly the Gray Wolf glanced at his watch, perhaps to hide the expression of swift relief that had come into his face.

"Time's up," he said. "Are you satisfied, Mr. Harper?"

"Thank you, yes." Harper extended another of his cards, with a fountain pen. "I need some confirmation of this interview. Jot it down, if you don't mind, that you've given it to me. You must trust me to repeat exactly what you've said, nothing else. You have my word on it."

"That's good with me," said the other, with a nod. "I know the right type of newspaper man when I meet him. There you are. One full hour, you said?"

"To the minute," replied Harper. "I'll get off my story and then go to Scotland Yard. Suit you?"

"Excellently, thanks. Good day."

Harper watched the man stride away, not back toward the Strand, but down toward the Embankment. He glanced at the card, found the brief note he had required, and the signature of *Le Loup Gris*. A smile touched his lips.

"Slipped one over on him there, eh?" he reflected. "French, but the letters aren't formed as the French write them. His English accent is natural and not assumed. But

he called me a newspaper man instead of a journalist; and said, 'That's good with me!'—a phrase no Britisher would use. What's the answer?"

"Obviously, an Englishman of good blood who went to America and lived there. A crook of the worst type. He passes as a gentleman, probably is ultra-respectable and so forth. May live on the Continent as an English tourist, like thousands of others. He's no fool, either. He'll know that England is too hot to hold him now, and he'll slip away with a real disguise. And now for the cables! I'll get the story off first, so the police won't stop it, then slip around to Scotland Yard and spill everything."

He came out again into the Strand, caught a passing taxicab, and ten minutes later was seated in the cable office, dashing off copy rapidly. The excitement of it thrilled him, drove everything else out of his head.

TO THE average eye, Harper was a young man in a business suit. Perhaps he was no more, even to the super-average eye of the Gray Wolf; but it did not occur to him that he was taking long chances in dealing with that gentleman. Little he would have cared, for Harper was not conservative by a good deal. In fact, he usually scandalized his conservative colleagues and enjoyed it.

His story finished and on the wire—he would not trust even the London office of his own syndicate with such a story—he glanced at his watch. Five minutes left before the hour was up. Scotland Yard was not far, but he wanted to arrive by car for the sake of appearances. Also, a taxi would slip him around there in two minutes.

He dashed out. At the curb, a taxi-driver was enjoying a heated argument with his late fare over the size of a tip. Harper cut it short.

"Scotland Yard, and sharp about it," he ordered, and got in. The driver touched his cap, slewed his cumbrous vehicle out into traffic, and started down toward Whitehall. Harper sank back on the cushions, absorbed in thought of the coming interview. The officials would be furious, of course, but they would have to like it. And after all, he had information for them that no one else had ever supplied.

He started suddenly. Instead of turning

toward Whitehall Court, the taxi made a sharp swing off to the left, to pass beneath Charing Cross viaduct. Harper leaned forward and rapped sharply on the glass. The driver turned in to the curb, underneath the arch of masonry, and halted.

The cab doors to right and left were jerked open, and two men darted in.

The thing was incredible—here in the heart of the world's most law-abiding city, in broad daylight! Harper awakened abruptly to the reality of it, as a "persuader" swung for his head and knocked him backward. His foot drove up; caught under the chin, the man with the slungshot sprawled back into the street head first.

Harper, however, had gone into the arms of the second man. A wet cloth was flung about his face. The odor of ether stifled him. He fought desperately, savagely. A howl broke from the man above as Harper's thumb found his eye and gouged it from the socket. A sharp command, a blow in the stomach, a second thudding crack as the slungshot came down on his head.

"Damn your dirty hide, you Gray Wolf!" he thought, and then everything slipped into darkness.

II

IN ONE of those charmingly retired houses which dot the Surrey countryside near London, two men sat looking out over the garden and tennis-court, upon which the weeds had made sad inroads.

One of the two, just arrived by motor, was short and fat, with a heavy jaw, a heavy black mustache, an air of sleek prosperity and an expression which was anything but benevolent. He was speaking with a worried and anxious manner.

"But, my dear Sir James, I tell you that Moreland has killed himself! It is in all the morning papers. He will pay nothing further."

The other man laughed a little.

"Come, come, Dumond! Speak French only, remember; you must think of the servants. Never mind what the papers say about Moreland. Tell me why you killed him?"

Dumond met the brilliant, piercing eyes of Sir James Santerre, and mopped perspiration from his forehead. Although the morning was cool as yet, he seemed unwontedly

bedewed with perspiration. Perhaps it was the look in those cold gray eyes that waked his agitation.

Cold they were, unwinking, steady, like the eyes of a reptile. The mouth was hidden by a ragged brownish mustache. The clipped hair was brown, like the bushy brows. The face was singularly unlined, almost youthful, harshly carven, strong.

"He—he attacked me," stammered Dumond. "He said that it was ended, that he would—"

Again Santerre laughed.

"Lucky for you, Dumond, that you acted so promptly and efficiently yesterday! Come, now. The truth about Moreland is that you killed him, and you intended to hold out on me—that is, to keep the thousand pounds he paid you. Come!" The voice sharpened abruptly. "Confess it, and no harm's done. You thought I'd be too taken up with other matters to pay any attention. That was human. I don't blame you a particle. We all make mistakes, you know."

"Peste! You are the very devil," grumbled Dumond sullenly, fear in his eyes. "Yes. I'm not the one to carry it through. Here is the money."

He produced a sheaf of black and white Bank of England notes which Santerre took and tossed negligently on the table.

"Very well; let us forget the mistake," he said, so that Dumond sank back in his chair with relief. "Now, I want to ask you something. You know the photograph which became public in Paris? How did that man Harper recognize me from it?"

"By chance," said Dumond promptly. "One of those chances that occur—and also because he is an exceptional person. I have made inquiries about him. He is dangerous. He would no doubt recognize you as you now are. He is that sort."

"Nothing in the papers about him?"

DUMOND shook his head.

"Too soon. His disappearance will not be realized for another day or so. You have seen the article he wrote? It appeared this morning in the *Post* alone, relayed by the Continental service."

"I saw it," replied Santerre calmly. "I could not prevent its publication; it was the price I had to pay for being recognized."

But I stopped this man reaching the police."

"You mean, I stopped him."

"Exactly. That is why you are now alive, after your attempted cleverness with the Moreland affair."

Dumond shrank a little in his chair.

"England is dangerous for you now, m'sieu."

"By this time tomorrow it will be dangerous," corrected the Gray Wolf. From the table he took a blue telegraphic form. "A wire just arrived from Chartres, in whose name the Blonville villa stands. He opened it yesterday. All is ready for us there."

Sharp admiration leaped into the eyes of Dumond.

"But—but you foresee everything! Even before it happens!"

"As I foresaw your bungling with Moreland." The Gray Wolf took a notebook from his pocket, opened it, consulted it. "At Lloyd's Bank you still have three thousand pounds on deposit in your name. Go back to the city at once. Withdraw this amount and close out the account. Book two of the large first-class cabins on the Southampton boat to Havre, for tonight, in your name. Present your physician's card and say that you are traveling with two patients, one of them Sir James Santerre, to the French coast. One patient is an ambulance case. You want special attention at the boat-train; pay well for it. You comprehend?"

Dumond, who was actually a doctor by profession, nodded.

"The number in the party, m'sieu?"

"Your two patients, yourself, two attendants; Jacques and Farquarson, to be precise. The name of the ambulance patient is Richard Masterson."

"He will require a passport."

Santerre produced a blue British passport and extended it. Dumond opened it, and his jaw dropped. Then he gave Santerre a sharp glance, and grinned.

"Oh, I see! The man who died suddenly last year! But Harper does not look like him."

"Your patient suffers from cancer of the mouth, requiring bandages."

"Of course, of course; your pardon." Dumond returned the passport. "But, the

French police will have seen that newspaper story—"

"We shall not be in Paris. At Deauville and the vicinity, we deal with provincial police alone, where I am well known and respected. Does anything else worry your profound brain?"

"Yes," said Dumond, who was possessed of a certain stubborn quality. "I do not like the fact of your initials being published."

"Within two weeks," said the other, "a man whose name holds those initials and who answers my description, will be found dead in Deauville. The Gray Wolf will die with him. This matter shall have my sole attention. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes," returned the other slowly, thoughtfully. Santerre broke into a laugh.

"My dear doctor, you are a rascal, you would like to cheat me, you are a coward—and yet I find you invaluable! Your wits, your queries, your objections, overlook nothing. On the table there is the thousand pounds from Moreland, which you desired to steal from me. Take it. The money is yours. Meet us at the boat-train tonight without fail."

Overcome with astonishment and delight, Dumond took the sheaf of banknotes, pressed the hand of Sir James Santerre, and departed.

LEFT alone, the Gray Wolf stepped out into the hall, struck a gong hanging there, and came back into the parlor. He lit a cigar and looked at the garden outside, brilliant in the morning sunlight, until the door opened to admit a burly man with a shock head of red hair and eyes of pale, almost colorless blue.

"Ah, Farquarson! Shut the door and come over here," said Sir James. "The patient?"

"He's trying to bribe Jacques, sir," answered Farquarson. A shadowy smile touched the lips of the Gray Wolf.

"Indeed! Well, I'll attend to him myself in a few minutes. We leave tonight for France. You have not been to the Normandy villa before."

"No, sir."

"We go to Havre by the over-night boat. Opposite Havre, at the mouth of the Seine, lies Deauville, with its attendant chain of

resorts and villages. One of these is Blonville, a few miles down the coast. Chartres, whom you met in Paris, has opened our villa there. The patient goes with us, insensible and unresisting, in charge of Dr. Dumond."

"Yes, sir," said Farquarson with admirable reticence.

