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WITH MADNESS**

By WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN

Missing Page



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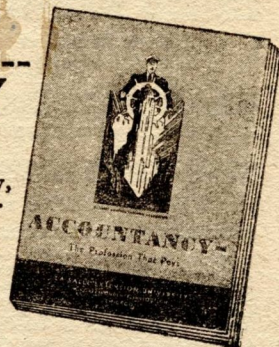
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VOL. XXXIII, No. 2

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BORN LUCKY.

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"YES"
HE'S MAKING
GOOD MONEY
IN RADIO
NOW

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IS GREAT. AND THEY
SENT REAL RADIO
PARTS TO HELP
ME LEARN
QUICKLY

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ONLY A FEW MONTHS AND
I'M ALREADY MAKING
GOOD MONEY IN
MY SPARE
TIME

THANKS

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SO PROUD OF
YOU, YOU'VE
GONE AHEAD
SO FAST IN
RADIO

YES! I'VE GOT A
GOOD JOB NOW AND
A REAL FUTURE.
THANKS TO
N.R.I. TRAINING

TOM SAID
"NO"
HE'S STILL
WAITING
FOR "LUCK"

BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE
HIS TIME STUDYING
RADIO AT HOME

SAME OLD GRIND--
SAME SKINNY PAY
ENVELOPE-- I'M
JUST WHERE I
WAS FIVE YEARS
AGO

GUESS I'M A
FAILURE.
LOOKS LIKE
I'LL NEVER
GET ANYWHERE

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE
A FAILURE, TOM,
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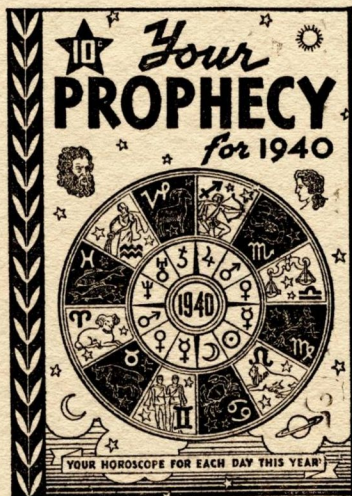


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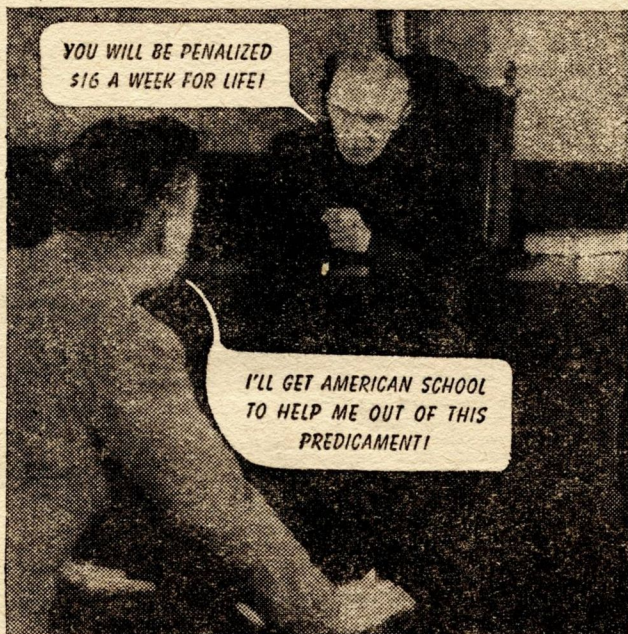
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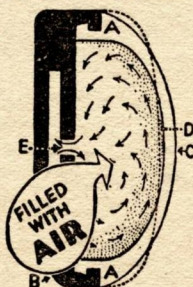
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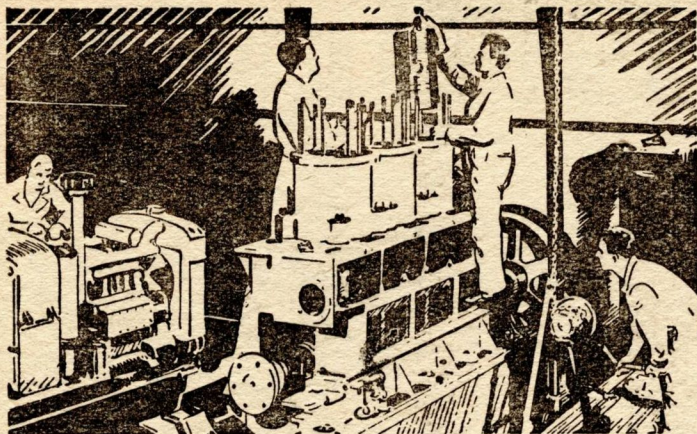
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Author of "Killer's Target," "Red Arrows," etc.

*Engineer MacLain Fights a Lone
Battle Against Heavy Odds
when He Pits Himself Against
Swampland Greed and Terror!*



"Hold it!" the engineer ordered. "Hands out in front!"



CHAPTER I

Murder in the Jungle

A ROAR as of heavy artillery, followed by what felt like an earthquake, jerked John MacLain up out of deep slumber. He swung himself out of his bunk, jackknifed erect and grabbed for boots and trousers. Outside his shack, in inky darkness, he stood in the clinging mud which lay like thick molasses over the Arkansas Sunken Lands. Instinctively, Poinsette's Chief Engineer searched the dark sky to the southwest.

Out of the huddle of bunkshacks on the west bank of the St. Francis River, some of them now with yellow lighted windows looking into the night like the eyes of squatting beasts, his staff men came to join him. None said anything, except to swear. MacLain stood watchful, lips grimly compressed.

A
Complete
Novelet

Then, against the sky in the southwest, appeared a red-gold glow like a full moon low on the horizon. The glow spread, intensified, and sudden flames jabbed up above the tree-line and serried the sky like wolfish tongues red with blood.

"Number Four water gap!" MacLain snapped. "Rod up, all of you, and let's go!"

The eight men on MacLain's staff, all armed, galloped their mounts over the newly made log railway embankment toward the red tongues in the sky.

A hundred yards short of the flaming, tumbled wreckage that had been gap Number Four, the group was forced to halt. The heat barred further progress.

"A damned thorough job they made of it!"

MacLain turned his head and nodded grimly at the speaker, George Considine, chief of the field staff. Considine's black eyes glistened with a hard, flat sheen against the flames.

"Expected trouble, sooner or later, didn't you?" MacLain asked.

"Sooner!" Considine snapped.

"Look yonder!" yelled young Pitman. He pointed a shaky finger toward something that lay on the embankment close to the burning timbers.

"Hell!" Considine cried. "It's Macey, guard at Number Four!"

MacLain slid from his horse, stripped off his rubber poncho. Shielding himself from the fire, he started running toward where Macey lay.

"One's plenty," he called back over a shoulder. "Stay there!"

Stopped by positive orders, the men waited where they were.

MACLAIN, intense heat beating against him in spite of his rubber shield, reached the huddled figure of Macey. He dropped to his knees beside him, and saw that the guard still breathed. The hair had been

scorched from one side of his battered, bloody head. His clothing smoldered. MacLain flung the poncho over the guard and hoisted him across a shoulder. He slipped and stumbled through the mud, the mounting flames flailing his steaming back like heated wires.

Fifteen yards, twenty, twenty-five—
Whoom!

A heavy-caliber rifle roared above the seething hiss and brittle crackle of the fire. MacLain felt the searing tear of hot lead across his back beneath the shoulder blades. He stumbled forward, fell to his knees.

The rifle roared again, and a bullet zoomed over him and into the jungle beyond.

The rattle and roar of rifles and revolvers informed the engineer that his men had gone into action against the ambushed rifleman, raking his cover with lead.

Findlay and Peters, two seasoned staff men, raced to the chief, relieved him of the injured guard and helped him up out of the mud. MacLain shook his tawny head like an angry bull.

"Skin wound, fellows," he said. "Just blistered. I'm okay. Shake on out of this!"

No more shots came from the brush. MacLain's men kept up a barrage of lead to cover the returning party. They reached the shadows out of the circle of flame-glow, and swiftly examined the guard.

A club had done the injury, crushing the skull badly. That Macey was dying was perfectly plain. Once, he tried to speak. But even as he opened his lips, the rattle of death was in his throat. He died without saying a word.

"Sabotage was to be expected!" MacLain exclaimed, grief and rage in his voice. "Murder wasn't!"

"Macey came onto them," Considine offered, "when they were planting the dynamite. That's why they killed him!"

"Who?" young Pitman asked excitedly.

The faces of the men hardened, but nobody spoke in answer. Nobody would even risk a guess.

"George," MacLain instructed Con-sidine, "take care of things. Get the sheriff and coroner out here."

He nodded to Findlay, Peters and young Pitman. Followed by the three, he rode off down the embankment on the west.

As MacLain rode through the deep darkness, giving his mount its own head, he was acutely conscious of the hot, seething jungle which crouched in a tangled, all but impenetrable phalanx on both sides of the railroad right-of-way. Nobody knew better than he just how relentlessly cruel the jungle could be.

Back of this jungle's green mask he now knew a menace lurked. It moved like a shadow there, following wild animal trails, and paths marked out in furtherance of its own obscure but vicious purposes.

Whence had come the menace? Who had unleashed it in the jungle and set it to do its nefarious work? Three separate and distinct elements were there—the Poinsette Company, the farmers, and the natives. From one of the three levels the menace had come. It had struck from cover and vanished through the jungle's secret places.

There had been no trouble at the other three gaps. MacLain rode back to headquarters, turned his horse over to a stableman, and sloshed through the jungle mud toward the main office.

ONE week before, John MacLain had succeeded Cordell Hampton as Chief Engineer for the Poinsette Land, Lumber & Navigation Company, often called the "Arkansas Octopus." Hampton himself had lingered on in the Sunken Lands, ready to help the younger man should help be needed.

And MacLain, walking toward the office, knew that the old man would very likely be awaiting him there—with blood in his eyes. Granting he had discovered what MacLain meant to do to the new embankment, a terrific clashing of horns was inevitable.

And Cissy would be about somewhere. Cecelia Hampton was always around when there was hell popping.

Cissy was lounging in a deep chair on the screened porch of the office building when MacLain opened the door. She was not more than five-feet-two, and her breeches and boots showed to advantage a beautifully rounded figure. She had brown hair, brown eyes which were too large for her small face, and she was too white of skin and red of lips—she was, in short, Cissy Hampton, the girl Jack MacLain was going to marry.

It was characteristic of Cissy that she did not comment on the happenings of the night.

"Mac, darling," she said languidly and without rising, "I'm afraid you are in for a mean session. If it lasts long I shall go back home to the club. Just why you see fit to antagonize my father is a puzzle to me, but you do. So go in and take it!"

MacLain eyed her carefully for a moment.

"Beat it!" he said.

He pushed on down a narrow passage into the room at the end, which he used as an office. The old man was there waiting for him.

Cordell Hampton wore his white hair cut very short. At the moment it seemed to bristle. His wide open blue eyes were frozen lakes, and he had a dead cigar clamped in a corner of his wide mouth, lifting viciously that part of his stiff mustache.

The old chief was angry. Before him on the desk lay a sheaf of blue-prints which he had evidently been scanning. MacLain tossed his shapeless old hat toward a peg in the wall, then sat down and waited.

"You discover anything definite?"

the ex-chief asked, biting his words before he let them go.

"Nothing."

"Farmers or natives? Any conclusions about that?"

"None yet. Need a little time, Chief."

The old man stared at the young one icily, while his white hair-stubble appeared to bristle still more.

"This is the specification sheet covering the water-gaps in the dummy," he rasped, stabbing a blueprint with a stubby forefinger. "On it you have seen fit to make a notation."

MacLain nodded.

"The notation is Plus Two!" the old man suddenly stormed. "Explain that!"

"It explains itself," MacLain said. "The four sixty-foot water-gaps specified are inadequate. Six will do the job. So I jotted down plus two opposite the four called for in the specifications."

THE old man became thoughtful. He rubbed his chin carelessly.

"Mac," he said quietly, "I'm out now, and you are in. I only want to help you. So I'm telling you something you haven't known about before. When I checked the specifications for the dump against the yearly overflow from the St. Francis, I knew that four gaps would not drain the flat lands promptly. I put the facts before a called meeting of the board in St. Louis—and the board turned me down cold.

"Old Rigor Mortis Murdock, penny pincher that he is, turned me down cold. Now you reach the conclusion I did—and you are going to step squarely on your own face if you alter the specifications and go back and cut two more water-channels in it. Your twenty-five thousand dollar a year job will blow up under you before you get started in it."

"I don't see it that way. If Poinsette is playing a lousy game in order to flood out the two hundred farmer

families over in the flat lands so it can pick up their holdings for a song, then I'll be finished with Poinsette. I'd want to be. If the high-ups of the outfit really believe Considine is correct, it's up to me to convince them differently.

"To okay this dump as is would likely result in drowning some of the folks over in the settlements. At least, it would ruin their land for a long time to come. I'm the sole authority here now—and I mean to put in those two badly needed water-gaps, no matter what happens to me afterwards."

"Poinsette will stop you."

"We're rather remote from headquarters," MacLain pointed out. "I'll have the work done within a week. Then Poinsette can do as it damned well pleases. You wouldn't tip them off, would you, Chief?"

"No!" the old man snapped. "But Considine found that plus two notation of yours three days ago. Told me last night. It's his job you're giving a black eye. He'll do the tipping off!"

"I'll take care of Considine," MacLain said evenly.

"All right, Don Quixote, it's your funeral," the old man declared. "But I wash my hands of you right now. As for Cissy—well, you wouldn't expect me to let my daughter marry a crackpot engineer who, with all the chances in the world to make good in a big way, is too much of a dud to seize his advantages. You wouldn't expect that, would you?"

"Suppose you speak for yourself?" MacLain said, acid in his voice. "Cissy might not see things eye to eye with you."

The old man suddenly began laughing. That suggestion seemed to strike him as really funny. Finally he sobered.

"You don't know that brat of mine like I do, young man! Better reconsider. We'll forget all this—"

"I'm going to finish this little job,

And that Four Plus Two stands!" MacLain broke in, suddenly angry.

Wordless, the old man got up and stamped into an adjoining office, banging the door behind him.

MacLain sat down at his desk. His lean face was white and drawn. What in the hell was the matter with him, anyhow? Why must he go lily-white all of a sudden and kick the beanpot over in the fire!