The Gray Wolf puffed at his cigar for a moment, took it from his mouth, eyed it critically, then lifted his cold, brilliant gaze to the pale eyes of Farquarson.

"Go up to London by the next train. Go to the Savoy Hotel and register as Jasper Stanton of New York; take with you the unmarked black suitcase, place in it two or three books and some of those American magazines from the library. At precisely four o'clock you will have a visitor. Do you comprehend?"

"Perfectly, sir," returned the immovable Farquarson.

"This visitor is a gentleman whom I believe you know, or knew. He is Colonel Hamilton Cecil, retired."

The pallid eyes flashed for an instant with a terrible light.

"He was sitting as magistrate, sir, when I was convicted."

"Exactly. He will not know you again, but you will know him. He will tell you that he has been unable to raise the money demanded, but that he has a part of the sum. Take it from him, and then kill him—silently. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Farquarson, and his eyes flashed again.

"I would remind you, Farquarson, that not two murders a year in London go unsolved. It would be a pity to spoil the record of the Metropolitan force. Therefore," and Sir James extended a small photograph, "leave this on the floor beside Cecil's body, so the crime will be assigned to the Gray Wolf."

Farquarson took the photograph and eyed it, frowningly.

"Why, sir—this is you, but it isn't you!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "That is, you haven't this scar, or this queer-shaped ear—"

Sir James laughed heartily. "Right, my man, right! Thank heaven I haven't either of those marks; but the photograph has. Further, it has other marks. I recommend

it to you as a study in the art of photography, Farquarson. Now, is every detail certain in your excellent brain?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. When you have paid your old debt to Colonel Cecil, abandon your bag, leave the hotel, and amuse yourself until the Southampton boat-train leaves. Meet us at the station for that train, with your passport, fifteen minutes before leaving time. That's all."

"Very good, sir," and Farquarson withdrew.

Sir James Santerre looked out at the garden, puffed at his cigar, and smiled a little.

"Yes," he murmured, "by this time tomorrow England might be rather unsafe for me, but it will be positively dangerous for the Gray Wolf—so beautifully and unmistakably described in that signed photograph! And the longer and more ardently that gentleman is sought by the police here and abroad, the more safe I myself am. Decidedly, I think I've drawn a red herring across the trail blazed by that fool Harper. Which reminds me; I'd better see him at once."

And laying down his cigar with a sigh, he came to his feet.

III

HARPER looked up sharply at his visitor. "Come around, have you?" said the Gray Wolf. "I trust you enjoyed your breakfast? All right, Jacques. You may go for the present, until I ring."

Jacques, a lean, dark-faced man in whites, left the room. The Gray Wolf came to the bed and sat down on the edge, regarding Harper attentively.

"You know me?"

Harper laughed shortly. "Do you think a false mustache and a little hair-dye would fool anyone?"

"No, I'm afraid not," and the other smiled. "You had no luck bribing Jacques, eh? Poor fellows, my associates are held to me by stronger bonds than money. Particularly Jacques, whose chief aim and end in life is to receive a regular supply of the drug vulgarly known as snow. I fear that mere money would not interest him."

Harper met those brilliant, icy eyes and

felt his own helplessness acutely. Each wrist and ankle was handcuffed to a corner of the brass bed in which he lay. He had long since given over any futile struggles.

"You're a fine double-crosser, aren't you?" he retorted. "A real sport, eh?"

The Gray Wolf looked faintly amused.

"Tut, tut, don't act like a little boy, my dear Mr. Harper! Remember, you forced your attentions on me; and self-preservation is the first law of nature. Will you kindly inform me how you happened to know that the Gray Wolf was in England? Or was your recognition purely a chance matter, as my chief assistant believes?"

Harper had no intention whatever of sticking to the truth. He was grasping at any straw offered, and seized on this one instantly.

"The encounter was sheer luck, of course," he replied. "The fact that you were known to be in England and operating here, however, had me on the lookout. Satisfied?"

The piercing eyes narrowed; the shaft had gone home.

"The fact that I was known—but that's impossible!" exclaimed the Gray Wolf sharply.

"Don't talk like a little boy, Gray Wolf!" said Harper in mocking accents. "One of your own men squealed on you in Paris, or so I understand. You didn't know it?"

"Indeed? And just how did that happen? Who was the man?"

"Find out for yourself," retorted Harper. A flame leaped in the brilliant eyes.

"You're lying, Harper!"

"Suit yourself. Probably I am, of course."

"Hm! You, a correspondent, would know," mused the Gray Wolf. Then he stood up. "Well, I cannot bother with the matter at present. We'll put you through a thorough inquiry tomorrow, my friend."

The tone in which these words were uttered, the glance that accompanied them, sent a sudden icy shiver through Harper. But a thin smile touched his lips as he met the gray gaze of the man above.

"Anything you screw out of me, you're welcome to," he returned. "I suppose you'd like to know about the letter from Elie Ferguson, too!"

The Gray Wolf stood as though frozen for an instant, staring down. There had

been no letter from that unfortunate woman, of course—yet Harper's tone was confident, assured.

"Upon my word," said the Gray Wolf slowly, "I believe you will be worth questioning!"

Harper laughed mockingly, but the other turned and left the room at once.

LEFT alone, Harper made another effort to get a wrist loose; quite futile. He had been stripped, put into bed, and ironed there. To all intents and purposes he was a hospital patient. The man Jacques was his attendant. He had learned the folly of trying to bribe that saturnine Jacques, too, even before the Gray Wolf showed up. A snowbird, eh? The fellow looked it. French, to boot; a cruel, pallid, dark-haired face.

Presently Jacques came back into the room, sat down with a book, and quite ignored the prisoner. He refused to talk or answer questions. When a maid brought up a luncheon tray, he took it at the door and fed Harper in silence. He might have been a deaf mute so far as his manner went.

Harper did no shouting. Common sense told him it would be folly.

The time dragged horribly. Nothing happened; Jacques read on in silence. Three o'clock, four o'clock. Then the door opened and the Gray Wolf strode into the room. He came to the bedside and regarded Harper for a moment, smiling, showed Harper his watch.

"You see the hour? Jacques, let us see your watch."

Jacques came close, bared his wrist. It was precisely four o'clock by his watch also.

"Free the right wrist of the patient, Jacques."

Harper's right hand was freed. The Gray Wolf handed him a fountain pen, held up a sheet of paper on a book before him.

"Write and sign a statement that I was in your presence at this hour. You have no reason to doubt that it is the correct time. There is also the clock above the fireplace, which you have probably been watching."

This was true.

"Why should I do this?" demanded Harper.

"Because I wish it," replied the Gray

Wolf coldly. "It will save you considerable pain."

Harper shrugged and complied. At a motion from the Gray Wolf, who folded and pocketed the paper, Jacques again ironed Harper's wrist to the bed-post.

"This is part of my future insurance," observed the Gray Wolf. "Were you to read the papers tomorrow, you would see that a man was killed at this hour today at the Savoy Hotel, by the Gray Wolf. Later, the police will receive this note—several days later. There is nothing like confusing our good police, in the right manner, and at the proper time. Now, Mr. Harper, you are going on a journey. Your waking will be pleasant, I trust. Jacques! The hypodermic case."

What now transpired was like a nightmare scene to Harper.

He saw the Gray Wolf carefully sit down to a table and prepare a load for the hypodermic that Jacques fitted together and cleansed for him. The knowledge that this man was about to turn him from a thinking machine into a senseless, drugged semblance of a man was filled with unspeakable horror.

Only by an iron effort did Harper keep his head, remain silent, repress the frantic desire to shout, to struggle against the inevitable. He was powerless to help himself, and realizing it, exerted all his will-power to restrain the desperate, insane impulses that tore and wrenched at him.

When he was ready, the Gray Wolf rose and came to the bedside, looking down at Harper.

"Damn you!" said the latter with a calm, quiet force that was like a blow. "Somehow, somewhere, I'll get you for this—"

The Gray Wolf smiled.

"Others have said the same, my friend," he rejoined. "The right wrist, Jacques!"

Jacques seized upon Harper's bare arm, swabbed at the forearm with alcohol, held it motionless in his two hands. Harper could not reach him with his teeth, and had no other available weapon. The Gray Wolf leaned over, inserted the needle, and emptied the contents of the syringe into the blood-stream.

"In twenty minutes," he said to Jacques, "you will prepare him for the journey. Farquarson joins us at the station, with

Dumond. We leave here in half an hour."

Both men departed, and Harper found himself alone, his eyes on the clock, waiting.

Farquarson! That would be the red-headed devil whom he had seen early in the morning. Dumond? A mere name, but he tucked it away in his brain. He watched the clock, watched the hands creeping gradually, insensibly—

In precisely twenty minutes he was sleeping soundly.

HIS waking came quietly, gradually, to sunshine playing on a distant horizon of sea. He became aware that he was in a different room, whose windows overlooked the sea; where? Morning sunlight—then the next day had arrived.

"Not awake yet, Farquarson?" came the cold voice of the Gray Wolf. Instantly, Harper closed his eyes, relaxed, lay breathing quietly.

"He hasn't stirred, sir. Getting on to noon, too," was the response.

"Yes; I gave him a stiff dose. However, he'll come out of it wide awake and little the worse, so be on your guard. Ten or fifteen minutes after waking, he'll be himself. Don't waste time. As soon as he stirs, iron him securely. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"The morning papers from Havre came in a short time ago," went on the Gray Wolf. "You did an excellent job yesterday, Farquarson; every detail was perfect. The story Harper sent out has been shoved into the background already. You're the one man upon whom I can rely to obey orders to the letter."

"Thank you, sir," returned Farquarson's stolid voice. "I've waited a long while to settle with Colonel Cecil, sir. And if I might make so bold, Sir James—"

"Well?"

"Him, over there. Why not get rid of him quickly?"

"Because we must first make him talk. We'll do that tonight. I'm going to Deauville now with Dumond, for luncheon. Chartres will remain here. Jacques will drive us—his wife's the general maid here, you know. She's one of us, and quite safe."

"Yes, sir. Why not iron this Harper at once, before he wakes up?"

"As you like. Not a half bad idea, in fact. Good-by! See you later."

A door slammed.

Harper half opened his lids, stole a look about. At the moment he could see nothing of Farquarson, but the man's last words filled him with alarm. Once ironed to the bed, he knew full well how helpless he would be.

Every word uttered had been quite clear. His brain was acute, entirely itself; a tumult of thoughts, impulses, eager conjectures, rushed through his mind all in an instant. Deauville! Then this house must be close by on the French coast, and he was looking out at the Atlantic. And he was free to act, momentarily, but not for long. He heard a jingle of steel chain, realized that Farquarson must be getting the handcuffs to secure him.

A stumpy French fishing craft with a red sail came crawling across the water. Harper thought of London, of the man murdered at four o'clock the previous day. No more than a day had passed. And Farquarson had done that job, evidently. A murderer like his master.

A FIGURE moved in front and blocked everything from his sight. The red-haired Farquarson stooped above him, the abnormally pale eyes hideous and terrible to see. The man reached out for one of Harper's wrists, a handcuff ready to snap, three others on the bed ready.

Like a flash, Harper's other hand shot up.

His fingers clenched about that sinewy throat. What was more important, they went in deep before Farquarson's muscles could become rigid; they gripped about the windpipe and sank into the flesh—fingers like iron.

A strangled sound broke from Farquarson.

Harper writhed about, drew the other down beside him on the bed. In that first instant of surprise and shock, Farquarson let fall the handcuffs. His heavy fists beat at Harper, but he had been drawn too close for the blows to find force. They were blind, furious blows, frantic with panic. The man was struggling like a chicken whose head was gone.

Not for long, however.

The two lay side by side, all Harper's faculties concentrated on keeping that iron grip about the other's windpipe. He clung on grimly, putting into his hand every atom of energy, of will-power, he possessed.

Then a terrific shock rocked him, and another. Farquarson had gained a desperate and awful calm, had ceased to struggle, was holding a pair of the handcuffs, swinging them in a short arc with frightful force. But the grip about his throat never relaxed. Harper was still half-conscious rapidly slipping but exerting all his will to hold on.

Farquarson's body moved convulsively, then lay quiet, quivering. After all, he had won his fight, for now the fingers of Harper relaxed. But he had won his fight too late.

When, some time afterward, Harper opened his eyes, he stared into the dead face of Farquarson lying beside him. The sight fetched him to his senses quickly enough.

IV

AFTER a little Harper sat up, barely repressing a groan.

He staggered to his feet, stepped out, and only his grip at a chair kept him from falling. He stared at his reflection in a mirror, and his eyes distended, incredulity clutching at him.

He was naked. The hospital gown he had worn, had been torn away in the struggle with Farquarson. Blood was streaming down the right side of his face; the irons had gashed his skull repeatedly. And his face itself was like death. He knew now that he had become very weak. He could only sink into the chair and try to hang on.

True, strength had flowed into him for the moment. All the energy of his being had been tensed, his whole spirit concentrated, in that one supreme effort. He had to overcome Farquarson or go under, with never another chance; and he had won.

The price, however, was terrific. He was limp as a wet rag; all force was gone out of him.

Presently he rallied, spurred himself to rise and move about. A bathroom showed to one side, with all the incredibly primitive and exposed plumbing of a French

country villa. Harper gained it, bathed his head, found that the bleeding had stopped. Then, as he tenderly towed his hair, he became conscious of a reiterated knocking at a door opposite, and a woman's voice in accented English.

"Are you gone to sleep? Here is lunch-eon!"

The wife of Jacques, then!

"Leave it," growled Harper, trying to imitate the rough, stolid tones of Farquarson. "Leave it, miss. I'm changing my clothes."

"*Je m'en fiche*," came the impudent retort. "*Sale Anglais!* I leave it, then."

"Thank the Lord!" muttered Harper.

Somehow he got across the room. The Gray Wolf had prophesied amiss about the effect of the drug departing. He could not control his feet, he felt dizzy, wretched, weak. Pausing at the bed, he drew the silken coverlet over the figure there, leaned forward and felt the pockets. No weapon.

Disappointed, he came to the door, opened it, saw a tray on the floor outside. With a frightful effort he carried it in and laid it on the table, then closed and locked the door. A moment later he dropped into a chair beside the table, unable to make any movement whatever. He was somnolent, drowsy. His lids weighed like lead.

Jerking his head up, he looked about. The room was pleasant, luxuriously furnished, and outside the long closed windows was a little balcony. Below showed a garden, a hedge on either hand, running down a slope toward the sea. Harper reached out, fumbled at the pot of coffee, poured some with shaking hand, and gulped it down.

This helped him instantly.

AN UPSTAIRS room of some villa along the coast, near Houlgat or Blonville, doubtless. And the Gray Wolf had brought him here from London, overnight. A certain blank astonishment seized upon Harper, then he shrugged and dismissed the matter.

He drank more of the bitter coffee, ate a roll, felt more like himself. When he tried to walk across to the windows, however, he realized how terribly that drug must have sapped his physical strength. He got a window open and drank in the fresh sunlit air, gratefully.

Noon, and in an hour or two the Gray Wolf would be back. Now was his time, if ever, to reach a telephone and drag in the police. A simple matter, to all appearance. There was very probably no telephone in the villa, for in France telephones are rare and precious things. And to get out of the place, he must have clothes.

A glance showed no clothes in the room. An armoire near the window revealed only women's dresses and aprons. He glanced at the heap on the bed, but the idea was revolting. Cursing the dizziness that assailed him, Harper procured a towel from the bathroom and knotted it about his waist. Going forth naked and weaponless—the thought drew a grim smile to his lips, as he approached the door where the tray had been left. Outside, he knew, was a hallway.

The coast was clear. He closed the door, locked it, and removed the key. Crossing to an opposite door, he found it and unlocked and entered. A sunny corner room, this, and very handsome; a man's room, which raised his hopes. On the dresser stood an unopened envelope which had probably just arrived and been brought by the maid who fetched the lunch-tray.

As Harper crossed the room to the dresser, a whirl of dizziness and nausea assailed him. He all but fell; his head swimming, he clutched weakly at the dresser for support. After an instant his eyes cleared. The letter before him was addressed to Sir James Santerre, Bart., Villa Beausolil, Blonville.

So he was in the room of the Gray Wolf—and had learned his name!

Sharp and savage exultation thrilled through him, banished his weakness, drew a laugh to his lips. Sir James Santerre, eh? He seized the envelope and tore it open. A check for five thousand francs fell out, and with it, in a woman's hand, a letter. He glanced at it. *My darling: I am awaiting the moment of our reunion with trembling heart—*

Harper grimaced, then read through the ardent epistle. It revealed, as nothing else could have done, the callous, inhuman bestiality of the Gray Wolf. A married woman, this, of good position; and the Ferguson girl, too, had been of an excellent family. Here were love and extortion mingled in a cold-blooded, brutally revolting scheme that

all too frequently ended in murder when the victim was blond white.

Putting down the letter, which rather sickened him with its implications, Harper turned. A trunk and suitcase stood open, half emptied. A high Norman armoire against the wall revealed clothes neatly arranged, and as the Gray Wolf was of a size with Harper, the most pressing problem was solved.

Despite the recurrent nausea, Harper was dressed within ten minutes, picking out a light and loose tweed that fitted him fairly well. To his disappointment, however, he discovered no weapons of any kind in the room. The maid was the wife of Jacques, and while he knew nothing about Chartres, who must be somewhere about, he had no illusions as to the character of the Gray Wolf's associates. Either of those two would take some handling, and he was in no shape to tackle the job.

"However, nothing venture, nothing win!" he reflected more cheerfully, as he surveyed himself in the glass. "Blonville's only two or three miles from Deauville, if I recollect aright. Now a cap, to cover up my head—"

Thus complete, even to a wad of French money that lay on the dresser, Harper reconnoitered the hall, which was empty, and the position of the house. This, he found, was just off a road, probably the main highway, for he caught sight of a passing autobus over the top of the hedge. Within this hedge, in the thorough French fashion, was an iron fence. He had only to walk out the gates and find himself at liberty. Blonville being a mere dot on the map, a commune spread across the coastal hills, he was not apt to find any police here. Deauville would be his best bet, he reflected.

He pulled the cap over his eyes, turned to the stairs—and then shrank hastily aside. From the hall below, at the foot of the staircase, came steps and a man's voice in rapid, urgent French.

"Quick, Therese? Who is it? Why did you bring anyone in?"

"But, m'sieu, she forced her way! I could not stop her!" came the voice of the maid. "She said that she knew Sir James was here and—"

"Who is she?" snapped Chartres.

A Mlle. Mills, an American—"

From Chartres broke a sharp oath.

"Impossible! We finished with that one two months ago, at Nice! She went back to America—she could not possibly be that fool blonde!"

"This is not a blonde, m'sieu. She is dark and petite. She sent away her car—"

"Where is she, then?"

"In the library."

"Good!" exclaimed Chartres. "I will go down the road to the Bureau de Poste and telephone the casino. Perhaps I can catch the *patron* there. Give her wine at once—from the green decanter. That will keep her quiet. Tell her Sir James will be here in a few minutes. Why the devil must she come when he is away? Go quickly!"