CHAPTER II

Too Late



SLOWLY the corridor door opened and a head was thrust through the widening crack. It was Cissy. A cigarette was in her too red mouth which grinned derisively.

"Storm blown over?" she asked, coming all the way inside.

MacLain didn't answer. Cissy came across and sat down on his desk, swinging her legs. Cissy had lovely legs, and knew it.

"In some ways you're a swell kid, Cissy," MacLain said, picking up the blueprints. "In others you're a proper hellion. But I reckon you can't help it either way."

"What's that got to do with you upsetting the *frijolies* and scattering them all over everywhere?"

"You were eavesdropping?"

"Certainly. When my father and the man I was going to marry are hooked up in battle, who has a better right to listen in than little me?"

"All right. You know it all. What's the verdict?"

Cissy lighted another cigarette and continued to swing her legs.

"Mac, old darling," she said through a fog of smoke, "all my life I've been used to having this, that and the other however and whenever I wanted it. You could hardly expect me to marry a discredited engineer who'd

be lucky to earn, say, five thousand a year."

"I wouldn't. And I'd be mighty lucky to earn the five grand."

"So why not be regular, Mac, and play the cards according to Old Mister Hoyle? Twenty-five thousand a year salary, and a block of Poinsette stock that will yield another ten or twelve thousand per. Is that to be chucked away just for a quixotic idea? To say nothing of chucking me away along with it."

"If that's the way you feel about it, then I'm chucking you too!"

The girl said nothing to that. She continued to smoke, her brown eyes squinted.

"I'll let you off from your date tonight, Mac," she said finally. "You will be feeling all let down. Considine wants the date anyhow—"

"You'll let me off from my date tonight because I've got work to do!" MacLain blazed at her. "And you'll get off my desk and out of my office and stay out so I can get started. And that doesn't mean fifteen minutes from now, but right now. This identical minute!"

Cissy slid off the desk. She made a face. On her way to the door she flipped her cigarette stub against a window screen. At the door she paused.

"Gosh, Mac!" she exclaimed, giving him a lovely smile. "I'm not so sure life wouldn't be interesting with you, even stuck off in a five-room shack and raising a gang of brats. I'll think it over—honest!"

"Get out!"

Cissy got out, closing the door gently back of her. MacLain heard the thump-thump of her small boot-heels fade out in the passage. He sat down. The bottom of his stomach seemed to have dropped out.

WELL, anyhow, he'd won. So far, at any rate.

Yes, like hell he had! He'd lost the one thing in all the world he really

cared about—Cissy. She was a selfish, spoiled little hussy. Sure, MacLain knew that. But she was the one particular selfish, spoiled little hussy he wanted for his own, and no other would do. No other would ever do for him!

He got up, went to a back window and looked out. The jungle lay in that direction too. It crouched on every side, silent and inscrutable. In the light of a murky day it was even more dismal and held even a more evil threat than when it lay under the black curtain of night.

MacLain, with nerves usually like steel wires, shivered. Then he swore. Never do to let the jungle obsess him. He couldn't let it overpower him by its weirdness, its treachery, its silent but nonetheless murderous defiance.

He jerked away from the window, snatched up his hat and went doorwards. Before reaching the door he turned back, opened a drawer of his desk and took up a holstered .45 caliber revolver, swinging in a shoulder harness. He slid out of his belted jacket and snugged the gun under his left armpit.

MacLain walked out under a sky scrofulous with moiling patches of angry clouds. The atmosphere was saturated with moisture which would soon become heavy drizzle, and then a deluge.

And the two extra water-gaps, along with a rebuilt Number Four, must be in before the big rains came! The rains would raise the swamp streams and overflow the St. Francis up against the new embankment!

A mile down the dump was located Construction Camp Number Two. "Blinker" Beatright, stable-boss at Number Two, was a native of the Sunken Lands. Little, shriveled, tough as hickory, Blinker had ridden to fame in a jockey's saddle on the big tracks of the country, had done time in at least two penitentiaries, lost one eye in a manner nobody seemed to know anything about, and had ended

up as a stable boss for Poinsette. MacLain found him in a corral-tent.

"Blinker," he said, sitting down on a box, "you are probably the best trailer in the Sunken Lands."

"No probable about it!" declared the little man.

MacLain took a field-book out of a pocket, turned to a blank page and got busy with a pencil. Presently, without a word of explanation, he handed the ex-jockey what he had sketched on the paper.

Blinker studied the sketch thoughtfully, and his good eye lighted up.

"I gotcha! This here line," indicating it with a dirty forefinger, "is the dummy-line north of Number Four gap. Them there figgers is where you stopped by the fire last night. Here's yore tracks when you went after Macey. And aside yore tracks is another set of tracks. Now, here's whereat Macey was laying. Them second tracks stopped there. Then they left the embankment and took off down the east side and into the jungle. Right?"

"Right!" MacLain said. "Follow that line of tracks, Blinker, and tell me who laid it. Also, in the brush east of the burned gap you will pick up traces of a man who hid there and fired twice at me with a rifle. One slug scorched my back. Probably the same man killed Macey. Get me the dope on it, Blinker, and I'll pay you well."

"I'll do it for you, Boss!" Blinker exclaimed, grinning happily. "I'll land the scoun'rel, too!"

"Good. Report secretly to me when you have something."

MACLAIN went back to headquarters and ate dinner with the members of his staff. After dinner he instructed Considine to put the men back to work that afternoon, and to clear away the wreckage at Number Four gap as soon as it could be done.

That night he would quadruple the

water-gap guards, and have the dump rigidly patrolled.

Contrary to the engineer's expectations, Blinker Boatright did not show up during the afternoon. Probably was waiting until after dark to make his report. MacLain hoped for something definite when it came.

At supper with his staff that night, MacLain exploded his bombshell. He quietly informed the men of his intention in the matter of the two extra gaps. The face of every man there reflected the consternation which the chief's plans created in them. Considine's face went red with anger.

"By God, MacLain!" he rasped, getting up and sending his chair against the wall with a vicious kick. "You'll not do that! Man, you must be crazy!"

"Sit down, Considine," MacLain said coldly. "And try and remember that I am chief here, not you. What I order will be done."

"Poinsette will stop you!" the field chief flared. "Wait until General Manager Murdock gets the news!"

Every man there knew that old Rigor Mortis would go up in the air. MacLain knew it. But he had his plans in that matter too.

"I'm asking each of you to carry out orders and keep your tongue between your teeth," he told the staff. "I think I can trust you. Perhaps not Considine. As for you, Considine," getting up, "if this news leaks to Poinsette ears, I'll hold you personally responsible for it."

He went out and to his office.

What had become of Blinker? Why had he not reported? Later in the night, perhaps— All the engineer could do was wait.

But the little man did not show up. MacLain kept a light in his bunkshack until twelve that night. Blinker did not appear, nor did he get a message through.

Daybreak found MacLain scouting the underbrush east of the wrecked water gap. He found without too much trouble what he expected to

find. Somebody wearing rubber boots, new, as the imprint of the soles betrayed, had entered the clump of hazel from the east. The tracks were not old. And a lighter, smaller footprint, newer by many hours, laid a course beside the rubber boots. Blinker Boatright had laid the second trail.

Somewhere, then, Blinker still was in the depths of the jungle. What had happened to keep him there? MacLain felt sick when he considered what might have happened, what probably *had* happened.

He was coursing swiftly along the trails when a movement in the brush ahead made him jump to protection back of a tree. He waited, peering cautiously around the bole. Nobody was in sight.

"Mr. MacLain!"

SOMEWHERE ahead and near at hand a woman had called his name.

"Come out of the brush!" he called back.

A girl of the swamps stepped into view not more than fifty feet ahead. MacLain recognized her instantly. He had seen Nora Boatright a couple of times, but only briefly. He had heard much of her. And, when he had approached closer, he realized that what he had heard was true.

The slender, brown-eyed, brown-haired swamp girl was even lovelier than common report declared her to be. When she spoke, her voice, throaty and low, was singularly appealing. In overalls, mocassins, red silk blouse and a knitted cap of the same color, she made a charming picture against her fitting background of green.

"Blinker said you'd be trying to follow his trail this morning," she told the engineer. "Said you'd be worried when he didn't show up. So I was expecting to run into you, Mr. MacLain. There is something he wants to tell you."

"And where is Blinker?" MacLain asked quickly.

The girl's lower lip trembled as she made answer.

"He's at my cabin. Blinker was shot up pretty badly last night. He managed to drag himself to me. He—he's bunked down for the last time, Mr. MacLain, and you must hurry."

"Get a doctor for him?"

"Yes. Doctor Perry, from the settlement. He had no hope."

"Then we had better hurry!"

"Blinker is my uncle," the girl informed him. "But I suppose you know that already."

"Yes," MacLain said, and hurried on.

A walk of half an hour through the green jungle brought them to the neat three-room cabin of logs in which Nora Boatright lived alone. She opened the door and MacLain passed inside. The room was gloomy because of curtains drawn. Standing there in the semi-darkness, MacLain had a feeling that he had come too late. It was so deathly quiet there in the room.

Nora drew aside a curtain—and the engineer's fears were realized.

Half out of his bed in a corner, both hands clutched stiffly around the haft of a hunting-knife which protruded from the left side of his chest, Blinker Boatright lay dead.

CHAPTER III

A Deadly Enemy



NORA dropped weakly on a chair and stared with grief-filled eyes at the little man in the bunk. She did not cry, or comment. She had no words.

MacLain went quickly over the place to determine whether or not the murderer had left a clue. He found nothing whatever.

"And I shall never know what it

was Blinker wanted to tell me," he said to the girl. "They got to him and sealed his lips forever!"

"He told me," MacLain was astonished to hear. "He was afraid he might die before you came—or he had a premonition of what was to happen. He told me what I must tell you, Mr. MacLain."

"Wait," MacLain told her, and hurried outside. He circled the cabin, scanned the clearing in all directions, then returned to the house. "Nobody about. Now, please, tell me what it was Blinker found out. Speak softly. You must not be overheard."

"Blinker was shot from the brush last night after he had trailed a man almost to the farmers' settlement on the river. The man wore a pair of new rubber boots. Blinker said he was the rifleman in the brush. Blinker was badly hurt, but he managed to plunge into the brush and hide among some logs. He got only a brief look at the man who shot him, and who came looking for him afterwards. It was too dark to make out who he was."

She paused, her face deathly white and her eyes feverish with excitement.

"Blinker, numbed as he was, managed to draw a revolver. He fired—Blinker swore to me that with the crack of his gun the man vanished!"

"Into the brush, no doubt," MacLain commented when she stopped speaking. "What else did Blinker tell you?"

"He said you'd be surprised to know that the man who killed Macey came from your own headquarters camp," the girl said. "He trailed the man through the brush and lost him on the dump at camp. Too many other tracks were there. He wore boots that had been half-soled and were studded heavily with nails. That is all he could learn about the killer."

Ice-water was running up and down the engineer's back. Could he believe what he had heard? Was it possible

a man from headquarters camp had done this murder?

"Blinker said one other thing," Nora went on. "He figured that the rifleman was shooting at Macey, who was on your shoulder, and not at you. He probably saw that the guard still lived, and feared he would manage to talk. As for you, well, you could be got any time. That is the way Blinker figured it out."

"And probably he was correct," MacLain conceded. "Macey was killed by somebody well known to him, and of whom he had no suspicion. How else could the murderer have got close enough to brain him with a club? He couldn't. There was nothing else?"

"Nothing—"

"Hello in the cabin!"

The voice, hailing from the clearing outside, was deep, clear and self-confident.

Nora flinched. "Jeter Gant," she whispered. "The big man of the farmers' settlement. And he knows I don't want him here!"

"Anybody in there?" the voice called again.

"Say nothing about the stabbing of Blinker," MacLain cautioned. "He died of a gunshot wound. Remember!"

NORA got up and went to the door. MacLain peered between two legs where a bit of chinking had fallen out.

The man in the clearing was above six feet tall, broad of shoulders, and not yet forty years old. Underneath his well fitting gray sack-suit, with trouser-legs tucked neatly in the tops of black, bench-made boots, one sensed great physical power. He was clean shaved, and deeply socketed gray eyes looked out over high cheekbones on which swarthy skin stretched tightly. He would attract notice in any crowd.

Jeter Gant was a power in the flat lands. He held title to several good farms, engaged in mercantile business, and was reputed to be a man of

wealth. His demeanor was marked by a dignified bearing, and his voice, usually soft and deep, rang always with self-confidence.

"Mr. Gant," Nora was saying, standing in the doorway, "was there anything especial to bring you here today?"

Deep resentment was very evident in her voice.

"Yes," came the answer. "Doc Perry told me about your uncle's injury. I called to see if there is anything I could do."

"There isn't. Blinker Boatright died this morning. I can do all that needs doing."

"Well, Nora, I'm mighty sorry to hear that!" Gant exclaimed. "And you surely won't deny a friend the privilege of offering—"

"A friend? No!" she said coldly. "But I do not think you are a friend!"

"Listen to me, Nora!" Gant soothed, moving closer. "I've asked you to marry me twice before. I'm asking you again. Your uncle and protector is gone—"

"My uncle is gone," Nora broke in. "He was never a protector. I protect myself. Now, Mr. Gant, as in the past. Will you please go?"

"No!" Gant snapped, his face congested, his pale eyes suffused. "You're going to listen to me. Sooner or later, you're going to be mine. I'm not a man who gives up easily, once I'm set on something I want. And I want you!"

He bit his words off, staring with jaw slightly dropped. MacLain had appeared suddenly in the doorway beside the girl. He stood for a moment while he measured with cold eyes the man in the yard.

"Not sporting to listen in on a man proposing," MacLain said briefly. "Could hardly help it, however. Now that you have your answer, Gant, it might be well for you to beat it!"

"So!" Jeter Gant sneered, looking contemptuously at the girl. "That's what's up, eh?"

MacLain was in front of him instantly.

"Blinker was in my company's employ," he said evenly. "When killed he was doing a special job for me. I'm here on the business of his murder. Now, will you apologize to Miss Boatright for your insulting implication, or do I have to beat the living hell out of you?"