HARPER whistled to himself. Mills! He remembered something about that case; a woman from home who got into trouble at Nice. She had lost a lot of money at Monte Carlo. Her husband was in the diplomatic service. Nasty rumors about it. No one knew just what. So there was another victim of the Gray Wolf, eh? Yet this could not be same woman. Perhaps some relative. And if she drank that drugged wine—

Harper started down the stairs impulsively, forgetting everything except the necessity of warning this compatriot, getting her out of the spider's web. Then, halfway down, vertigo seized upon him. His head swam. Violent nausea attacked him and he all but slipped headlong to the bottom of the stairs. However, he got down safely, clung to the newel-post, and stood there weakly, shakily, looking around.

And at this moment, as he waited, a door six feet away opened. Out into the hall came a swarthy woman in maid's uniform, bearing a tray. At sight of Harper she stopped short, and her eyes widened in sharp astonishment. Quick as thought, Harper turned to her with a gesture of caution.

"You're Therese? I met Chartres; I'm one of the Paris crowd. You've got wine there from the green decanter? Take it back. Let me handle this woman. Instead, bring us some ordinary wine in two minutes. You understand? Any kind of wine—but not from that decanter."

It was at once obvious that this woman had not seen the patient.

"Yes—but yes," she stammered. "But how do I know—the *patron*—"

"I saw Sir James at Deauville; also your husband," and Harper laughed. Her face cleared at once. He made an imperative gesture, and she turned back. "Wait! This woman is in the library? Which door?"

"There, across the hall."

Harper nodded and went to the door she indicated. He paused briefly, to glance back and see that she had obeyed him; then he opened the door and stepped into the room beyond.

He was astonished at its air of luxury, but his eyes went at once to the woman who stood by the table. She had not heard his swift, quiet entry. She was standing there, looking up at a glorious Zuloaga portrait above the fireplace—a rather small woman, dark, her face strangely pathetic and sad. She was perhaps thirty, Harper figured swiftly.

Then she was aware of him, as he strode toward her.

A little gasp broke from her. She turned about swiftly, with catlike grace, and Harper was startled by the blaze of fury in her eyes.

"You unspeakable monster!" she cried out in a shrill, nervous voice. "I've learned everything—my sister has told me everything! And now I've found you—"

Her hand jerked up a small pistol, and she fired pointblank. At the same instant, Harper was aware of the roar of a motor engine, and through the open windows caught the sound of the Gray Wolf's cold voice.

Sir James had returned home.

V

THAT bullet passed through Harper's hair.

Before she could fire again, he had caught her wrist and thrown up the weapon.

"You fool, I'm not Sir James!" he exclaimed sharply. "He's just returned now—he's outside! I was trying to escape from this accursed house—"

She wilted abruptly, her distended eyes fastened upon him. She did not even try to retain the pistol he wrested from her.

"Listen, now!" exclaimed Harper quickly. "When they come in, say a man was here, fired at you, leaped out into the garden!

Then grab your chance and get out of here quick. They'll be too busy to care about you, never fear. My name's Harper—newspaper correspondent. You clear out and get the police here, understand? Just walk straight out. They'll have other things to worry about—"

He turned. Against one long wall, flanking a bookcase, was a tattered but priceless old fragment of tapestry, a large chair in front of it. In a flash, Harper perceived that this was his one hope, and a slim one. He darted to it, pulled out the chair a trifle, and slipped behind the folds of the tapestry, as the door was burst open.

And in this instant he prayed that the woman might have her wits about her.

"What the devil!" exclaimed the voice of the Gray Wolf. "Who are you—?"

"He nearly killed me! He shot at me!" broke out the woman. "I'm Grace Mills—wanted to see you about my sister—that man—"

"What man? Where is he?"

"He jumped out the window, there—"

A sharp, shrill cry echoed up from outside the room; the cry of a woman. Then her voice came in rapid French.

"M'sieu! He is gone—the patient is gone! Your man here is dead—"

Harper had found a rent in the tapestry, close to his eye. Through this he caught sight of the room. Grace Mills, apparently almost in hysterics, was by the table. Inside the door stood the Gray Wolf, a short, fat man at his elbow.

"Quick, Dumond!" exclaimed the Gray Wolf, the first to comprehend what might have taken place. "Upstairs! You, Jacques! To the garden, swiftly! Watch the gate, Chartres—"

His voice, no longer cold, now rang with a steely vibrance. Then he was leaping across to the long open windows." Next instant he was gone.

DUMOND had turned and scuttled away, crying out something to the woman above, who still called shrilly. Harper saw Grace Mills turn, glance around, and then quietly walk out the door.

What of Chartres, guarding the gate? He might be glad to be rid of her; now that they knew Harper was gone, all of them would have but the one thought, the one

desperate intent. She would matter nothing. And yet, at the same time—

"Can't chance it," he thought. "She went to pieces, then bucked up again and took my clue like a good one! I'll have to stick by her, at least make sure she got past Chartres. If she did, I can play a waiting game. She might strike a pair of bicycle officers at the door, or she might have to go clear to Deauville. Came here to kill the Gray Wolf, eh? Probably didn't know him as such, however."

Harper pulled the tattered hanging aside and stepped out.

In his hand he still held the pistol he had wrenched from the woman, but looked at it with disgust. It was a tiny thing, and its small-caliber bullet would not stop a man. This Mills dame, thought Harper, was certainly an amateur at killing.

Then he jerked up his head sharply, listening. The door into the hall was half closed. Directly outside it was Jacques, calling urgently.

"What's happened up there? Dumond! Therese!"

"He killed Farquarson and got away," came the shrill voice of his wife. "Get into the garden, quickly! The *patron* is searching there!"

"Who's that woman outside? Chartres let her go out—"

"Never mind, imbecile! Into the garden!"

Harper drew a quick breath of relief. Chartres had let her pass, then!

He looked about the room. No egress except by the windows or the door into the hall. He advanced toward that door, intending to shut it—then it was thrown open almost in his face. The maid Therese burst in, stopped short at sight of him, stared at him in paralyzed shock. Then she turned and fled.

Harper kicked the door shut behind her, with a curse at his own inability to shoot down a woman. Well, they would soon learn that he was here, and armed. After that, what? If they delayed long enough, the whole outfit would be nabbed when the police arrived, if they did arrive. Everything was conjecture.

"If I had a real gun!" muttered Harper, angrily, as he eyed the door and waited.

He heard a slight sound. Something warned him; not in time, though. He

remembered the open window, remembered that the Gray Wolf was out there in the garden. He turned around—too late!

From the open window came the heavy crack of an automatic.

The torso of a man showed there against the sunlight. Head and shoulders only, the pistol and arm rigid across the window-sill. To the shot, Harper's head jerked sharply. Then he crumpled to the floor and lay face down, inert, motionless. Over his left cheek crept a scarlet trickle.

THE soft, cold laugh of the Gray Wolf rang on the room.

In through the window came Sir James Santerre, and tossed his pistol into a corner as he came; its need was ended. With rapid strides he passed the sprawled figure of Harper and jerked open the door into the hall.

"Out!" rose his shout. "Jacques! Dumond—everybody! Run for it! Take the passage—I'll join you at the beach!"

Excited voices answered him. He slammed the door, turned swiftly to that very tapestry behind which Harper had been sheltered, and ripped it away. Here a switch-box was revealed. He tore this box open, caught the switch inside, and threw it over.

"So!" he exclaimed, and looked down at Harper. "I failed to hit you in the ear, eh? You whirled around and spoiled the shot—but not entirely, eh? Well, stay here, fool that you were! You've spoiled all my plans. You've made me turn to my emergency get-away—if that's any satisfaction to your spirit!"

A bitter oath escaped him, then he reached out, took a cigar from the table, and biting off the end, lit it carefully. All haste had fallen away from him. His cigar alight, he looked about the room, sniffed the air, and frowned slightly. Then, turning to the wide fireplace, he bent over one end of it.

There was a grating sound, and with a subdued thud the entire front of the fireplace moved out and halted. The Gray Wolf looked at the opening thus revealed, and shrugged.

"So many plans, to go for nothing!" he observed aloud. "This Harper, this ass of a newspaper man, to cause everything to fall in ruins! Truly, a fool can create more

damage in a moment than a wise man can repair—ah! It has worked!”

HE LEANED forward. Smoke was eddying in under the hall door. From outside the room was now perceptible a roar and crackle of mounting flames. So intent was the Gray Wolf upon this, that he failed to observe the slight movement made by the inert figure on the floor.

Harper had been recalled to life by hearing his own name voiced.

Smoke-fingers were reaching along the floor from beneath the door, curling around him chokingly. He opened his eyes as he lay, and saw the figure of the Gray Wolf standing by the fireplace, peering forward, watching and listening. What had happened, how much time had elapsed, Harper did not know.

Nor did he care. In his hand was still the little pistol. With a sudden effort, a surging upthrust of energy, he lifted himself on one arm, jerked up the pistol, fired. He fired a second time.

Through the smoke-mist he saw the Gray Wolf stagger, heard a frightful cry. Then the figure vanished entirely. There was a heavy thud.

Harper came to one knee, amazedly, lost balance, came down on his hands and knees. But he perceived that the incredible was true. The man was gone from sight—had apparently melted into the solid wall.

Coughing, choking, with a fierce heat and the red glow of flames coming from the door, he dragged himself toward the windows. Twice he fell then rose again and crept on, blinded by the smoke, half suffocated by the fumes. Somehow the Gray Wolf had got away, but he had not gone scatheless. Those two bullets had reached him.

Sudden terror seized Harper. Behind him came a gush of flames as the door went down, a terrific wave of heat, of smoke, of fire. He was nearly at the windows now, three feet from the open air, when that gusty billow of smoke closed in around him.

He sank down helpless.

VI

HOURS later, they told him about it—the *maire* and schoolmaster of the commune, the police officials from Deauville, the little woman with the dark, sad face who sat beside him as he lay.

“You see, your disappearance had already become known,” said Grace Mills. “When I told them who you were, it caused instant excitement. Nobody had known until I recognized you—nobody quite believed my story, until that house broke into flames. They barely got you out in time. Your head’s hurt, and a bullet came within an ace of killing you—”

“The Gray Wolf?” exclaimed Harper eagerly. “Tell me—did they get him?”

“They know everything about him now, yes,” she answered. “So he was the Gray Wolf! I had never suspected that. I thought he was a titled Englishman merely—well, no matter. You can tell them everything they don’t know already.”

“Of course—but did they get him?” insisted Harper.

She shook her head, frowning a little.

“Get him? I don’t understand. Everybody there had vanished. They’re searching the ruins now for bodies; they don’t know whether anyone perished in the fire or not.”

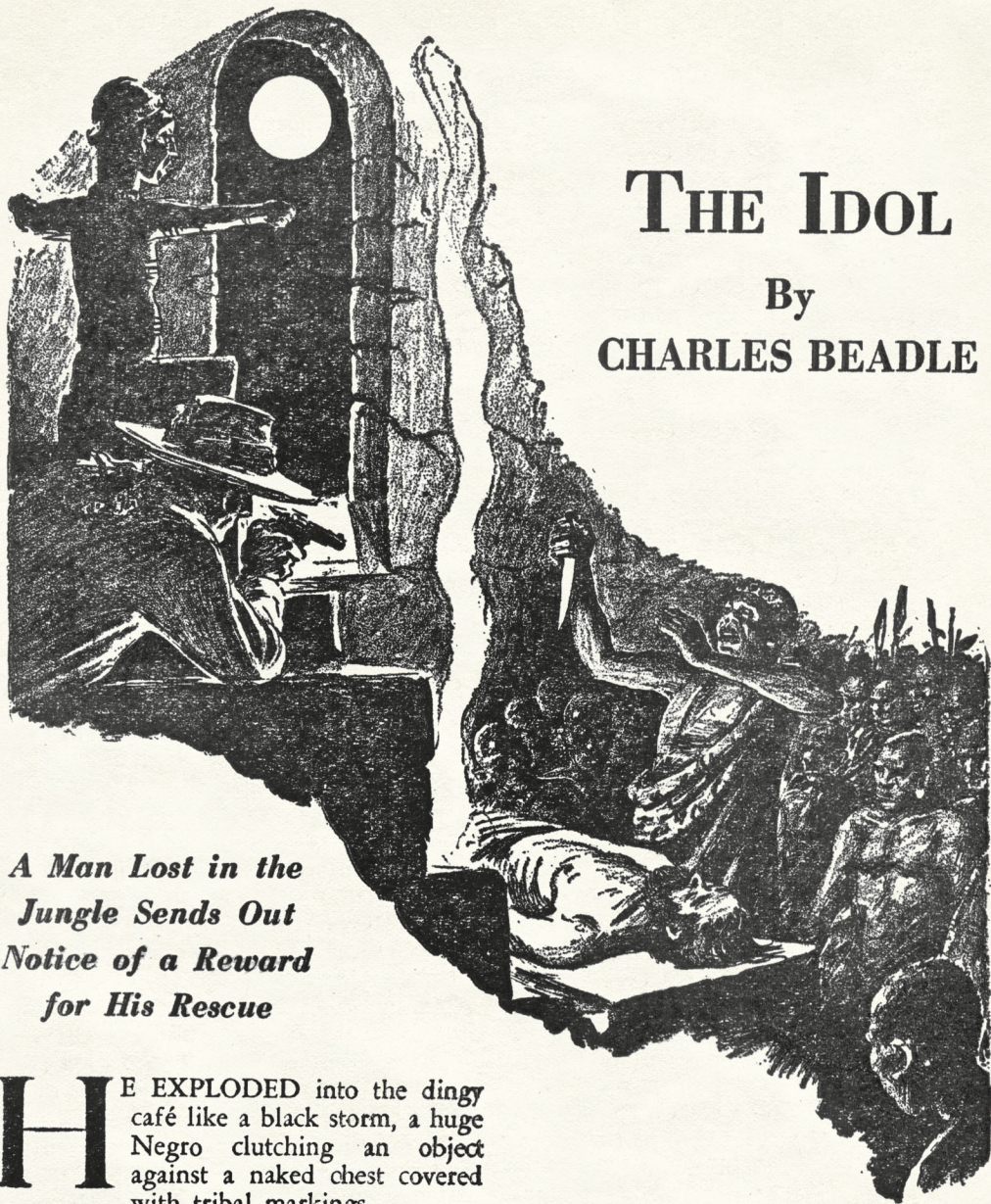
Half an hour later, Harper was sitting up, telling his story to a police stenographer, when two blackened gendarmes appeared.

“Well?” exclaimed the officer in charge. “Any bodies among the ruins?”

“Impossible to say, my captain,” replied one of the two men. “We could find none, at least. But the fire was so hot—whew! There was petrol stored in the place, apparently. It blew everything to bits. As you know, it is a distinct contravention of the law to store petrol in such quantities in a dwelling—”

Once more Harper asked his question about the Gray Wolf, but had no answer, except the picture in his own mind; the staggering figure vanishing amid smoke-wreaths, vanishing apparently into thin air.

But the police had no doubt whatever. The Gray Wolf was dead.



THE IDOL

By
CHARLES BEADLE

A Man Lost in the Jungle Sends Out Notice of a Reward for His Rescue

HE EXPLODED into the dingy café like a black storm, a huge Negro clutching an object against a naked chest covered with tribal markings.

There were yells outside in the dusty street which drove the fellow headlong for a back door. The key evidently conveyed nothing to him for he wrenched desperately at the knob as a clutter of Portuguese police burst in brandishing three cornered bayonets. As they surrounded him the terror subsided into a native indifferent submission.

I had noticed that the precious object was a carved idol, common enough on the west coast of Africa, and asked the half breed barman who had hidden behind the counter, what the fuss was about. He told me that

the big Negro was a murderer of a Portuguese trader up-country and had broken jail.

I had come into this benighted village after a disastrous hunt—for all the elephants seemed to have gone to the Disarmament Conference—and in the general store that afternoon I bumped into another white man. He was a lean fellow with a hawk nose and a mean look, but as I hadn't spoken English for a twelvemonth I was glad to know him!

We were sitting in the same café drink-

ing tepid beer and getting acquainted—he was a Ronald Wites cruising around the lake in a speedboat—when a native Police Sergeant came in and after peering about came over to us, drawing from under his tunic an African carving which was so like the other that I asked him where he had got it. He grinned as he replied that he had swopped it and wanted to sell.

Neither of us was interested until I noticed several peculiarities: the scratches on the skull intended to represent hair, instead of being curly as usual, were straight, suggesting white or Asiatic influence; on the chest were similar tribal marks to those the big Negro had borne, and most important, the navel was formed of some green substance.

My companion glanced at the fetish contemptuously and when I suggested that the stone might be an emerald he laughed disdainfully, saying that it was a pity I couldn't tell the difference between a stone and green glass.

I got a bit hot in the collar and retold a story current among the Portuguese as well as the blacks; the natives said that a month's trek to the west was a mysterious country from which no stranger, white or black, ever returned, ruled by a strange tribe who worshipped a cross set with jewels—a drawing in the sand by a native was unmistakable. The Portuguese interpreted this yarn by quoting the historical fact that monks had settled in the interior of the west coast in the seventeenth century and more than a hundred years ago had been wiped out.

"Bah!" said Wites. "Are you such a hick as to believe that?"

"Hick or not," I retorted, "I've often thought of trying it out!" and bought the idol for a few dollars and a bottle of gin.

Scarcely had the black sergeant gone out than a halfbreed entered as if he had been awaiting the former's departure. He spotted the idol still in my hands, came across and asked in Portuguese patois, politely enough, whether I'd like to deal—he'd give fifty dollars. The sum—for a halfbreed—surprised me. I was suddenly convinced that the green thing was an emerald and refused. The fellow seemed agitated, raised the offer by fifties to two hundred dollars. Instantly

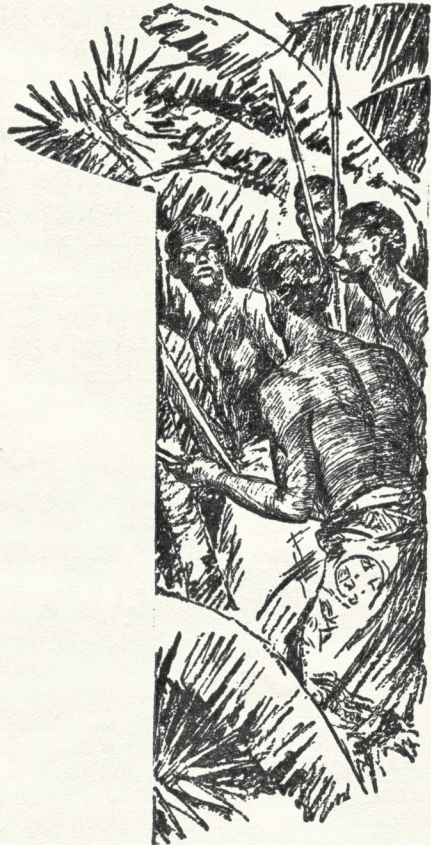
was born a determination to follow up the legend of the monks. Finally he scowled evilly and went off.

Another hullabaloo in the street preceded a crowd of police into the café jabbering excitedly. I listened.

"That darned Negro they grabbed a while back with this idol has broken jail again," I interpreted to Wites.

"Guess the sergeant must have let him go in exchange for the idol!" laughed Wites.