Like a cat springing on its prey, Gant launched an instant attack. MacLain, watchful as a fish-hawk over a teeming stream, rolled with the big man's crashing blow. Gant went off balance, and before he regained his stance the tall engineer landed two terrific jolts to his jaw. Gant staggered back, recovered, came flailing in. MacLain, as skilled with his fists as he was with transit and level, side-stepped, hit from his boot-tops, and dropped Gant in his tracks.

The fight was brief and decisive. Gant struggled up almost at once, thrust a hand quickly under the left lapel of his coat. He stopped, staring wide-eyed into the muzzle of the engineer's .45.

"Hold it!" MacLain ordered brittly. "Hands out in front!"

GANT extended both hands, making no effort to resist when the engineer took his revolver from a holster under his left armpit. MacLain stepped back.

"Beat it," he said. "And don't come back!"

Gant walked slowly to the path which led off into the jungle from the north side of the clearing. There he stopped, turned, looked steadily at the man and the girl in front of the cabin. Without uttering a word, he disappeared.

"That's that," MacLain remarked, holstering his gun.

"You've made a deadly enemy, and on my account," the girl said softly. "I'm mighty sorry for that!"

"I have had enemies before," MacLain shrugged. "Have more than one

now. Gant won't cause me to lose any sleep. Go in now, Nora. I'll send the sheriff here when he comes."

MacLain went off swiftly in the direction of headquarters camp. A mile from Nora's cabin he caught a glimpse of somebody moving toward him, angling in the general direction of the river. Curious, the engineer went to cover back of a red-oak tree.

Five minutes later he stepped out from cover. George Considine, startled at the sudden appearance of his chief, came to a dead stop before him. The two men stared hard at each other, neither speaking. The masks were stripped off the faces of both in that moment. MacLain's was hard, uncompromising, accusing. Considine showed undisguised hate.

"Going somewhere, Considine?" drawled the chief.

"Would it be any of your business if I am?" Considine countered, voice thick with anger.

"Your place is on the job until five o'clock this afternoon. Company business taking you away, or your own?"

"My own!"

"I suspected as much. Considine," he said slowly, "I want the letter you are carrying out to mail!"

"You'll play hell getting it!" Considine snarled.

MacLain's iron fist came up. Considine was rocked back on his heels, sent reeling toward the fringe of underbrush. He recovered, came smashing in. MacLain waited calmly until he was near enough, then crashed home to the point of his jaw. The blow was a short-arm jab, but it had the kick of a mule in it. Considine shuddered, shut his eyes against the stabbing pain. MacLain crossed to the chin with his left and ended the fight.

When the field chief managed to struggle to a sitting position a few minutes later, MacLain was reading the letter he had meant to mail.

"To Murdock," he commented, tearing the sheet into bits. "Tipping off my hand. You're a louse, Considine,

and a lot of other things besides—"

He broke off. The toe of his boot caught Considine's right hand just before the six-gun, drawn in a flash, exploded. The bullet shredded the leaves harmlessly above.

MACLAIN picked up the gun and pocketed it. His eyes were dead.

"Get up!" he grated. "Get up and walk ahead of me to camp. I don't want to kill you, but I will if you give me cause. Try to run and I'll shoot your legs from under you. Now, get up and move!"

His face pale, but black eyes sullen, Considine got to his feet. A look into the cold and threatening eyes of MacLain appeared to convince him of the folly of resistance. He turned and walked off toward headquarters.

The sheriff and coroner came in, made an investigation of Macey's death but fixed no blame. They went then to the cabin where Blinker's body awaited them. When they came back, three hours later, they were as much at sea in the second murder as they had been in the first.

"But we'll get the skunk!" the sheriff growled.

MacLain, knowing the jungle as he did, had doubts.

He wrote a note to Cissy, and sent young Pitman to take Nora Boatright to the Hatchie Coon Club, the residences two miles from camp.

Relying on the loyalty of the remaining members of his staff, MacLain took them all into his confidence next morning.

"Considine sold us out," he told them. "He's worked hand in glove with the man or men who constitute the menace here in the jungles. I'm keeping him under guard in his shack until this job is done."

To a man they agreed that Considine should be carefully guarded, and each pledged himself to keep silent and to help.

Satisfied, MacLain gave the orders which, he had no doubt, would wash him up with Poinsette when the company learned what he had done. His dilemma had two very sharp horns. He chose to be gored by the one which would at least leave him the good reputation among fellow engineers which he had always enjoyed to the fullest extent.

MacLain's staff turned out the men that morning under leaden skies, skies that dripped water in a fine, steady drizzle.

But it was nothing unusual. It

[Turn Page]

**BIG BOY
TAKES A
TIP**



BOB: Say, fellow, are you taking Ex-Lax? Thought that was for women and kids.

JIM: Wrong, Big Boy! I've been taking Ex-Lax for years. It fixes me up fine!



BOB: Oh yeah! Well, I'm pretty husky... I need a laxative with a wallop.

JIM: Don't kid yourself! Ex-Lax tastes good, but it's plenty effective!

LATER



BOB: Thanks for the tip, pal! I tried Ex-Lax and it's great stuff!

JIM: What did I tell you! It's the *only* laxative we ever use in our family.

The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle*! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax next time you need a laxative. It's good for **every** member of the family.

10¢ and 25¢



was a morning typical of the Sunken Lands in early Spring.

Four hundred men strong they were, muckers with spades and shovels, and skimmers with their little rabbit-mules and slideslips.

In the absence of Considine, MacLain took charge in person. Two sixty-foot gaps were to be cut out of the finished embankment, forms were to be built and concrete run. There was no time to lose. Any rain might bring disaster.

MacLain saw nothing of the old man that day, nor did Cissy put in an appearance. He was glad of that. He was in a black mood.

The following day duplicated the first, except that the drizzle was heavier and more continuous. But the work went steadily on.

Young Pitman made nightly visits to the Hatchie Coon Club. Cissy and the swamp girl were becoming fast friends. Nora sent messages to MacLain, but no word came to him from Cissy. The old man stayed away from the job. The evil weather might have hindered him, but that did not explain Cissy's avoidance of the vicinity. A fine horsewoman, she rode in all sorts of weather. She was just acting up. Well, let her!

But then frightening reports came in over the office telegraph. The Mississippi was carrying a dangerous volume of water! The rains were increasing in the Ohio basin!

CHAPTER IV

Trapped With the Foe



MACLAIN drove his men as he had never driven men before, as he hated to drive them. Gamely, they responded. The work was completed under oil-flares, in a driving rain, at midnight of the fifth day.

Shortly before midnight, young

Pitman came to a stop beside the chief on the edge of the finished Gap Four.

"A note for you, Mac," he said, extending a square white envelope. "Cissy gave it to me when I was up there for supper. Said you must have it when the job was done."

Wonderingly, MacLain opened the envelope and drew out a single page upon which appeared Cissy's girlish scrawl. He stood in the light of a flare and read.

Mac, you old darling, I must be very subtle if you failed to see through me like a pane of glass. Guess, though, you didn't. But, Mac, I had to know that nobody, not even I, could make a heel of the man I want to marry. You have done what I knew you would do and I'm proud of you! Will you come to me when the job is finished, no matter what the hour?

Cissy.

MacLain felt that many tons of dead weight had been lifted from him. Something sang inside him.

"Mac, I hope you're as happy as I am," Pitman said huskily. "Nora—she's going to marry me! Isn't that great?"

But MacLain was not listening. He was staring over Pitman's shoulder at a man who was weaving drunkenly through the mud and rain in their direction. A moment, and he recognized Miller, one of the guards set to watch Considine. Miller's face was covered with blood, his clothing caked with mud.

"Boss," he gulped, "I don't know exactly what happened. I heard Powell, the guard back of the shanty, yell once. Ran around a corner of the cabin. And it felt like the cabin had fell onto my head. When I came to, Powell was dead. Stabbed in the back—"

"Considine!" MacLain cut in savagely. "What about Considine?"

"Considine is gone!"

MacLain waited to hear no more. He sprinted for the field chief's shack. Pitman was on his heels. They burst

in. The place was deserted. Considine had made his escape!

"Take charge, Pitman!" MacLain ordered. "I'll be back soon!"

Pitman ran off to the embankment. MacLain saddled a horse. He rode swiftly over the two miles between headquarters and the Hatchie Coon Club. He wanted to see Cissy. Had to see her. Just a minute or two would do. Then he could face whatever the next few hours held for him. He knew that they would be hours filled with peril.

CONSIDINE was gone. Gone, as MacLain now knew, to join the menace in the jungle, whoever and wherever he might be. And that meant trouble graver than any that had gone before.

So he had to see Cissy—

The squat clubhouse loomed up in the night, with its roomy cottages in a circle back of it. The building had not a light showing anywhere. The Hampton cottage was at the end of a row nearest him, and he rode swiftly there. Through the glass door of the entry he saw a light gleaming faintly. But nobody answered his knock. He twisted the knob. The door opened. He went in, calling, and got no answer.

The light streamed through the opened doorway of the old man's bedroom. MacLain went toward it. At first he saw nothing unusual. Suddenly, under a carelessly flung spread on the bed, something heaved and struggled. MacLain snatched the spread away.

The old man, bound with rope, gagged almost to the point of suffocation, lay there. He stared furiously up into the younger man's fear-frozen face.

MacLain snapped into action quickly. He removed the gag and cut away the binding ropes. The old man, barely able to raise himself on an elbow, became a verbal bombshell, exploding and breaking in every direc-

tion. His attack centered on MacLain.

"There was danger!" he yelled, becoming coherent. "You knew it! But you didn't set guards here for our protection. Now Cissy is gone. So is Nora. Two men, masked and unrecognizable. About two hours ago. Damn it, there's a note on my dresser. They left it. Read it! Don't stand there glaring at me!"

MacLain found a folded sheet of paper on which was traced in a printed scrawl:

MacLain, you have queered a big game. A million dollar game. See what you can do to this.

You and Old Man Hampton can raise two hundred thousand between you. If you don't, you won't see the Hampton girl and the little swamp beauty again, alive. Get the money within two days. You'll hear again soon.

Remember, no double-crossing, if you want the women back safe and sound!

MacLain suddenly felt old, old far beyond his years. So short a time before he was on top of the world!

He turned haggard eyes on the old man.

"Do you know anything at all?" he asked. "Anything useful? Can't you tell me something?"

"No!" the old man stormed. "Only that you are to blame for what happened to Cissy! Good God, they've got my girl—"

"And squawking like that won't get her back," MacLain cut in wearily. "You blame me for doing the thing you wanted to do but didn't have the guts to swing. All right. Stay there on the bed and squawk. I'm going to bring Cissy back. Nora too. And if the good Lord will only grant me a glimpse of them, there are two men in the jungles I'm going to kill!"

MacLain rushed out again into the rainy night.

The engineer had no definite plan.

But he rode at a hard gallop through the mud and rain with a hunch strong in his mind. Considine had undoubt-

edly been one of the abductors. Nora Boatright had been stolen too. Why, he asked himself, go to the trouble of carrying off the swamp girl? There was nobody with big money back of her. She would be more a burden than anything else. Then why abduct her?

The answer was easy, granting that one of the abductors was interested in her. Had not Jeter Gant made his boast that she would be his some day? What more likely then that Gant, a man of wealth, had been back of Considine in the scheme to flood the farmers out; and, since that scheme had failed, the plot to extort money from MacLain and Old Man Hampton?

MacLain meant to play his hand that way.

Back at headquarters the chief skidded his horse to a stop when Pitman, his face white and anxious in the light of the flare he carried, flagged him down.

"The St. Francis is going on a rampage!" the young engineer shouted. "Cloudbursts to the east. All the sloughs and bayous on the rise and pouring into the river. She's bank-full, Mac. And the damned dump may be too new to stand the pressure if she spills over and comes in!"

"Take charge, Pitman!" MacLain instructed. "Your chance to show your stuff. Put all the weight you can on the dump. Logs, mules, slips. Sandbag the weak spots. There's a chance the dump will hold. But get all in the clear if it gets too shaky!"

"Where are you going, Chief?"

"After Considine!" MacLain shouted, and spurred off toward his office.

He dismounted and rushed inside. A profile map hung on a wall—a map of every stream and island in the Sunken Lands. MacLain himself had compiled it, and he knew it was accurate. Lighted lamp in hand, he scanned the map.

He had a new idea. The sloughs and

bayous were swelling. The St. Francis was on a rampage. The abductors had only a start of a couple of hours—not time enough to reach a secure place of hiding.

Too many honest farmers were in the settlement for it to be used for a hideout.

With the flood coming in, the kidnapers would be forced to hunt cover at once. MacLain knew the jungle. He knew that the only place that might give them sanctuary was Duckfoot Island, ten miles across the St. Francis, up Big Hawk Bayou. It was higher ground than anywhere else in the swamp. Nobody lived on it or close to it. There were just the rotting hulls of a couple of trappers' cabins, deserted long ago.

MacLain put his finger on the spot, got exact bearings. Then he hurried through the rain to the shore of the St. Francis. It was true. The river was running a terrific torrent. The water-gauge showed a two-foot rise—and another foot would mean a flood.

The engineer found a dugout, emptied it of water. He went back to his shack, got blankets, a rifle and ammunition. He belted on another six-gun. Food was packed in a waterproof container. Back at the river again he stored his stuff aboard the dugout, got in and shoved off.

LIGHTNING played over the jungle in broad, sheetlike flares. For once in his life the engineer was thankful for lightning. But for it, he and his dugout would have come speedily to grief. He laid a course up the river, fighting with his paddle for every foot he traveled.

An hour passed, two hours. He knew from the surge of incoming water, that the river must have overflowed its banks. It would back across the flatlands and menace the embankment.

He was certain that Duckfoot Island would be the spot the abductors would

make for. When he came, two hours later, to where Big Hawk Bayou poured its swollen tide into the St. Francis, he headed into the torrent. He felt that soon he would come to grips with the Menace and reach an end to the mystery which had puzzled him. He felt a strange elation at the thought.

MacLain was in the very heart of the jungle. Of human habitations there was no sign. The rain came down with increasing violence. He had to bail his boat at frequent intervals.

Daylight came, drab, cold and ugly. He saw then that the bayou had spread out of its channel and covered the ground on all sides. But the water was still clear as crystal. No Mississippi mud as yet. If only the Big River would hold—

He came to Duckfoot. He couldn't see the island, but he knew that beyond the dense growth of water-wil-lows, beargrass and flags the island lay.