"Maybe," I assented, but the fellow had got me thinking. Wites took up the idol and let the light fall on the green stone.



"Bah, that's glass all right!" said he.

"Then why the blazes is that halfbreed so crazy about it?"

"Might be some native supersition, the legend of the monks you were yawping about," he suggested mockingly. "But it's of no cash value. Holy Sam Hill!"

The green navel of the idol had come away in his hand.

Then a cylinder-like object fell on the table.

Just as we both reached out to pick it up a lean brown paw shot over my shoulder and snatched up the idol.

I CAUGHT and twisted the wrist. The halfbreed dropped the image. Instinctively I snatched the idol and the green stone and thrust them into my pocket as Wites jumped to his feet drawing a gun.

The tiny cylinder thing which had fallen out was not on the table. I was about to look underneath when a shout distracted me. I turned in time to see another younger halfbreed rushing knife in hand.

Wites fired. The fellow pitched across the table oversetting it. In an instant the café was in an uproar. Cursing Wites for a rash fool I backed against the wall pulling my own gun as the Portuguese began drawing their revolvers and squealing for more men.

The elder halfbreed was screaming hysterically, the younger was moaning on the top of the overset table. I sidled along the wall towards the back door shouting to Wites to follow me. Under our two guns the Portuguese kept off.

Unlocking the door behind my back I slipped through followed by Wites. I locked the door on the outside and ran as a fusillade of bullets crashed after us.

The single street of adobe bungalows led down to the jetty on the lake. Our only chance of escape was by means of Wites' speedboat.

"Any gas aboard?" I asked as we raced.

"Yes—and provisions. A boy, too, waiting me."

As we reached the end of the back compounds a few ragged shots zipped about us amid a distant shouting.

Wites sprang into the lanuch yelling for the "boy" who was not visible. Alongside the wharf was another speedboat with a machine gun, their only means of pursuit except canoes. I jumped in, unscrewed the magneto plug, snapped the wire lead and threw them overboard.

I UNTIED the painter and shoved off just as the first of the straggling police reached the jetty. The engine took just as two of them halted to fire wildly. While we

roared out into the bayou rose cries of rage as they discovered that their patrol boat was out of commission. A couple of men were ripping off the cover of the machine gun, but by the time they had got it ready we were out of range.

I was aft steering and Wites was sitting for'ard of the two-berth cabin amidships. When we were clear out in the lake I recalled the cylinder object which had fallen out of the belly of the idol and asked him if he had it. He said that it must have been lost in the scrap.

"What was it?"

"Don't know," he replied from the other side of the cabin.

"Looked like a roll of paper," said I. "Might have been a plan!"

"Might!" he retorted with a sneering laugh. Then he raised his head over the top of the cabin house and added, "Say, how about your stuff and canoes and all your men?"

"Oh, they're gone! Those Portuguese bandits will grab the goods and my battery too, darn it!"

"What're you going to do then?"

"That's just what I'm beginning to wonder," said I ruefully. "I can't go after my monks now unless I could sell this stone—if it is an emerald!"

"See here, Carden, I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll chip in on this crazy scheme of yours. Finance it as you've got nothing left—on a fifty-fifty basis."

"What!" I gasped, staring blankly.

"I mean it."

"But why? You're so cock-eyed sure that this is a bit of glass!"

"Well," said he, grinning mockingly over the top of the cabin house, "you're a good sport if you are dumb! And I shouldn't have got out of that mess if you hadn't have known what to do. So I guess I owe you a good turn. Terms suit you?"

"Sure, they suit!" said I delightedly. "And thanks, Wites, and you're a good sport even if you are mother's cock-eyed wonder!"

WE HEADED south for British territory where were a station and a store for fitting out. Towards sundown we were passing through scattered islands. The launch had a searchlight, but Wites didn't find out

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that it wouldn't work until the night had fallen like a blanket. Cursing his missing boy anew he fumbled in a locker in the bow. I heard him exclaim:

"Hi, come out of that, you mutt! Good Lord, he's dead!"

He dragged the body onto the deck and examined it in the light of a torch.

"He's been stabbed in the back and pushed into the locker," he reported. "Damn queer!"

"Maybe some tribal revenge," I suggested. "Better see in the morning whether you've had anything stolen."

Wites came to the port side of the cabin house to examine the searchlight switch with the torch. Presently a beam of light shot out ahead. To get at my pipe I had a while since taken the idol from my pocket and placed it on the seat beside me.

"What's that?" suddenly Wites called out.

I, too, had heard something, the sound of a bolt being drawn. The cabin door rattled distinctly. Someone was inside. I started up drawing my gun. The door opened violently.

WHITES of eyes and the blade of a knife gleamed dully in the glow of the stars. A huge black body hurtled at me.

I fired from the hip. The man lurched sideways onto the seat.

As Wites flashed the torch aft the fellow rose with the idol in his hand and with the agility of a cat sprang overboard.

Swearing, I put over the tiller and brought the launch around in a careening circle. I shouted to Wites to switch the searchlight over the water, but the lamp was a fixture to the mast. We hunted around for half an hour, but never caught sight of the man whom I had recognized as the big black, the murderer of the Portuguese trader, who had twice broken jail.

Then as I lighted a match to smoke I noticed something glint on the deck grating. It was a dagger evidently dropped by the black. The haft was of heavy metal and had six greenish stones embedded, three on each side in a fashion that suggested that they had been designed to fit the fingers to give a non-slipping grip.

"What about that?" I asked Wites triumphantly as he examined the knife in the

torch light. "Think they're more bits of glass!"

Wites grunted in a non-committal way, but this time he neither grinned nor laughed.

II

THREE weeks out from the British post and well into Angola territory—on the map—we struck our first snag; our men, porters and "boys," refused to budge a foot into the dense belt of forest which lay before us. Neither cajolery nor money—in goods—could persuade them. No man, white or black, said they, had ever returned from the country beyond that forest. We looked at each other and decided to go on with what we could carry ourselves.

For days we waded through slime, stumbled along elephant tracks, clambered over roots and vines tangled in the humid heat of a Turkish bath in semi-obscurity, a weird world of flame-colored birds, chromatic insects and snakes of all shapes and sizes.

On the fifth day Wites began to show signs of collapse. As we were resting on a tangle of roots and vines, our clothes in rags and covered in slime, I watched the puffed face streaked with blood and wondered how long he would last.

Suddenly he sat up cursing violently and clapped a hand over his hip pocket, an action he had repeatedly done quite oblivious to the fact that whatever was therein must have been soaked to pulp days ago.

"To hell with you!" he gurgled through enormous lips. "I'm going blind! I'm through! I'm going back!"

"You'll never make it, boy," said I quietly. "We've got to go through or go under. You said *you* weren't a quitter!"

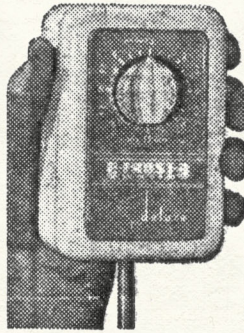
"I'm not a quitter, blast you!" he spluttered, rising unsteadily to his knees. "If you think you've got a chance you haven't! I've seen to it that you'll never get 'em!"

"Get what?" I asked sharply, but he wouldn't reply; just stayed mumbling and cursing.

I pulled him to his feet and practically drove him in front of me. Half an hour later we came upon a track made apparently by some beast smaller than an elephant. Then I spotted something that punched a cry out of me—the blazing of a trail! Wild

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vines that had been cut by a sharp instrument.

Half an hour of what was comparatively easy going, brought us to a small clearing. As we entered I stumbled over an object that gave a familiar sound. Groping in the undergrowth I discovered a—gasoline can!

We found three more and in each was a hole made by some bluntish weapon.

What were gasoline cans doing in the middle of an African jungle five hundred miles at least from any automobile road and hundreds from any lake or river?

And what were the meaning of the holes? They might have been done by superstitious natives thinking that the cans had been filled with white man's magic.

Then just as I had gotten a damp fire going I was startled by a clang of an empty can. I peered around. Wites was asleep. Puzzled I rose to my feet. Peeking from behind a tree was the face of a man whom from the pallor of its skin I took to be a white man.

Calling out I walked towards him. He disappeared into the greeny forest twilight. Flashing my torch I ran. Once as he turned I recognized the coffee and milk features of a halfbreed. He was too slick for me and short of firing I couldn't catch him.

On awakening Wites I told him and advised him to keep an extra good watch during his spell so that somebody didn't get a chance to murder us. In the morning I missed my dagger, the emerald hilted one, which I had carried in my belt. When I reproached Wites he retorted defiantly that maybe he had dozed a bit but that no great harm had been done.

The following afternoon trek we came into scrub which petered out into a desert of cacti and euphorbia. On the horizon were hills blue and clean cut. We slept in some shade until sundown and walked all night, but at sunrise the hills appeared as far off as ever. I had misjudged the distance in the dry desert air.

NEXT day our meager supply of foul water gave out. The rest of the trip was a nightmare. I awoke painfully to stare at some dozen natives in rags and tatters of uniforms standing around us. They were smallish and brown and had no tribal marks as had had the big Negro and the idol; but

to my surprise they all carried rifles—Sniders, Lebel, Enfields, evidently filched from the adjacent European territories.

A tall halfbreed of very Negroid features who was clad in a dirty robe bound by a rope of twisted fiber made some sign above his head and said in fair English:

"Welcome, brudders! No shoot!"

I smiled as well as I could and gurgled for water. The fellow gave some guttural order and two women bearing calabashes of water came forward. Then a grizzle-bearded halfbreed joined the crowd. Stuck in his girdle was an emerald hilted dagger. Then I noticed that the other fellow also carried one.

While I was cautiously moistening my lips the grizzled man bent over Wites who, awakened, stared, and began to struggle wildly.

"Don't get excited," I lisped as well as I could as they offered him water. "We've got there—wherever that is, and now we'd better sit quiet and see what's going to happen. Don't drink. Just sip."

As soon as he was a little refreshed Wites began to recover his wits. Gazing at the two robed men he gurgled an exclamation and glanced swiftly at me. Just then the tall robed fellow made the same greeting and the sign above his head.

TO MY surprise Wites calmly repeated the gesture and then lisped as best he could words which sounded like: "pay ter nos ter."

The effect was visible upon the features of the two priestlike men. The older registered slight astonishment and some deference; the younger a passing shadow of awe.

The swollen features of Wites grimaced satisfaction. Turning to them and pointing to me he said with an air of authority:

"That's the man who stole your idol, took out the emerald and shot your black fellow, and he stole a knife like yours too. See! I've brought it back to you!"

From the inside of his ragged pants Wites produced my dagger wrapped in strips of his shirt.

As I stared incredulously sharp exclamations broke from both the robed men. The smaller fellow leaped forward to grab the knife, jabbering excitedly. Wites grimaced at me, I could not grasp the truth.

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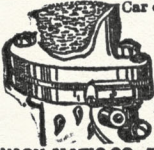
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"You—you stole that dagger, Wites?"

"Thure!" lisped Wites sneeringly. "Think I'm such a fool as I look! Your hunch about these crazy people seems pretty good, but as they all speak English I've got no further use for you. Get that?"

"What d'you think I financed the trip for? I'm no darned philanthropist for dumb-bells! Just to buck you up I'll tell you that the roll that fell out of the idol's belly wasn't lost! Very interesting, too! Now chew on that!"

DULLY I obeyed an order to get into a litter. The two robed men and Wites got into thers and were borne away. A mile or so distant was a town. The roofs were mostly flat. At the far end, huge in comparison with the others, was a structure which resembled a church.

The litters with Wites and the priests had gone ahead rapidly leaving me with the soldiers. We entered the town through a hole in what had been ramparts. Beyond, adobe houses formed some likeness to streets.



In a ruined courtyard they told me to get out and led me into a large room. A bundle of grass by way of bed was in a corner. Light came from holes in the ceiling. A black woman placed a calabash of water and closed the rickety door which was bolted on the outside. I just dropped onto the grass couch and fell asleep.

III

I AWOKED as the sun was nigh to setting as I could tell by the shadows. Drums were throbbing and natives shouting a chant far away. Through the holes in the door I caught a glimpse of a rifle barrel.

I took stock of the situation; how to escape. To protect my gun from wet and slime

in the jungle I had carried it under my belt and inside my pants which luckily the soldiers had not noticed. The walls of my prison were of stone blocks, but the ruined ceiling was full of rents. The smallish brown soldiery evidently had not reckoned on my height, for I managed to spring and get a grip on a cross beam and with the other hand to wrench open a small gap into one large enough to force my shoulders through.

There was no roof except a few decayed rafters. I crawled cautiously across the rotting floor to a hole in the side wall. A scarlet balloon of a moon was rising. The chanting seemed to come from behind the church-like building. Dimly I could make out a huge crowd beyond the far ramparts.

Then a peculiar sound startled me, a familiar rhythmic roar which increased swiftly in volume until it had drowned the shouting and almost the drums.

I couldn't believe my ears! Yet it was unmistakable—a motor!

The sound died away leaving me listening to the frenzied chanting. A motor here where there wasn't even a mule track? Wasn't sense! Yet those gasoline cans in the forest? But anyway a motor wouldn't be made to run for possibly two minutes and then stopped. No, no, wasn't sense. The fatigue of the jungle and desert trip was making me hear things. Bats in the belfry, I muttered.

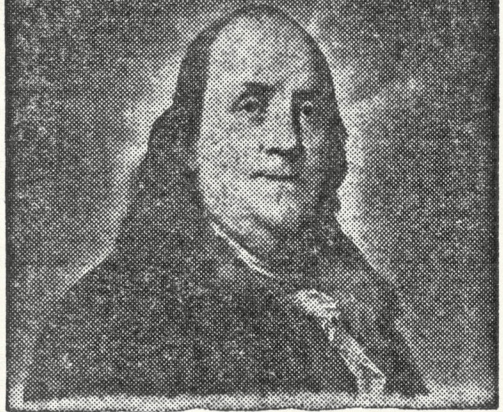
The drumming and chanting continued. I decided to escape while they were all occupied. Below the gap was a heap of rubble where the old wall had crumbled. The drop was fairly stiff, but I made it without hurt. The streets seemed deserted as if even the dogs had gone to the prayer meeting or whatever it was, without the ramparts.

I WALKED to the square in front of the church. The grass roof had been kept more or less in repair, but large masses of masonry had fallen out of the walls. Climbing up the debris I peered within.

Against the jagged lines of a ruined window through which the moonlight was streaming, was a large figure with the arms extended, the replica, except for the attitude of the limbs, of my lost idol.

Around a big fire on front of the image squatted three huge blacks. On their tem-

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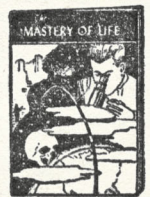
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ples I detected, as they swayed their bodies in time to the drums, the same tribal marks as had had the Negro who had murdered the Portuguese trader and leaped overboard with the idol.

The form of the great image was unmistakably influenced by that of the crucifix, eloquent of the degeneration of the teachings of the monks into idolatry.

Then, peering at this weird scene, I thrilled at the glimmer in the light of the fire—the moonlight was at the back of the idol—of greenish stones set in a kind of diadem upon the head. I was convinced that these must be genuine emeralds.

NOTICING that the sound of the drums was drawing nearer I looked over my shoulder and saw that some of the crowd were entering the square. My escape was cut off.

Behind the idol and lower than the moonbeams pouring through the large ruined window at the back was shadow. I crawled through the hole inside the church and down among the fallen blocks of masonry.

Soon the crowd began to swarm into the building ululating to the sound of many small drums. The three ebony attendants threw more wood on the fire before the idol. At the foot I saw now was a kind of stone altar streaked with ominous dark marks.

For half an hour or more the mob within and without yowled hysterically. Then from what had been the presbytery filed half-breed priests in their robes and emerald-hilted daggers in their girdles. They took up places on one side of the altar and huge blacks ranged themselves choir fashion on the other. Below them at the top of the nave strode a gigantic Negro wearing another diadem of emeralds on a shaven skull and seated himself on a crude stool of ivory. I gathered that he must be some kind of king.

The multitude continued to chant and wail and sway to the rhythm of the drums. Then from the presbytery emerged another bunch of blacks carrying something heavy. They placed their burden on the altar slab before the idol. The black king, eyes blood-shot and nostrils distended, stood up brandishing a dagger with the emerald shaft. Cautiously I rose.

On the altar was the body of a nude

white man. He was not Wites, for he had a ragged beard and long hair.

The sacrificial knife flashed. I fired. The mouth and eyes of the giant black opened as if in surprise. The fatal hand fell. Slowly he turned on his heels and then crumpled across the body of the intended victim.

I grabbed the fallen dagger. The unexpected paralyzed those who had witnessed the death of the king fellow. Drums were still beating, the people yowling.

I dragged off the corpse of the black and cut the bonds of the white man, who seemed completely unconscious, before the priests had grasped what was happening.

The emerald diadem had fallen from the shaven skull and rolled between the altar and the idol. I snatched and placed it on my own head. The thing was so big that it sank to my ears and I jammed my Tirai hat on the top.

The possession of the diadem—probably sacred in their eyes—appeared to terrify the priests black and white. They recoiled uttering cries of alarm.

Just then the mob, as if conscious of what was happening, began to surge forward.

Immediately all the priests turned upon them menacingly with their daggers.

Instantly I seized my chance, hoisted the body of the white man onto my shoulder and scrambled out of the ruined window over the rubble. I found myself in a kind of walled square empty. I staggered on towards a streak of moonlight between large gates ajar.

BEHIND, the pandemonium increased. Within the gates was a large quadrangle flanked by pillared verandas resembling cloisters.

I dumped my man, closed the gates and shot heavy iron bars into wooden sockets. The row between the priests and the populace seemed in full swing. The stranger revived. He rose to his feet giddily and reeled away from me.

"It's all right!" I called. "I'm a white man."

For answer he raised his ragged beard and gave a quavering laugh.

"No, no!" he replied, pointing a hand on which glittered a diamond. "You keep on coming, but you can't fool me!"

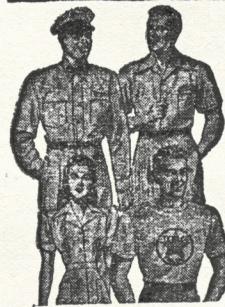
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The wild long hair, the straggly beard, the gleaming eyes and splashes of blood from the slain black priest on the nude body, made him look like a mad John the Baptist.

"Oh, yes, of course," he responded mockingly. "You've always told me that! But you never do anything except disappear! Why, man, I've been waiting for you for a whole year! But it's too late now. Can't you see it's the equinoctial moon? I've told you, you fool! Tonight's the night! ha! ha! ha! ha! But that's all right, old man, it's my turn now and yours next year!"

He trailed off into a giggle. Vaguely I could make some sense from the words. The "equinoctial moon" referred to an annual festival practiced by some tribes in Africa as well as elsewhere.

"See here," I repeated firmly, "pull yourself together. My name's Carden. What's yours?"

"No, it isn't," he replied solemnly. "Because you haven't got a name—you don't exist. I *invented* you myself because I had to have somebody to talk to and I wanted you to save me. You see tonight they're going to cut my heart out and eat it! ha! ha! ha! ha!