What would he find? Cautiously, he pushed the nose of his dugout through the river growth, and sent it up on the mud ahead. He had finally reached his goal.

Sitting down in the boat he surveyed what lay before him. Within sight were the two deserted cabins. They were up two hundred yards from shore line. The farther one, standing on the highest ground, had a thin wisp of smoke spiraling up

from its chimney. Some chance camper, or had his hunch been right?

Rifle under his arm, MacLain stepped ashore.

Zing!

A rifle spat viciously. MacLain saw the course of the bullet as it shattered the water-growth beyond him. He did not hesitate, but leaped into the heavy growth of the bayou, wading out as far as he could. When the water became too deep he stopped, sheltered by the flags between.

From the cabin on the high ground two men ran. Briefly he glimpsed them. But even that was enough. He knew they were Considine and Gant. They gained cover. The engineer reasoned that they would work their way down to the spot where he had plunged into the bayou.

Cautiously, careful not to disturb the foliage, he moved away from the spot. He made his way to the shore. He could not tell where Considine and Gant were, but he had to take a chance.

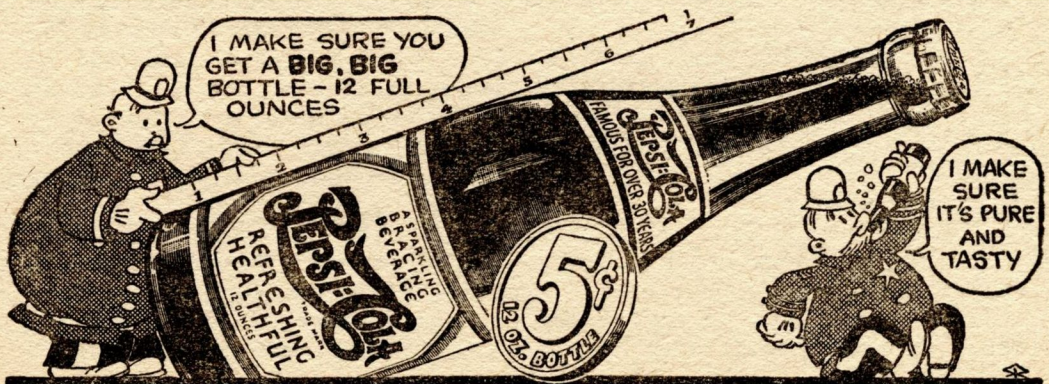
Stepping ashore, zigzagging, taking advantage of all the cover that offered, he ran for the cabin on the high ground. He reached it, crashed through the doorway, slammed the door behind, and stood panting in the semi-darkness.

"Cissy!" he called.

"Mac! Oh, Mac—thank God!" she answered.

Whatever else might happen,

[Turn Page]



MacLain had found the hideaway of the jungle menace!

He groped his way through the gloom to a corner where Cissy and Nora lay on blankets spread on the floor. They were bound, but not gagged.

He made swift work of the ropes, lifted Cissy up and held her tight for a moment.

"Mac!" she cried brokenly. "I've been a fool! Those men never intended to return us. They wanted money for a getaway. It didn't fool you, did it?"

"No. Abducting you would put the fat into the fire. That's why I knew I had to find you. I know their game, both of them, in fact. Considine and Gant are desperate now."

NORA pointed to some marks on the logs of the cabin that were up almost to the rafters.

"That's how high the water gets here," she said uneasily. "If there is a real flood—"

"We're on the highest ground," MacLain pointed out. "Before the water can get up here and drown us out, the rest of the island will be under deep flood. Considine and Gant will have to take to their boat. This is the final place of refuge. And they can't get in here!"

"Point is," Cissy said ruefully, "can we get out of it, safely?"

"I've got a scheme," MacLain said. "Right now, though, I'm hungry as a wolf. If there's grub about, suppose you try me on some?"

There was. Cissy and Nora got busy at the fireplace. MacLain watched from the front, and made frequent trips into the shack and peered out behind.

He saw nobody.

If Considine and Gant were still on the island they were keeping mighty still about it.

They were planning a rush on the cabin, probably, when they figured the time ripe.

CHAPTER V

A Fight to the Finish



WHEN he had finished eating, MacLain stationed Nora and Cissy as look-outs. Taking up an ax from a corner, he went into the lean-to. The walls were of hewn logs. The engi-

neer attacked the logs at the rear with his ax and a piece of stanchion which he used as a pry.

Within two hours he had the groundwork of a substantial raft laid with logs on the lean-to floor. The roof of the room sagged, but the end wall kept it from collapsing.

"You can't move that thing out of here!" Cissy exclaimed, after watching the engineer strip the logs with boards from the floor.

"The flood will do that for me," MacLain said, and secured the bow with a length of rope. "If it comes to that, Cissy, this thing may be our one and only chance to ride out the high water."

It was almost dusk when MacLain saw Considine and Gant again. One moment the island between the cabin and the fringe of jungle at the rear was unpeopled. The next instant, the two men were racing from cover, heading for the back. MacLain shoved his rifle through a chink-hole and fired.

Considine plunged to cover in some buckbrush. Gant wasn't slow to follow. Then a hail of lead was let loose from the brush. MacLain crouched low in the protection of the floor logs, and watched through a small hole. After a bit the firing ceased.

"Come out of there, MacLain!" Jeter Gant called threateningly. "You are holed up, and ought to have sense enough to know it. Come out, and we'll let the women go, after the old man pays up. Stay there, and we'll

pot all three of you like so many rabbits. You hear me?"

"Sure," MacLain called back. "Just inviting me to come out and be shot. Well, that doesn't make sense. You must be mighty desperate, you fellows, to make a proposition like that. Don't blame you, at that!"

"Figue you know a lot, don't you?" came sneeringly from Gant.

"Know plenty to hang the pair of you. Considine killed Macey. You, Gant, first shot and then stabbed Blinker. Then you killed Powell so your crooked pal could escape from his shanty. All because you wanted to flood the farmers out, buy their land for a song, then resell it to Poinsette for a huge profit. You, Gant, bought Considine. And that's why he allowed for only four water-gaps instead of

themselves again. But MacLain knew they would be active enough before he was done with them—or they with him, as the case might be.

Terrific deluges ushered in the night, with wind and almost continual lightning. MacLain watched from the front. Cissy and Nora took turns watching from the rear. It was almost certain that the two desperate killers would attack during the night.

At midnight only the beat of rain and the roaring of wind and thunder had disturbed the quiet. MacLain grew uneasy. True, Gant and Considine might have gone. But that was hardly likely.

Then, with startled eyes, MacLain saw something in the flare of the lightning which caused every nerve and muscle in him to tighten. Something

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six. Then he and you dynamited one of 'em. It's all plain enough, now."

Gant laughed uproariously. "Grant-ing you are right—which I don't—you're in a hell of a spot to make that sort of talk. As a matter of fact, the natives blew up Number Four. Why would we do it?"

"You meant to blow up all of the gaps. That would be to harass us and give us so much work repairing that I wouldn't have time to put in the two extra gaps. Just one flood was all you skunks needed. But we guarded them and the dump too closely. Well, anyhow, whatever happens here, you won't profit a single dollar!"

Considine and Gant answered this with another barrage of lead. It was wasted. MacLain was lying in good protection. Then followed a long silence.

Gant and Considine did not show

crept out of the jungle to the west. It held even more menace than did the presence on the island of Gant and Considine.

MacLain saw the slow but inexorable surge of flood waters as they came up from the depths of the forest and spread out over the island.

It would be only a matter of a few hours until the whole island would be inundated. By noon of the next day, at the latest, water would stand eight feet high in their own cabin!

Where had Considine and Gant taken refuge?

The engineer got the answer to that at daybreak. Peering out across a flood within ten feet of his cabin door, he saw a bateau tied at the door of the old cabin in the lower ground. It could belong only to Considine and Gant.

They had been forced to occupy the

other cabin. Water was even then standing above the doorsill!

Quietly, MacLain informed the two young women of what they faced. He was thankful to find them both taking things without flinching. They were game, and showed it.

"Considine and Gant will be forced to act very soon," he said. "And what I'm going to do now will probably bring matters to a head quickly. Watch!"

VERY deliberately, MacLain drew a bead with his rifle on the port gunwale of the boat tied at the lower cabin's door. He spaced his shots, sending his lead into the flimsy wood below the waterline. He didn't stop levering his gun until he had nearly emptied the magazine.

Yells of rage, accompanied by heavy gunfire from the lower cabin, informed MacLain that Considine and Gant had realized what his shooting was about. They knew the desperate spot he had put them in.

For, even while they yelled their rage and sent futile lead into the upper cabin's walls, the splintered bateau sank beneath the water.

"How about it now?" he called out. "Who's got who where the hair is short!"

"You damned fool!" Considine roared. "That was the only boat left and you've wrecked it!"

"But you're in as much of a spot as we are!" Gant shouted a reminder. "If we can't leave, you can't either!"

"That's what you think!" MacLain taunted. "But you're dead wrong, Gant. Wait a couple of hours, and you'll get what I mean!"

Silence, then; and the flood rose higher. It lapped the doorsill of the upper cabin, came greasily in over the floor. It would be only a matter of hours—

A hoarse shout from below drew the engineer's attention outside. Considine was calling.

"What's your proposition?" he

wanted to know. MacLain smiled grimly at the fear in the man's voice.

"What's troubling you?" he called out. "Water getting pretty high down there?"

"You'll pay for all this, damn you!" Gant raged hotly. "We ain't through with you yet!"

"What's your proposition, MacLain?" Considine cried again. He was rapidly getting panicky.

"Shut up!" Gant bellowed. "You ain't going to accept it, no matter what it is!"

"I'm not going to stay here and drown like a rat!" Considine shrielled. "That devil up yonder would let us do just that! What do you say, MacLain?"

MacLain spoke in low tones to the girls and got their answers.

"I'm told each of you has a pair of six-guns and a rifle," he called across the flood. "Throw all your guns out into the water. Then we'll talk turkey!"

For a full minute the two in the lower cabin did not answer. They were stunned at the proposal. Finally Gant laughed derisively at MacLain.

"You're even a bigger fool than I thought!" he sent up with the laugh.

"What can you offer us?" Considine wanted to know. His voice had a quaver in it now.

Little wonder, for the flood was at least thigh-deep inside the cabin by then, and rising speedily. Considine knew the terrors of high water too well not to be deathly afraid of the trap whose jaws he could even then feel closing on him.

"I've got one good raft already built," MacLain told him. "Enough material handy to build another. If you want to go out on one, act damned quick!"

"You're lying!" Gant shrielled at him. MacLain noted the strain in his voice, too. "You haven't got a raft!"

"Wait an hour and it will float around where you can see it. I've got it. Made it last night—"

"We heard him chopping and pounding up there!" Considine broke in. "And you can bet he's got a raft. I'm going to take him up!"

"Like hell you will!" Gant threatened. "I'll kill you myself, damn you, if you try it!"

Considine swore and fell silent.

Another hour passed. The flood had risen so high in the upper cabin that it had driven Cissy and Nora to refuge on top of a table.

The flood also enabled MacLain to float his raft out where the logs had been taken from the wall. He tied it there, in plain view of eyes he knew would be watching.

"The sight of that raft will bring action," he predicted to the girls. "And prompt action, if I know anything about people."

IT DID. Considine screamed. His voice was strained. It scarcely sounded human; more like the shriek of a terrified animal.

"I'm taking you up, MacLain! I'm coming out!"

MacLain saw him leap through the doorway into the flood, tossing his rifle and revolvers out ahead of him. He came struggling through waist-deep water toward the cabin.

Whoom!

A rifle snarled in the cabin back of him. Considine stopped still, flung both hands up. He crumpled down under the water.

Gant had killed his tool in plain sight of the three in the upper cabin!

"That helps our situation," MacLain called out, "and doesn't improve yours a bit. What about it, Gant—want to go out of here with us? Rather hang than drown? Make your choice!"

How long the desperate killer would have stuck it out can never be known. But the decision was taken out of his hands. The flood right then decided the matter for him.

Astonished, MacLain saw the lower cabin shudder like a live thing. The far end began to collapse. A shell at

best, it was succumbing to the action of the waters on the rotted ground logs. Swiftly, the whole roof then dropped in, and the end wall nearest the engineer tottered to a fall.

The lower cabin was disintegrating under MacLain's very eyes!

The girls saw it. They shrilled their fright.

Then Gant was in the water, both hands held up to show his revolvers and rifle in them.

"I'm coming up!" he yelled, throwing the guns into the water.

Ten minutes later, wet to the skin, pale and haggard, Jeter Gant stepped across the flooded doorsill and into the cabin.

"You win, MacLain. You and the damned water!"

Then, like a snake striking, Gant went for a hideout under his coat. His right hand came up, fingers gripping the butt of a revolver.

His raucous laughter filled the little cabin.

"Said you'd pay, damn you! And pay you will!"

He raised his weapon to cover the engineer.

MacLain was not caught napping. Before the killer could squeeze the trigger of his gun, MacLain's revolver roared.

Jeter Gant died on his feet.

FOR twelve miserable hours in unrelenting rain, MacLain poled his raft through the flooded jungle. Cissy and Nora, reduced almost to a state of drowning, never lost their gameness. It was a situation that demanded the best in all of them. Just how the trip was managed, none of them could ever say exactly. MacLain's sense of direction was his sole guide.

In the morning the downpour ceased. Then the sky cleared and the sun came out. Through the timber MacLain caught glimpses of people running about. Boats were coming toward the raft. Then he saw a section

of the railroad embankment and knew it had held.

Almost out on his feet, he nevertheless felt exultation surge through him. His action had been justified!

Now let Poinsette fire him if it wanted to. He'd done a good job, and to hell with Poinsette!

Dimly he heard Pitman shouting, saw his bateau lay alongside the raft. Then the old man, face beaming with happiness, laid a dugout alongside. The raft was towed in against the dump. The hazardous trip was over!

After supper that night, MacLain, the old man, young Pitman and the two young women sat in MacLain's office. MacLain told in detail all that had occurred.

He had barely finished when the telegraph began tapping from St.

Louis. MacLain himself took the message.