"Now see here," I said desperately as arose a swirl of louder screeching, "I *am* real! Come, shake hands and you'll see!"

But he waltzed away, a grotesque figure like a white ape. Came another swirl of sound nearer. I rushed and seized him.

"Don't be a fool, you fool!" I shouted. "I've got you out of this mess so pull yourself together!"

In my rage I had taken him by the forearms and shaken him savagely. The effect was uncanny. He gasped; then he swore. I let him go. He stood stock still, appeared to shudder, and the eyes in the bright moonlight blinked like a person coming out of a trance. He backed off tensing his limbs as a man does threatened by personal assault.

"Who the hell're you?" he demanded in a deep, angry voice, a sane voice.

I repeated my name, briefly stated how I had found him.

"Now," I finished, "there's no time to fool. What can we do?"

He hesitated; then glanced down at his nude body.

"Good God, how did I get like this?" he

muttered. "Oh, yes, they stripped me after the bird sang and then I must have swooned."

"Did you hear those shots?" I interrupted. "What's that mean?"

"Fighting probably," he answered still in a foggy way. "The white priests and the black—rival cults, y'know."

He put both hands to his head as if trying to master his wits. Came a hammering on the big gates and near shouts and yells.

"Never mind that now," I told him. "How are we going to get out of this alive? Where are we anyway?"

"In the old monastery," he said dully. "But if they can't get through those gates there's a way round, but—Oh, I dunno."

Sure enough a hubbub arose at the far end of the quadrangle and several black priests rushed out of the dark shadows of the cloisters.

"Come on, snap out of that, for God's sake!" I shouted at him.

AT LAST he came to life; ran off diagonally across the quadrangle. The priests spotted us, set up a howl and raced to cut us off. A big fellow outdistanced the others with the speed of an antelope and bounded onto the pillared veranda just as my crazy man reached the shadow of the cloisters.

I paused and fired at maybe twenty paces. The Negro reeled sideways just as he was about to grab him. My man darted through a small door and I after him. I pulled up in utter darkness.

"Come on this way," I heard my stranger cry from above my head and looking up saw his silhouette against a square of moonlight in the roof.

I clambered up some rungs set in the wall.

"Lie flat," he whispered as I joined him.

We lay quietly listening. The jabbering went on down below and then they began to move away. The rhythmic drumming and distant howling continued.

"I don't think they'll dare to follow us through that hole as they know you have a gun," said he. "Perhaps they'll leave us alone till morning and then send the soldiers after us. They're pretty busy over there. With luck we'll have time to get away."

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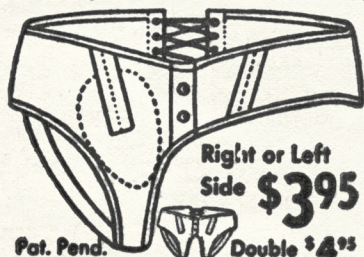
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"What, escape from the town?"

"Yes. It's the chance I've been waiting for for twelve months!"

Yet I hardly heard him. I was thinking of the fortune in emeralds down yonder in the church. After all, I'd gone through—

"How did you get that thing?" he inquired, pointing to the diadem still around my ears.

I told him.

"They're only bottle glass!"

I glared at the uncouth face as he laughed softly.

A desire to hit him mingled with a sickening sensation in the middle of my diaphragm.

"You're sure?" I gulped at last.

"Absolutely. Ah, what's that?"

A hoarse shriek had arisen from the quadrangle, followed by a renewed jabber of voices. Again the shriek. I began to crawl over the flat roof.

"No, no," he whispered, grabbing an ankle.

I KICKED loose. Cautiously I peered over the parapet. A bunch of black priests was just going through the big gates by which we had entered. They appeared to be carrying a heavy burden. I crept back and told my companion. He smiled contentedly.

"In half an hour we can leave."

"So you said," I growled a bit irritably, recollecting the lost emeralds. "But how?"

"With my white bird, the Albatross, of course!"

"Albatross!" I muttered disgustedly, thinking that he had gone crazy again. "Why not a giraffe? What on earth're you talking about?"

"I told you in my note."

"Note? What note? Oh!"

I recalled the roll which Wites had stolen.

"You had put a note in the belly of a small idol which was brought out of this country by a Portuguese trader?"

"I did. He passed as a half-caste to save his hide and joined the priesthood—clever fellow—and then bolted at the first chance. That started a fight between the two cults—the loss of the small idol, I mean, which I took from the church and gave him—and the black section sent after him."

"They got him and the idol too."

"Oh, well, you got the note in the idol all right then?"

I told him.

"Ah! I had written full instructions how to get here and what signs to make so that the half-castes would bring you to me. But I want you to see. Come."

He walked boldly along the flat roof of the monastery and pointed.

"See! I'm not balmy!" said he with the absurd pride of a child for a new toy. "There's my Albatross!"

I gasped. On the open plain fifty yards from the ramparts was a white mono-plane.

The roar of the motor I had heard! The gasoline cans in the forest!

"But—but—" I stuttered. "I don't understand. If you had— Ah, no gas?"

"Yes. But I have now. Sufficient for a few hundred miles anyhow—enough to get into British territory. Got a cigarette?"

I STILL had some makings, damp, but smokable. Deftly he rolled a cigarette sitting on the parapet.

"That's the first tobacco I've tasted for many a month! Thanks!"

"Who the devil are you anyway?" I inquired, suddenly irritated that during the excitement and his craziness I had forgotten to ask him.

"Nutterfen," said he, inhaling smoke with relish. "Wing Commander Nutterfen of the S. A. A. C.—South African Air Force, y'know. I had to make a forced landing. Busted gas pipe. Twelve months ago today! Everyone bolted. Only the half-castes had the guts to come back and see what was up."

"You see it happened to be the afternoon before the full equinoctial moon when they have a festival. About a century after the monks settled here, as far as I can gather, these blacks revolted, wiped them out and stuck up their own idol. These half-castes must be the descendants of the monks. The result was of course that their theology became mixed with native superstitions—kind of voodoo stuff. Anyhow since they've had two sects—the blacks and the half-castes. The former insist upon human sacrifice. The two cults have been scrapping about it for centuries.

"Well, I had landed as near the walls as I



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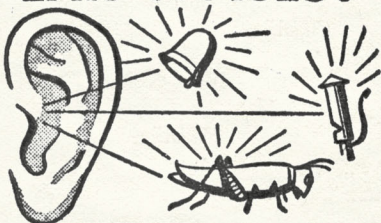
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dared. The chief priest of the half-caste cult declared immediately that the machine was a bird sent from Heaven and me to be some kind of holy prophet or something. That saved my life. The old bird speaks English and as the blacks don't he had the pull. English, by the way, has become a secret and sacred language among this cult. The roar of the motor he called singing and asked me to make the bird sing again. Well, there was just enough juice left to turn her over a few times to satisfy him—and scare the others thoroughly.

"However, later he explained that a condition of my safety was that I should make the bird sing every month. Without juice I couldn't. At last I hit on an idea. I informed the old bird that my bird required a special diet made by the whites before it could sing. That appeared reasonable enough to his notions. So he sent off to the coast or the lake—God knows where. Anyway, now and again they'd turn up with a few cans which gave me hope to save enough to get away some day."

I TOLD him about the empty cans in the jungle and asked why they had been punctured.

"Oh, probably the rival blacks. They wanted to stop this white bird business to get at the half-castes. That was why I was always locked up during the monthly dances when the crowd got worked up. Anyhow the blacks had always wanted to get hold of me and finally they did—"

"How?"

"Why tonight after I had done the singing stunt—it was always as short as possible to save juice—the blacks rushed the half-castes and carried me off. Evidently the shock—for I hadn't quite foreseen their success—must have knocked me loony."

He tossed the stub of the cigarette over the parapet and stood up.

"Hear that?"

From the church arose the moaning and howling of the myriad fiends and the drums were beating wildly.

"Time to go," said Nutterfen quietly. "Shan't need your gun, I think. They're too busy to hear her warming up."

"Sounds as if they'd got a victim after all," said I uneasily.

"They have."

"Who? Wites?"

"Unless there's another white here."

"Good God!" I exclaimed halting.

"Good nothing!" he retorted sharply.

"He double-crossed you and tried to hand you over to those black fiends, didn't he?"

"M—yes," I was forced to admit.

"Well, what good could you have done had you known in time? You couldn't have staged another rescue with one gun in a thousand years! Anyhow, I can assure you that he's gone now whoever he was. By the way, I've got overalls in the machine but I haven't got a hat."

"Sure," said I mechanically taking off the outer one of the double Tirai hat.

He thanked me and walked quickly back along the roof. I followed more slowly. Then he paused by the trap door and turned, a mad-looking figure with his hair, uncouth beard, white body gleaming and the diamond ring flashing in the moonlight.

"Well, my lad, are you going to stay and go mad for a year and then be skewered like a chicken on a spit? Oh, if you're pining after your emeralds you needn't worry. I saw to that!

"I cut up a few bottles I had with me with my ring and the Portuguese chap helped me to pry out all the emeralds and stick in glass with seccotine! They're all stowed in the machine. And—er—oh, by the way, I wrote in that note that you never read that I'd go fifty-fifty with anyone who came to save me and I'm sure you deserve it! That was why your partner double-crossed you! Coming?"

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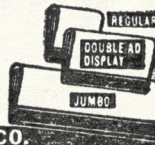
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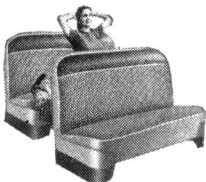
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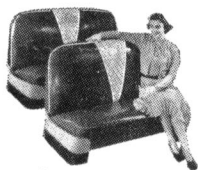
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