JOHN MACLAIN
CHIEF ENGINEER
HEADQUARTERS CAMP
GARPOINT ARKANSAS

YOUR HIGHHANDNESS APPEARS
TO BE JUSTIFIED STOP HAMPTON
ADVISED TWO EXTRA GAPS SAVED
FARMERS AND POINSETTES RAIL-
ROAD DUMP STOP CONGRATULA-
TIONS STOP BUT DONT LET IT GO
TO YOUR HEAD STOP

SIGNED ROBERT MURDOCK
GENERAL MANAGER

MacLain grinned, and passed the message to Cissy. She read it.

"Pouf!" she said, "there goes my dream of a little shack and a gang of brats! Well, Mac darling, we'll just have to make the best of it!"

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You Can Only Die Once

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

Author of "Arrows of Doom," "Avenger Guns," etc.



Hayden cut savagely at the giant clam

JIM HAYDEN'S eyes and mouth were stern parallel lines in his lean, bronzed face as he stared across the brassy waters toward the approaching *zaroug*. A fiery breeze blowing up through the straits of Bab el Mandeb bellied out the single sail of the fleet little Arab boat nearing the islands of the Farsan archipel-

Jim Hayden's Life Is in the Balance When He Fights to Pay Off an Honor Debt!

ago. The Eastern air sweated placidly, giving no hint of danger.

Under a sky of fire, the Red Sea lay shimmering in heat waves that blurred the three turbaned men in the boat. The face of one man, sharper and more cruel than that of his two darker companions, stirred the coals of Hayden's memory uneasily.

With time only for a guarded glance at his nearby boat, Hayden saw the powerful, black Somali, Kassim, at watch at the prow. It was not the American's place to sit in an open dugout, exposed to the shriveling rays of a pitiless sun while he watched a Sudanese diver through a glass-bottomed box. The diver who worked with Ahmed, however, was ill with fever. Hayden was anxious to close his diving operations—to convert the small fortune in lustrous pearls aboard the lugger into cold, hard cash, if he could come to terms with the pearl-buyers of Aden.

A sick diver meant lost time, and already the debt to Peter McGregor had gone too long unpaid. When your life has been purchased with the life of another man, that debt can't be paid in money. But there were things to be done which Mac would wish done. That old debt weighed heavily on Jim Hayden's mind.

When Hayden shifted his weight in the pirogue and leaned over the glass-bottomed box again, he had a clear view of the sea floor. A batlike electric ray leisurely crossed his field of vision. Spangled, darting fish, and a great, black figure struggled in the forest of waving kelp and sea grasses below.

Hayden stiffened, momentarily expecting the Sudanese to rise with the oyster in his hand. When Ahmed dropped the white shell, a dark suspicion flashed across the American's mind. It was a greater depth than he had ever dived, but fresh in his mind was the memory of a night in Djibouti when the giant Sudanese had broken the arm of a man who had tried to stab him from behind.

Hayden dropped his lancelike iron

pole. Knife in hand, he dived, a milky wake of air bubbles rising behind him as he went down—down—down. The pain in his ears became a maddening torture as he forced himself farther and farther down. Lightning streaked across his vision.

The American caught a heavily-muscled arm, and then a leg. In the clear water, he saw the reason for Ahmed's struggles. A giant clam with the diameter of a drum had closed its powerful valves on the black man's leg. The hopelessness of Ahmed's position struck Hayden like a blow, for already his tortured lungs screamed for air and black specks danced before his eyes at the unaccustomed depth.

AMPUTATION of the leg seemed the most likely to succeed. Hayden, however, could not bring himself to mutilate the Sudanese even in the choice of saving his life. He attacked the ligament by which the giant bivalve clamped itself to a rock. His big, razor-edged knife seemed to make no impression on the tough muscle.

Ahmed's struggles grew more feeble. Hayden himself could scarcely conquer the overwhelming desire to breathe. Working almost entirely by feel, he slashed desperately. The knife was cutting, but when he put his draining strength against it, the big shell still failed to give.

The darkness sweeping over Hayden was blasted away by bursting balls of yellow light. His heart pounded under the pressure. He had to go up or drown! But he kept up the attack, gambling his last chance to save himself. The great shell gave a little. Summoning all his remaining strength, the American cut away the remaining ligament.

He caught Ahmed's arm, and straightened bent knees to force himself toward the surface. Air carried him upward like a bubble. Hayden did not know just when the Sudanese

became a dead weight or when he instinctively fought with his free arm against the combined weight of an unconscious man and a giant clam. But the great clam, its ligament severed, soon dropped away to the depths.

Hayden rose toward a silver sheet—the surface. At last he could suck air into his famished lungs. Fresh air made him giddy. He could barely make the pirogue, and then he could only cling to it, supporting Ahmed's dead weight.

He had not long to wait. Kassim, the whites of his eyes rolling, reached him in the ship's pirogue. He pulled Ahmed into the dugout. Hayden clung to the stern.

"Quick, now!" the American cried sharply in French.

When Kassim had paddled to the lugger, Hayden made his way up the accommodation ladder. He grasped one of Ahmed's limp hands, and with difficulty got the giant Sudanese over the rail. Kassim sprang after him, and then his powerful jaw dropped.

"May Allah give us strength."

Hayden wheeled. Three men in the white robes of Arabs stood on the deck. Gleaming modern rifles—not Belgium trade guns—were leveled at them, and on the other side of the lugger Hayden saw the sail of the *zaroug*. The three men had boarded the boat during Kassim's absence.

The sharp, cruel, dark faces of the two Arabs were sufficient indications of their intentions, but it was the third man who made Hayden realize the hopelessness of his position. Now no shimmering heat waves obscured his face. Arab dress and black beard were not sufficient to hide the identity of that saber-scarred man. The American felt a swift fury kindling within him at again meeting the Prussian he had so long sought.

The tall, thin Arab known as Abd el Mandeb and his smaller shadow, Mohammed Ali, had been pointed out to Hayden in Djibouti as illicit slave traders and suspected pirates. Rein-

hold Volbrecht's ventures in hashish, slaves and piracy had been elusive rumors which Hayden had never been able to verify.

The Prussian's voice was harsh and guttural when he spoke. "Again the American *schwein* is my prisoner!"

MOHAMMED ALI lowered his rifle, his finger grew taut on the trigger. But Volbrecht knocked up the rifle.

"Fool! Do we know where this *schwein* keeps his pearls? First, we must make him talk."

Hayden's twitching blue eyes measured the distance to Volbrecht. Five yards! He would have taken the mad chance had it not been for the unconscious Sudanese. More than once Ahmed had saved his life.

Hayden spread-eagled Ahmed, face down. There was no time to lose in administering first-aid, but Volbrecht had other ideas.

"*Herr American*, you will show us now where your pearls are hidden."

For a moment, their glances warred. The hard brownness of Hayden's lean face mirrored his contempt as he began the first movements to expel the water from the Sudanese mate's lungs.

"*Herr American!*"

Hayden did not pause.

"You may not hear, but you can feel!"

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the Prussian approach. His dark face was purple with rage at the contempt shown him. Still Hayden refused to break the rhythm of his movements. Volbrecht stopped three feet away, aiming the rifle at his head.

"*Herr American!*" The Prussian's guttural voice was hoarse. "I give you one more chance—your last!"

Hayden's body stiffened, awaiting the impact of that bullet. It was not because of bravado that he refused to obey; it was because of Ahmed's need! To break the rhythm, to abandon efforts to start him breathing would cost the Sudanese his life—the

life he had already risked in Hayden's defense more than once.

So Hayden continued first-aid, full well knowing that brutality of the man threatening him. He knew full well that Volbrecht was capable of the act and in his anger might forget that he did not yet know where Hayden's pearls were hidden.

* * * * *

Reinhold Volbrecht was injured when the plane in which he was strafing men in the trenches was struck by flying fragments of an "archie" shell. Subsequently put in charge of a prison camp, he made life hell for Allied prisoners, not only by severe punishment for minor infractions of the rules and by withholding medical attention in cases where it meant life, but also by selling the meager sustenance rations of the prisoners and putting the coin into his own pocket. To be a prisoner under Volbrecht meant slow starvation.

A mounting wrath took possession of Jim Hayden as he saw Volbrecht growing fatter each week while every week men foul with the sores of deficiency diseases were carried away in sheets to be buried. He would have killed the man in charge of the prison if he could, but the Prussian wisely avoided the prison yard.

Money was smuggled to prisoners in certain ways, and in this respect Hayden was fortunate. A Pole who had been contemptuously treated by Volbrecht might be bribed. But Peter McGregor tried to show him the futility of attempting escape.

"Wait, maun," Mac advised. "If there be a chance oot o' here, I'm wi' ye heart and soul. But ye cannae trust that Pole."

YOUNG and impulsive though Hayden was then, he heeded the Scotch aviator's advice. Peter McGregor was his idea of a great man. He had shot down sixteen German planes before a conked motor had ended his flying days. Patient, quiet,

humorous McGregor was the one ray of light in that miserable camp. He doctored the sick, and he calmed men reaching the limits of human endurance.

When Volbrecht tried to introduce the goose-step into the camp and Hayden went to solitary confinement and bread-and-water for refusing to comply, even Mac could no longer restrain him. Out of solitary, he bribed the Pole and began making a rope of strips of sheet. With heart-breaking difficulty Hayden cut the bars in the latrine. Though disapproving, Mac helped him twist the bars back—and withdrew the sheet-rope when he had gained the courtyard below.

It was as the Scot feared. Karsack had betrayed him, and there were other guards below. Several bayonet thrusts left Hayden between life and death. No doctor came; Volbrecht feared discovery of the food which should have reached the men.

For weeks Hayden was delirious. He did not know he was receiving meager rations as well as his own. And when his mind cleared sufficiently, Mac was a living skeleton as the result of his sacrifice, dying of consumption.

Tears smarted Hayden's eyes as he took the bony hand.

"Why did you do it, Mac?" he asked hoarsely.

A faint twinkle came into the rheumy eyes. "I've nae regrets, lad. And I'm o'er weak where ye Amurricans are concerned. There's a wee lassie. I met her in the States, and we were to be married. She wrote that she was crippled by a car, and asked me to break it off. But I wudnae hear o' it. I was plannin' to take care o' her, and noo—"

"I understand," Hayden's eyes were swimming. "She'll never want for anything if I can ever get out of here."

"Aye." Mac's eyes closed, and he tried to smile. "Mind ye noo, lad, I'll gi' ye her address. Don't ferget."

"Never," said Hayden.

Mac died that night in Hayden's arms, and the youngster faced the wall and beat it with his fists while tears ran down his cheeks and murder corroded his blood. He promised himself then that he would do two things. He would provide for the girl Mac had left behind, and he would kill Volbrecht.

After the armistice, he drew his pay and sent it to Karen Morley. And then he returned to Germany. But, though he had found Reinhold Volbrecht's old friends and old haunts, he could not find the man he sought. It was then Hayden heard the first rumors that Volbrecht was in the illegal hashish trade at Red Sea ports.

Lacking money, Hayden returned to the States. The woman Mac had hoped to marry showed traces of former beauty, but now she lay strapped to a board. Doctors said she would never walk again. Karen Morley had pride, too, and it was only when he convinced her what Mac had meant to him that she would accept his help.

DRIVEN by a desperate necessity, Hayden took whatever work promised the most money. Caisson work, then diving. With the girl's immediate needs taken care of, Hayden set out for the Red Sea. He had a lugger built, and took aboard a crew of Somalis on the North African coast. Rumors of Volbrecht were persistent, but proof was always lacking. Pearl-*ing* provided expenses, and Hayden bided his time, asking, always asking, about a saber-scarred Prussian called Volbrecht.

And then the doctor who cared for Karen Morley wrote Hayden. An operation could be performed, with the advance of medical science, which would enable the woman to walk again. Hayden wrote that he would have enough money in a year.

Now that year drew to a close. The pearls he had garnered, even after paying the Somalis their share, would pay for Karen Morley's expensive

operation and long convalescence. But he had lost—in every way. Volbrecht would have those pearls; Volbrecht would kill him.

Even as he continued his efforts at resuscitation, Hayden saw the rifle tremble in the Prussian's hands. It was coming now! Death was at his elbow.

It was a national characteristic which saved Hayden at that moment. Arabs are cruel, but they admire bravery. Hayden had not flinched, he had not begged for mercy.

A crafty light came into the black eyes of the tall, turbaned Arab.

"You feel a kindness toward this man, *Herr* Volbrecht?" he asked.

The Prussian turned, an oath rumbling in his throat. His small, piggy mouth puckered.

"Are you a fool, Abd el Mandeb? I am going to kill him!"

"Mercifully. Quickly. That is a kindness."

Volbrecht hesitated. "I see what you mean."

"There are other ways for one's enemy," purred Mohammed Ali. "Slower ways—but as sure."

"After he has told us where his wealth is hidden," said the tall Arab. "Allah blesses the wise man with wealth."

Ahmed was stirring under Hayden's skillful manipulations. Breathing! Every second of delay tipped the scales further in the American's favor. If he could bring the Sudanese around, weak though he would be, he was a good man to have in a fight, utterly without fear!

Little water remained in his lungs now, and his breathing momentarily became more normal. Finally he opened his eyes blankly. Hayden continued his first-aid treatment, a surge of triumph sweeping over him.

Finally Ahmed tried to rise, but Hayden pushed him back.

"Enough!" Volbrecht growled uneasily.

He was apparently thinking of the

five other pirogues and the Somali pearl-divers who might soon be returning. Hayden was thinking of them, too, but not counting heavily upon their returning in time to be of any assistance.

It was Kassim who forced matters. Believing that he saw a chance while the two Arabs were watching Hayden, he uttered a cry calculated to temporarily paralyze his enemies. If it hadn't been for that blood-curdling yell, their chances might have been improved.

Kassim hurled himself at the tall Arab from one side. Abd el Mandeb lacked time to bring his gun around. It exploded harmlessly into the air as he was borne backward toward the deck by an attack which would have found approval in the eyes of an African savage.

NEVER one to lose an opportunity, Hayden realized that Ahmed no longer needed his help while Kassim did. His small, piglike eyes narrowing, Volbrecht swung around at the sounds of commotion. He aimed his gun pointblank at the Somali. At the same moment, Hayden sprang.

He struck the gun up as it exploded. His fingers missed the barrel.

Mohammed Ali was torn between two loyalties. The tall Arab and the Somali were rolling over on the deck. The one on top pounded the head of his opponent to the hard decking, but neither one could stay on top for more than a split second. When Mohammed Ali saw Abd el Mandeb withdraw a knife from his robe, he decided that the Prussian most needed his assistance.

Hayden saw the rifle being aimed at him as he struggled to wrench Volbrecht's weapon from his hands. The American brought the Prussian between himself and the smaller Arab.

In his excitement, Mohammed Ali failed to check his impulse. His rifle spat flame. Volbrecht howled as a

bullet grazed his shoulder. Blood stained his robe, but he was not badly hurt.

Mohammed Ali had no opportunity to get into a better position to shoot the American. Ahmed had staggered to his feet. He was still probably vague as to what was going on, but the sight of Hayden struggling with the Prussian gave him a cue. The giant Sudanese stumbled toward Volbrecht.

It would have been all over then if Mohammed Ali had not rushed down on Ahmed from behind. Hayden screamed a warning, but the Sudanese did not understand. The small Arab smashed his rifle down on Ahmed's head. A blow that would have crushed a white man's skull.

The deflection of interest, however, had been to Hayden's advantage. He released his hold on the rifle, rocking the Prussian with a vicious uppercut. The rifle clattered to the deck. Volbrecht fought to keep his footing. His hand fumbled for a pistol as he regained his balance. But as it appeared, Hayden struck again.

They went down together. The pistol slithered across the deck from the impact of Volbrecht's contact with the hard wood.

Hayden's fingers closed on that flabby throat—where they had ached to close for so many years. Volbrecht's small, piggy eyes popped as steel fingers applied a murderous pressure. He struck desperately, but Hayden's fingers tightened—tightened—tightened—

Abruptly Hayden found himself seized from behind in a hammerlock. He struggled to break the hold, but his head was forced forward until he thought his neck would crack.

"Quick!" panted the voice of Abd el Mandeb from behind him.

MOHAMMED ALI came running with a rope. Hayden saw that they had lost in all quarters. Kassim lay in a pool of blood on the deck. He was gasping his last. Ahmed lay

unconscious, perhaps dead for all the American knew, from the blow he had been struck.

Hayden's arms were quickly bound behind him. Then his legs were tied securely and drawn back. Wrists and ankles were so fastened that Hayden knew he could never possibly escape without help. When he lay a helpless bundle on the deck, Volbrecht kicked him three times in the ribs. Hayden's senses reeled from the pain, but he clamped his lips in a hard, white line, refusing the Prussian the satisfaction of hearing him groan.

"Tie up the Sudanese the same way." Volbrecht's guttural voice was harsh. "Then take them below deck. We don't want them in sight when the pearlers return."

"This black man," Mohammed Ali purred, "would bring a good price in the slave market."

"He's too dangerous," growled Volbrecht. "Too strong. Too likely to make trouble. We'll have all the slaves our *zaroug* will carry."

"What is your plan?" Abd el Mandeb frowned.

"To sink the boat when we have found the pearls and taken the crew prisoners."

"It will be pleasant to the sight of Allah," Abd el Mandeb nodded approval, "that this Christian dog should die."

Jim Hayden had been a long time below deck before he heard a triumphant exclamation from one of the Arabs. From the direction of the sound, he knew the copper-inlaid coffer in which he kept his pearls had been found. He thought of a once beautiful woman, doomed to be strapped to a board for the remainder of her life. Anger tightened his muscles.

"Sorry, Mac," he muttered into the darkness.

In his mind's eyes, Hayden pictured that homely, humorous face. Mac, dying because he had given up his meager rations in order that an Amer-

ican doughboy could live. Hayden's eyes stung. No man wanted to die with such a debt unpaid!

He heard Ahmed stirring. Slowly Hayden worked his way toward the Sudanese. "Can you hear me?"

"*Mais oui!*"

"When they have taken our crew prisoners, this boat will be sunk—with us aboard."

"It is the will of Allah that all men must die, Master."

No fatalist, he humored Ahmed's beliefs. "What is written is written. It may be written that we are to live."

"As Allah wills."

"Can you reach the ropes which bind me?"

"I will try, *nakhoda*."

BY BACKING up to Hayden, Ahmed was able to touch the ropes with his fingers. Numb fingers, however, useless because of tight ropes around his wrists. He could do little. Rolling over, Ahmed attacked the ropes with his strong teeth. As minute after minute sped by, Hayden's heart pounded heavily. The Sudanese seemed to meet with no success.

Faintly could be heard the thud of a pirogue against the hull of the lugger. He could not allow his men to fall into the trap if he could prevent it! He raised his voice in a shout of warning. But the cry had the opposite effect from what Hayden had intended. Apparently the men heard and thought he had called them. There was a thud on deck; then another thud. Unwittingly Hayden had assisted the Arabs and Volbrecht in surprising one team of divers.

Four more pirogues would return. Perhaps one of the Somalis would suspect treachery, and warn the others.

Even this hope soon faded. Another pirogue scraped the side of the *Storm King*. Presently it was followed by two more thuds on deck, and a muttered groan from one of the men.

Volbrecht was succeeding all too well in his designs!

And Ahmed, apparently, was succeeding not at all! He tugged and pulled and bit at the rope but could seem to make no headway, find no end which he could loosen. The sweat stood out on Hayden's forehead and he could have screamed with impatience. It was stifling here below.

Presently the lap of water against the skin of the lugger was lost in the louder splash of a paddle. Again Hayden restrained an impulse to cry out a warning. His restraint served no good purpose, however, for again he heard thuds above.

Ahmed smothered an exclamation of triumph. "Ah, I have worked an end loose, Master. Soon, if Allah wills, the *nakhoda* will be free."

"Hurry!" Hayden urged. "There are only three more pirogues."

Ahmed tugged and worked at the ropes with his strong teeth. Hayden felt his bonds loosening. But long before the Sudanese could free him, the third pirogue returned and its occupants were taken prisoners.

The thump of footsteps on the companionway, then a light, coming nearer. Hayden inched away, and just in time. He lay on his hands, hiding the loosened ropes. By the glimmer of a ship's lantern, presently, he spied Volbrecht's cruel face. It loomed over him, more sinister than ever in that flickering light.

Volbrecht's laugh was short, sardonic. He kicked Hayden's leg. The American bit his lips, but made no outcry. His eyes, however, brimmed hatred. Disappointed, Volbrecht grunted, and shuffled away. He returned with an ax. Ice formed along Hayden's spine. Did the Prussian intend to kill him *that* way?

VOLBRECHT, however, had not changed his plans. He started work with the ax, trying to open a seam. The lugger was solidly built. Its timbers resisted repeated blows.

Cursing, the Prussian finally stopped to rest. Then he attacked the same seam again. At last water began seeping in. Volbrecht struck the crack with fresh vigor. A small cascade finally poured steadily into the lugger.

Volbrecht shouldered the ax. The light danced away, and vanished.

Hayden crawled to Ahmed's side instantly.

"Hurry!" he cried hoarsely.

Already water spread around them. Ahmed ripped and tore at the ropes like a dog at a bone. As from another world, they heard men being lowered to the *zaroug*. Slaves to be sold to the Arabs! It made Hayden's gorge rise. Those Somalis had been hard working and loyal. He knew what treatment they would receive at Arab hands.

They lay in water now, and soon it would be so high that Ahmed would be helpless to assist him. But the giant Sudanese never lost heart. He worried the knots. His strong teeth pulled and tugged. Then at last Hayden felt something give. His relief was short-lived when he found that it was only the knot which held his wrists and ankles together. He could separate cramped limbs, but he could not free either his hands or legs.

They both rose to their bent knees, for they would drown if they lay prone any longer. It seemed to Hayden that water flowed in more freely, as if Volbrecht had weakened other seams which were now adding to the inflow.

"My jaws ache, *nakhoda*," Ahmed said. "But I will try again."

Hayden held his hands up as high as he could to assist the Sudanese—Water reached to above their belts before his hands were at last free. It was only a matter of minutes, then, before they were both splashing through the darkness to the companionway.

When Hayden emerged on deck, he saw that the lugger had already settled low in the water. The pirogues were still moored to ropes near the accommodation ladder. They might

reach the nearest of the islands of the Farsan archipelago, but that was no guarantee of safety. Arab hospitality to an American in an out of the way spot was more than doubtful.

He strode to the pilot house to see what he had in the way of weapons. The prospects looked bleak. Everything light enough to be moved had been pirated. His five rifles had been taken. Not even a cartridge remained. A broken lock and an empty locker showed where his store of knives had been. But in the back of one small locker, Hayden found a marine glass which had been overlooked.

"See if there are any knives in the galley," Hayden said grimly.

He studied the sea with marine glasses as Ahmed moved away. Daylight was failing, but a dis-

protected bay where Volbrecht would probably find anchorage. Drawing more water than the Arab craft, even if he could feel his way among the treacherous reefs by dark, he could not pass over that coral reef. Nor had he a single weapon to use in a surprise attack. A fine prospect, indeed! Hayden shrugged as the Sudanese returned.

He made a triple-thick bag of canvas, filled it with rice, and then tied the neck securely. Looking puzzled, Ahmed followed as Hayden made his way below.

Water was up to his armpits now, and he knew that his boat might sink while he was below decks. No escape, then! Hayden filled his lungs and tried to reach the source of the under-water river. Each time the inflowing

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tant *zaroug* was silhouetted on the sunset waters. It was becalmed. Hayden realized the seriousness of their plight. The lugger could not long stay afloat. If they could reach land, Ahmed had only slavery to look forward to while it was not improbable that his throat would be cut.

"All knives were taken from the galley," Ahmed reported.

Hayden deliberated, his blue eyes bleak.

"We're going to recover those pearls and rescue our crew," he finally decided.

"Our boat sinks fast, *nakhoda*."

"Find rice, and canvas."

A wintry smile quirked Hayden's lips as a desperate plan took shape. Already a breeze was lightening the sticky heat. The *zaroug* would soon have wind for her sails. Familiar with the Farsans, Hayden knew the reef-

water swept him back, and he had nothing to hold to. Ahmed grasped the idea, and braced him. Hayden wedged the canvas sack of rice so securely into the opened seam that only a sledge hammer could have driven it out.

"That rice will swell quickly, sealing the leak," Hayden muttered, when they had made deck. "Now to pump out our boat. That done, we'll follow Volbrecht."

Ahmed's white teeth flashed as though he relished the idea of rescuing his shipmates from slavery and the prospect of a fight.

"The bones of many ships lie upon the reefs and shoals of the Farsans," he said, "but a man can die only once, *nakhoda*."

Like many black men, Ahmed had an uncanny ability to see in the dark. Hayden left him the difficult post at

the wheel, while he went to work fashioning a crude torpedo. With oiled silk, he made a packet of three dynamite caps. One of these he primed and furnished with a fuse intended to burn for approximately twenty seconds. He tied this packet securely to a boat-hook.

This improvised weapon was ready when at last they saw a *zaroug* with collapsed sail lying at anchor beyond a protecting reef. Once Hayden had tried to find anchorage in that little bay, only to find that even his shallow-draft lugger drew too much water. Hayden dropped the hook, and helped Ahmed to lower the canvas.

Without arms, they dared not make a sound which would betray their presence. It seemed strange, however, that there was no sound of life aboard the *zaroug*. Surely, with such a treasure aboard, a sentry must be posted. Perhaps he was withholding his fire—

ONE of the pirogues had not been taken aboard. Hayden drew it alongside with the trailing rope, and slipped quietly down the accommodation ladder. Ahmed paddled silently toward the reef. They did not dare go through. The scrape of the boat might bring a salvo of shots.

Ahmed tied the boat-hook into place on Hayden's back with two light ropes, so that the dangerous torpedo rose just a little higher than his head and could thus be kept out of water if the American swam carefully. In a whisper, Hayden gave orders. The Sudanese nodded.

Hayden clung to the side of the pirogue, lowering himself with extreme caution into the water. Ahmed put a cigarette between Hayden's lips, and cupping the flame in his hands, lighted it.

Hayden immediately swam toward the Arab boat, occasionally puffing a little at the cigarette. It made him a perfect target if anyone watched from the moored boat, but it could not be helped. He swam frog-fashion, keep-

ing his shoulders higher than his legs so that no water might dampen the fuse of the torpedo.

He crossed the reef without injury, and passed the pirogue which the *zaroug* trailed behind. Ahmed inched his way into the dugout, but Hayden continued on to the bigger boat. As he came closer, he glimpsed a nodding figure sitting braced against the mast. Ice crackled in Hayden's veins. If Mohammed Ali awoke, that glowing cigarette would instantly attract his attention.

Hayden quickened his strokes. The cigarette was already within an inch of his lips. He touched the side of the *zaroug* at last. Clinging with one hand, Hayden worked the boat-hook upward out of the two rope slings. The cigarette was burning his lips, but he dared not touch it with his wet hands for fear of extinguishing it. The pain of that burn was sharper as he adjusted the torpedo lower on the boat-hook so that it was just at the water line.

The burning tobacco was almost between his lips as he pulled himself toward the fuse of the torpedo. The fuse ignited from the glowing red coal, and he pushed himself away from the sputtering shower of sparks hurriedly. He dived to put out the cigarette, for the burning paper stuck to his seared flesh and he could not drop it.

Then Hayden struck out desperately for the pirogue. Less than eighteen seconds remained. He had used the dynamite caps to obtain a fresh supply of fish, and he knew how far the force of an explosion could carry in water.

AHMED had untied the pirogue. Unfortunately, there had been no paddles left in the boat, and he was forced to paddle with his hands. Slow and clumsy when a fuse is timed for twenty seconds! Too much depended upon speed on both their parts for great caution. Hayden was splashing

a little. Ahmed occasionally bumped against the boat as he paddled on one side or the other.

One of them awakened the sentinel!

Hayden's first warning was when he heard an oath in Arab, followed by a pungent foot away. The next bullet was aimed at Ahmed. Hayden heard the thud of wood as he instinctively submerged to swim under water. The American's pulses pounded heavily. It seemed as if he would lose either way. Exploded from the water by the relayed concussion, or struck by a bullet while climbing into the pirogue!

His hands touched wood. Another bullet struck the water as he emerged. A black hand reached down and grasped his hands. In seconds, Abd el Mandeb and Volbrecht would be shooting, too. An open pirogue offered no protection!

Ahmed stifled a groan as a bullet grazed his arm. Blood flowed down but did not force him to release his hold. He pulled Hayden into the dugout, and not a split second early!

Hayden had just spied Abd el Mandeb and Volbrecht raising their rifles when there was a deafening explosion. Gravel ballast flew like shrapnel. Mohammed Ali screamed, and dived into the water. The *zaroug* rocked heavily, and then listed sharply to port as water poured into a gaping hole on that side.

Hayden and Ahmed waited no longer. They sprang into the water. Abd el Mandeb and Volbrecht were

too startled by the sudden explosion to grasp what had happened. Volbrecht had been thrown off his feet. Abd el Mandeb hurried to the port side to see if, perhaps, there was another explosion imminent.

Hayden had covered half of the distance to the *zaroug* before the Prussian could again bring his rifle into play. Two shots cut the water near his head. Hayden sucked in air, and then drove himself down. His phosphorescent wake was a give-away, and he hoped Volbrecht would fail to account for the deflection of a bullet in water.

When Hayden came up for air, a bullet zinged past his head. It was Abd el Mandeb's shot, however, for the Prussian was diving overboard. The *zaroug* could not last minutes.

Hayden was about to submerge again when a black arm rose from the water and a huge hand closed about the tall Arab's ankle. Taken completely off guard, Abd el Mandeb never had a chance to brace himself. Ahmed pulled him into the water.

Hayden's heart quickened. If Ahmed could overcome the Arab and take his knife, he might yet have a chance to rescue the Somalis. Experience with slave-traders told Hayden that they were probably bound and lying under the slats which he had seen when setting the torpedo.

Hayden's concern, however, was with Volbrecht. The Prussian must

[Turn page]

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not escape! The American swam with strong, quick strokes, cutting down Volbrecht's margin. Three yards separated them, then two.

VOLBRECHT turned as he heard the other's approach. He had divested himself of turban and Arab robe to aid in swimming, but he must still have retained the belt which held his knife-sheath. Abruptly he turned, and out of the water emerged a knife. Volbrecht's cruel face was livid with anger.

"This time, *Herr American*," he gasped, "you will not escape."

Hayden's lean, brown face hardened. Something caught him around the throat. He had not counted on this. He had no defense against a knife. As always, the odds were tipped in Volbrecht's favor!

Hayden remembered suddenly, as Volbrecht swam toward him, the time when, as a kid, another boy had pulled him down when he had not been expecting it—and the results!

He filled his lungs and dived, forcing himself down with strong, sure strokes. When he turned over, he saw the silver form of Volbrecht above, and his lips quirked. He let buoyancy carry him up.

His hands closed around Volbrecht's heavy ankles, and he pulled him under water. Volbrecht had not been expecting it. He had not filled his lungs with air. He had been waiting to stab the American when he broke the surface again. The result was bad for the Prussian. He strangled as he went below—Hayden could tell from his struggles.

Hayden held grimly to those thrashing ankles. Volbrecht struck with the knife, but could not touch his enemy.

Hayden's lungs were bursting. He could stay below no longer.

But as he came up, he rose behind the Prussian. He got one arm under Volbrecht's right arm, and his right hand back of the Prussian's thick, red neck. He was on Volbrecht's back

when he reached air, and Volbrecht's head was still below water.

It was thought of the men Volbrecht had starved so that he could sell their miserable rations that kept Hayden from weakening. When the Prussian's struggles had ceased, Hayden released his hold. Volbrecht sank to the depths.

Slowly the red haze cleared from Hayden's eyes. He saw that the *zarrong* had sunk. Swimming Somalis dotted the bay—mute evidence that the Sudanese had overcome Abd el Mandeb and taken his knife. A grim smile touched Hayden's lips at the direction the Somalis took.

A dripping Arab scuttled through the scrub brush. Every Somali headed unerringly toward that point.

A small eruption broke the water. It was Ahmed, and he supported an unconscious Somali.

"The last one, *nakhoda*!" he cried triumphantly. "Not one is lost, though some, I think, were a little hurt by flying gravel."

They got the unconscious man to the pirogue. He had responded to first-aid by the time a beaming group returned to the beach. One wore Mohammed Ali's turban; another, his robe.

Hayden didn't need to guess what had happened to Mohammed Ali. He asked no questions.

At dawn Ahmed put a line around the stolen treasure chest. When it was lifted into the pirogue, the pearls were found intact. Karen Morley would walk again—that old debt to Mac had been paid!

When the canvas filled with a snap some minutes later and the ruffles sang along the sides of the lugger, it seemed for a moment to speak in a voice Hayden had not heard in twenty years.

"Thank ye, maun."

Imagination, of course, but so real was the illusion that Hayden smiled as he stared across the bright, sunlit sea.

The **TERRIBLE TENDERFOOT**

Continuing the Latest
and Greatest Novel
by the Author of
"Tarzan"



EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

THE SECOND OF THREE BIG INSTALLMENTS



Buck Mason

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

OLE GUNDERSTROM, wealthy rancher, has been ruthlessly murdered by a mysterious band of night riders. Earlier that day he had quarreled with Buck Mason, deputy sheriff and ranch owner, over a piece of property that Mason claimed he did not legally own.

Mason is in love, or thinks he is, with Olga, Gunderstrom's daughter, who is away at school in the East. Because of Olga, Mason has laboriously studied to make himself over into Olga's idea of a "gentleman."

Suspicion fastens on Mason for the murder of Gunderstrom. Before he can be arrested, he makes a quick investigation of Gunderstrom's cabin.

Mason finds no tangible piece of evidence—that is, nothing but an old boot with some markings on it.

Saying nothing about it to anyone, Mason disappears from the range.

At the T F Dude Ranch, owned by Cory Blaine, Mason turns up in the guise of Bruce Marvel, a socialite from the East. Acting the part of a tenderfoot, he becomes very friendly with Kay White and Dora Crowell, who knew Olga Gunderstrom in the East.

While the guests of the dude ranch are out on a lion hunt, Cory Blaine asks Kay to marry him, but she staunchly refuses his offer.

Their guide on the trip is Hi Bryam, whom Marvel doesn't trust. Marvel attaches deep significance to Bryam's refusal to allow him to inspect his secluded cabin.

On the trip, a horse runs away with Kay. Marvel (Mason) rescues Kay, and does it with so much courage and skill that Blaine begins to suspect that he is not really the tenderfoot he claims to be.

That night Marvel cautiously removes one of his boots and hurls it into the campfire, arousing Blaine who has been sleeping nearby. It is a strange action, but in reality it is the first step in baiting a trap for the killer of Ole Gunderstrom!

Now go on with the story!



Young two-gun Western Deputy Sheriff Buck Mason drops his dude masquerade for a one-man battle against sinister outlaw menace when the girl he loves is held for ransom!



CHAPTER X

Bucking Bronc

LONG before dawn broke the cook was astir, growling and grumbling among his pots and kettles. Then Cory Blaine awoke and reached for his boots, but he found only one. He looked about the camp in all directions, then he reached over and shook Marvel by the shoulder.

"Say," he demanded, as Marvel sleepily opened his eyes, "who the hell's boot did yuh throw at that damn coyote?"

Marvel sat up and turned back the edge of his bed, revealing a pair of natty English riding boots, waiting there to be donned.

"By golly, Blaine, I'm awfully sorry!" he exclaimed. "I must have thrown one of yours by mistake. I'll get into mine and go out and find it for you."

"Damn funny how yuh could get hold of mine instead of yore own," grumbled Cory Blaine.

"Isn't it?" agreed Marvel, his tone deeply apologetic.

Bruce Marvel pulled on his boots and searched the camp, but no boot could he find. He questioned the cook and the cook helped him in the search. Even the girls and Mrs. Talbot who had come out of

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CONTINUE THIS GREAT WESTERN EPIC

their tents, asking questions about the early morning hubbub, volunteered to help, but it was all to no avail.

Then Cory Blaine joined them with one foot bootless, and not in the best of humors. He glowered at Bruce Marvel, and appeared to be battling with himself to keep from exploding.

"The son-of-a-gun musta grabbed it and run off with it," the cook offered helpfully.

"I sure am sorry," said Marvel, and sighed heavily.

Then suddenly a startled expression came into his face, as if something had abruptly occurred to him. He began to search his pockets hurriedly, one after another. After a moment, across his face came blank surprise.

"I might have known it!" he groaned. "No wonder I had the bad luck to grab up Blaine's boot instead of mine! His hard luck, too, of course, but mine's likely to be worse." He spread his empty hands in a futile gesture.

"What's the matter?" Bud asked curiously. "Lost something?"

Marvel nodded mournfully. "Yes. I can't find my lucky tooth. I'm sure I had it last night, and now it's gone!"

"Your lucky tooth!" exclaimed Dora. "Surely you don't mean that you've been carrying your first baby tooth all these years!"

"Oh, it's not that," Marvel said hastily. "It was a horse tooth—my lucky horse tooth. Thought everybody knew a horse's tooth is better to bring good luck than even a rabbit's foot."

Mrs. Talbot chuckled until her sides shook. "Well, I never!" she declared. "A horse's tooth for good luck! Whoever heard of such a thing! I thought all horses' teeth were good for was for chewing hay."

"Live and learn," Marvel told her. "Anyhow, now I've got to find another one—maybe I can find Blaine's boot then." He shook his head sadly. "Wouldn't have happened if I hadn't lost my horse tooth. Wouldn't be without a horse tooth for anything!"

Blaine snorted, mumbled something about "damn fool tenderfeet", and hobbled back to roll up his bed.

AT BREAKFAST, both Blaine and Bruce Marvel came in for a good deal of good-natured raillery. Marvel stood up under it, insisting that the accident would never have happened if he had not lost his horse tooth, but Blaine seemed to have considerable difficulty in appreciating the wisecracks at his expense, which flew thick and fast.

"I'd loan you my boots, Blaine," offered Marvel, "but I'm afraid they would not fit you."



Kay White

"I wouldn't be buried in them things," Blaine snapped surlily.

Kay White did not enter into the joking. She was unusually quiet, and time and again her eyes were on Bruce Marvel, as though she were studying him.

Breakfast over, they lost no time in preparing to get under way. When it came time to mount, Marvel stood holding Baldy by the neck rope.

"Are you going to top him for me, Butts?" he asked.

"No," growled Butts. "I ain't got time." Marvel turned to Bud. "How about you, Bud?" he asked pleasantly.

Bud grinned. "Aw, you can ride him all right," he said. "Anyway we ain't had no fun for a long while, and if he does a little buckin' I reckon we can stand it."

"I don't like to ask Cory to top him," Marvel said reluctantly, "because he's only got one boot."

"Why don't yuh ask one of the girls," suggested Butts. "Or mebbe Mis' Talbot. Like as not she ain't scared."

Marvel sighed. "Well, I guess I'll have to try it myself then," he said in a resigned tone.

"What kinda lillies yuh want?" Butts drawled, but Marvel paid no attention to him.

Coiling the halter rope, he gathered the reins in his left hand. He spoke in a low voice to Baldy and stroked his neck. Then he swung easily into the saddle. Baldy did nothing. It was a great disappointment—

BY THE FAMOUS AUTHOR OF "TARZAN"

and a surprise—to everyone. Except to Marvel. He'd had a fair idea that that would be the kind of performance Baldy would put on, and had his reasons for believing it.

"What's the matter with that bronc this morning?" demanded Benson Talbot in an aggrieved tone, as if the failure of Baldy to give them an exhibition of bucking were a personal affront.

"I don't think you're a bit nice," Dora Crowell told Marvel pertly. "You might have got thrown once, at least."

"Sorry to disappoint you," Marvel murmured, grinning at her. "I'll fall off him anyway, if you say so."

"I damn well wish yuh would," Blaine muttered under his breath, "and break yore fool neck."

Blaine was seething with anger as they started out, and he took his place at the head of the procession without a backward glance to see how his guests would follow him. He'd had a pretty good idea, anyway, that Kay would ride beside Bruce Marvel, and she did.

Kay was not in a talkative mood, however, as Marvel immediately discovered. He tried to draw her into conversation, but quickly saw that she did not care to talk, and desisted. It was not until the party had stretched out along the trail and the two were alone that she spoke.

"**I**'VE got something to say to you, Bruce," she said abruptly. "I've got to say it! It's this: After I got to my tent last night, I didn't feel like sleeping, so I went out a little way from camp and sat on a rock that I noticed there before dark. In front of me was the camp, illuminated by the campfire, so that I could see everything plainly. Behind me lay the hills, mysterious under the starlight. I saw you pick up something and throw it into the fire. Until this morning I didn't know what it was. I heard you yell at something, as though to chase it away, but there was nothing there."

"I was so surprised last night that I just sat there until the camp had quieted down again before I went back to my tent. I cannot imagine why you did it, and I don't mean to say anything about it to anyone, but I want to tell you that I think it was a petty thing to do. I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself! Even if you were a child, playing a joke, it would still be detestable. I'm disappointed in you, Bruce, frankly so."

Her voice was low, but her tone was like ice. He could see that she was thoroughly disgusted, and that there was no longer any of the camaraderie between them that had been so quickly built up the day before.

"I am sorry you saw that." That was all he said.

The party had made a particularly early start that morning, because the intention was to ride all the way through to the ranch, leaving the chuckwagon, which they no longer needed, to trail along at its own convenience. By doing so the same

trip that had required three days going up into the mountains would require only two days coming out.

It was a long, dusty, tiresome trip at that, but the hunters arrived at the home ranch in the middle of the afternoon. After hasty greetings to those who had been left behind, and with the promise to give detailed accounts of the hunt, each repaired to his or her room to clean up and read what mail had been delivered during their absence from the ranchhouse.

Bruce Marvel had no mail, so he was soon out again, wandering about the ranch yard. Presently Blaine emerged from his own quarters and walked down toward the corral. He had donned a pair of old and well worn boots—boots that once had been resplendent with patent leather designs in two colors embellishing their tops, and with little brass hearts set in the center of each heel. That was plain without the soles of the boots being displayed, because each step the dude ranch proprietor took left a plain little heart imprint in the soft, grassless earth.

As Bruce Marvel followed Cory Blaine into the dusty corral, his eyes were on the ground and he appeared to be in deep, but pleasant, meditation. He was humming a gay little tune, an occupation which was so much at variance with his accustomed quiet that it elicited a comment from Blaine.

"What's ticklin' yuh?" he demanded. "Get a letter from yore gal?"

"No," said Marvel. "I haven't got any gal, but I just got some good news."

BLAINE made no comment, but he stopped as though he had something more to say to Marvel. Before he could say anything he might have intended to remark, Marvel spoke up.

"Can you rent me a fresh horse, Blaine?" he asked.

"What yuh want with a hoss?" demanded his rather surly host. "Yuh've been ridin' all day. Should think yuh'd had enough for any tenderfoot."

"I just want to ride around the range a bit and see if I can find me another horse's tooth," explained Marvel. "There must be plenty of old skulls around here somewhere, and I've got to have a horse's tooth."

"Sure they is," said Blaine. "If yuh can find 'em. Don't know as I can tell yuh which way to look, though."

"I can try," said Marvel. "I don't feel safe without a horse's tooth—greatest luck charm in the world."

"I ain't got no real gentle hoss up now," Blaine said hesitantly. "They're all out to pasture. Might take a half hour or more to get 'em up, and it'll be dark 'fore long."

"What have you got here in the horse barns?" asked Marvel.

"Nothin' but an old crowbait that we use for wranglin', and a colt one of the boys is bustin'." Blaine shrugged, but the sneer on his face was unmistakable. "Reckon yuh wouldn't be wantin' to top no bronc like *that*."

Marvel indicated a horse standing in a stall in the stable.

"That sorrel there, you mean?" he asked.

"Yes." Blaine's shrug was still more indicative of his private opinions.

"Why, I saw one of the boys riding him before we went on the lion hunt," said Marvel. "He didn't seem very wild."

"Shore yuh can take him if yuh want," said Blaine, "but if yuh have to walk home, or have to be brung back in little pieces, don't blame me none."

"I'm not going far anyway," Marvel assured with a grin of satisfaction, "so it won't be a long walk."

"Jest as yuh say," Blaine said laconically. "I'll saddle him for yuh."

He led the animal out of the stable and Marvel held him while the dude ranch proprietor saddled and bridled the young sorrel.

"I'll take him outside the corral," Blaine suggested. "Reckon yuh'd better mount him out there where there's lots of room. Yuh'll mebbe need it."

Outside the corral, when Blaine turned the sorrel over to him, Marvel stroked the colt's neck and spoke to him as he had become accustomed to speaking to Baldy. Then he eased himself into the saddle, slowly and gently, and started off down the road at a walk.

Blaine stood watching him, his brows knitted as the horse and rider grew smaller and smaller in the distance. They were almost out of sight when Blaine straightened up expectantly. The colt had commenced to pitch! He had expected that. Miracles where horses were concerned could not happen to Marvel all the time.

Blaine grinned and slapped his thigh.

"Reckon that damn dude will walk home all right," he muttered.

THE sorrel was still pitching, and he was pitching hard. Even from a distance the watcher could see that, and he could see that the colt was bringing into play every bronc artifice for unseating his rider, short of throwing himself to the ground. He was sunfishing, turning end to end, and humping himself, with his four feet bunched in a way that would have unseated the best bronc buster Cory Blaine had ever had in his employ. And the "damn dude" stayed on!

Gradually the smile faded from Blaine's lips and there crept into his eyes an expression of astonishment, not unmingled with trouble.

"The son-of-a-gun!" he muttered under his breath, adding something considerably stronger, though not so intelligible. But whether he referred to the horse or the rider, there would have been no definite way for a listener to know, had there been one.

While Blaine stared, with unbelieving, popping eyes, the sorrel pitched for four or five minutes perhaps—more like fifteen it seemed to Cory Blaine. Then the rider evidently got the animal's head up and the two disappeared around the shoulder

of a hill, the horse moving at an easy lope.

"The son-of-a-gun!" repeated Cory Blaine, his lips tightening and his eyes an ominous flame. Then his eyelids narrowed to slits as his pupils became pinpoints. "Mebbe I'll have somethin' to say when he gets back—from looking for hoss teeth."

Out of sight of the ranchhouse and the corral where Blaine stood stockstill, thinking hard, stern thoughts, Bruce Marvel was riding hard and fast, but he did not appear to be looking for horse teeth along the way. For a man who was supposed to be in unfamiliar territory he was making a beeline, too—riding straight for the nearest town as if he scented it.

The sun was setting when he rode into the railroad town where, scarcely a week before, he had left the train and taken the buckboard for the ranch. It was such a town as Buck Mason had ridden into many times, but never in the scintillating raiment that now clothed Bruce Marvel.

He tied his horse to the rail before the general store in which the post-office was located, and entered the building. After purchasing some stationery and a postage stamp, he wrote a brief letter. With a sigh of contentment he sealed and addressed the envelope and dropped it in the slot for outgoing mail.

CHAPTER XI

A Horse's Tooth



THAT he was the object of the amused interest of the few people he encountered in the store and on the street did not appear to concern Bruce Marvel. He was becoming accustomed to others being startled by his apparel and apparently it no longer troubled him. After watering the sorrel and readjusting the blanket and cinches, he mounted and started back through the growing dusk toward the ranch, knowing that the other guests there were probably already sitting down to supper.

And they were. Filled with their exciting stories of the hunt, none of the dude ranch people noticed his absence at first. Dora Crowell was the first to comment about it.

"Where is Bruce?" she asked suddenly, when the meal was half over and he had not appeared.

"He went out huntin' hoss teeth," Blaine said dryly. "Reckon he didn't have much luck, but he plumb declares he's got to have a hoss tooth for good luck."

"Who ever heard a horse's tooth bringin' good luck?" scoffed Birdie Talbot. "Rabbit's feet do, of course, and then there are medals and charms—but horse teeth! He must be crazy!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say so," Miss Pruell murmured primly. "He seems quite a nice young man."

"Birdie thinks anybody's crazy who

doesn't play bridge with her," said Benson Talbot, chuckling.

"Nothing of the sort!" snapped Birdie. "Do you remember the English lord, dear, who made such a wonderful bridge partner at Fishkill-on-the-Hudson that summer?"

"That might have happened to anyone." Mrs. Talbot's lips snapped tight shut, but her eyes only snapped.

Her husband glanced around the table, his eyes twinkling.

"Birdie was always quoting him as an authority on bridge and everything else until they came and took him away," he explained. "He had escaped from Mat-teawan."

"And he wasn't an English lord at all?" asked Miss Pruett.

"No." Talbot shook his head, but did not look at his wife. "He had been a school teacher in Poughkeepsie until the night he killed his wife for trumping his ace."

Birdie Talbot was fuming as she suffered her husband to draw back her chair when they all got up from the table and strolled out to the porch. The dusk there was already drawing into evening shadows.

Experience had taught Cory Blaine that his Eastern guests particularly enjoyed the stories and the rough humor of his cowboys, and it had become customary for some of the men to stroll up to the ranch-house during the evening and join the group on the wide porch. Tonight they were later than usual in coming. Then only Bud and Butts put in an appearance.

"Where's the dude with the panties?" inquired Bud, quickly noting Marvel's absence.

"He is out looking for a horse's tooth," Dora told him.

"The poor nut," said Butts disgustedly. "Hoofin' it around at night lookin' for a hoss tooth."

"He is not on foot and he started out in the daylight," Kay White said crisply. "Something may have happened to him." She glanced at Blaine. "Don't you think someone ought to go out and look for him, Cory?"

"What's he ridin'?" asked Bud.

"The sorrel colt," Blaine said shortly.

BUTTS whistled low, long, and emphatically.

"Then we shore had better go out and look for him," he said with conviction. "And we better take along a basket or some blottin' paper. Hell's bells! That there sorrel's probably killed the dude by this time and spread him all over the range. He shore is some ornery bronc."

"Oh, Cory!" cried Kay. "You shouldn't have let him take a bad horse like that!"

"I warned him," Blaine said grumpily. "But he wanted to take the hoss anyway."

"Yuh shore better send out a search party, Cory," urged Butts. "That colt has the makin's of a good hoss in him. It would be too bad to lose him."

"Here comes someone now!" exclaimed

Dora, and as all eyes turned in the direction of the road they saw a horseman approaching.

It had grown too dark to tell who he was even when he rode up and reined in not far from the porch.

"Is Butts here?" the rider called, and then they recognized the voice as Marvel's.

"Yeah," Butts drawled. "What yuh want?"

MARVEL dismounted and came closer to the porch.

"Take my horse, my man," he said.

If there is anything that will wreck a cowboy's equanimity it is to be treated like a menial, and no carefully studied insult could have been more effective than the use of "my man" in addressing the puncher. But Cory Blaine, who was sitting next to Butts, nudged him with his elbow before the man could spit out the angry reply on his lips.

That nudge was an order, though, and Butts knew it. So, he arose, boiling with rage, and, taking the reins from Marvel, led the colt away toward the stables.

"Where yuh been so long?" Blaine asked the tenderfoot rider. "Musta found hoss teeth right scarce, huh?"

"I guess I must have got lost," Marvel said, a little shamefacedly.

"Did yuh have any trouble with the colt?" asked Bud.

"Not a bit," declared Marvel. "He was just like a kitten."

"Didn't he pitch at all?" asked Blaine.

"Not a pitch," Marvel said, his face straight and placid in the finger of light that came from the open hall door.

"And you didn't find a horse tooth?" asked Birdie Talbot. "Not that I think that it matters, but after all that trouble, and staying out until after supper time—"

"No," replied Marvel, "I didn't find one. But tomorrow I'm going to get Bud to take me down to where there's a dead horse he must know about. Will you do that, Bud?"

"What dead hoss?" quickly demanded Blaine.

"Well, I don't know exactly," Marvel said, "but seems to me I heard something about a horse dropping dead here a few weeks ago, and if that's so, it occurred to me that naturally Bud would know where the horse had been taken. If he would show me where, of course I'd pay him—"

"Shore, I'll take yuh down tomorrow," Bud promised promptly. "Shore I know where that dead hoss got dragged to."

"You must be hungry," Kay murmured to Marvel. "You haven't had any supper, have you?"

"Oh, it won't hurt me to miss a meal," Marvel said, and grinned. "Perhaps it won't be the first time."

"Come on, I'll get you a sandwich," Kay offered. "I guess the cook won't murder me."

She arose and started to lead the way back to the kitchen.

"This is mighty good of you, Kay," said

Marvel, "but I didn't want to put anyone to any trouble. I should not have been late. But perhaps you know how it is when you get lost."

The darkness hid the scowl on Blaine's face. He muttered something under his breath as the two disappeared through the hall door, bound for the cook's domain.

"What did you say, Cory?" asked Dora. "There's somethin' fishy about that hombre," Blaine mumbled sullenly, but he did not explain that his remark was induced by Bruce Marvel's statement that the sorrel colt had not pitched with him.

"Oh, any tenderfoot might get lost here after dark," Dora defended.

By the time Kay and Bruce had returned from the kitchen, Butts had come back from the stables.

"Yuh musta rode that hoss pretty hard, Mister," he said to Marvel accusingly, his mean little eyes snapping.

"Oh, is that so?" inquired Marvel.

"That's what I said, Mister," snapped Butts, his tone ugly, almost menacing.

"I heard you, my man," Marvel said suavely. "I ain't deaf."

Butts started to rise. It was as plain to him, as it was to some of the others, that Marvel was deliberately baiting him. The man's voice had been soft and low, but he had put just the right inflection on certain words to raise them to the dignity of insults.

BLAINE clamped a hand tight on Butts' leg.

"Sit down," he ordered in a low voice.

Blazing with anger Butts started to jerk loose from the restraining hand.

"I ain't goin' to let no—"

"Sit down," Blaine sharply commanded, "and shut up!"

And Butts did as he was bid.

"What's new?" asked Marvel, as if quite unaware of the by-play. "It seems almost like I've been gone a week."

"I got a letter from my father," said Kay. "He may be along here any day."

"Is that so?" said the troublesome tenderfoot. "Well, that surely is nice."

"When did he say he'd get here?" Blaine asked quickly.

"He didn't say exactly," Kay told him. "To be truthful, he didn't even know just when he could start, but from what he did write I imagine that he may be here at any time now."

"Well, he'd wire you," wouldn't he?" asked Blaine. "So that we could meet the train?"

"He isn't coming by train," said Kay. "He is driving on."

"Oh," said Blaine and was thoughtful for a moment. "When was his letter dated, Kay?" he asked.

"About four days ago," she said. "It came while we were on the lion hunt, but I just got it."

"How long would it take him to drive here?" Blaine persisted.

"He likes to take it easy, so I imagine it would take him three or four days."

"Oh, I almost forgot to tell you!" ex-

claimed Dora Crowell. "There's a friend of mine coming up, too, Cory. I want you to have a room for her and give her your particularly special care."

"When's she coming?" asked Blaine.

"Well, I don't know that, either. She said she would come just as soon as she could get away. It's Olga Gunderstrom, you know. You heard me speak of her before when I told you she was going home after her father was killed. Well, she did, and now she writes that she has a few more matters to settle up and then she can get away for a week or ten days and she wants to come up here with me and rest. I asked her to, you remember. I imagine it's been pretty hard for her."

MISS PRUELL clucked sympathetically. "The poor child!" she murmured.

"Did she say whether they'd found her pa's killer yet or not?" asked Blaine.

"No, but she said that everybody is pretty sure now that it was that man, Buck Mason. They can't find a trace of him anywhere, and of course there was all that talk about the quarrel over the land, and with him missing now—"

"Is that the only reason they have for suspecting him?" asked Marvel. "Just because they can't find him?"

"What more reason yuh want?" Butts demanded harshly. "Who else could it have been? Anyhow the papers all agree there wasn't nothin' missin', and I reckon if that mysterious rustler gang they was first tryin' to hang the killin' onto had had anything to do with it they'da tore up that place of Gunderstrom's from hell to breakfast." The bow-legged puncher sniffed. "Me—I don't believe there is any mysterious rustler gang a-tall. Jest talk—that's all it is—to cover up when some feller wants to slap his iron on some other feller's dogies."

"Yuh said somethin' then, Butts," Blaine promptly agreed. "Talk! They's always plenty of talk goin' round. Anyhow, seems as if they was any such thiev'in' outlaw gang around they'd have been here some time or other, wouldn't they? Where there's shore good pickin's. We ain't seen hide or hair of 'em."

"Well, maybe you're both right," said Marvel. "But I still say its sort of slim evidence to hang a man on—just because he's missing."

"Oh, but they have more than that!" Dora cried eagerly.

"Have they?" asked Marvel.

"Yes! Olga said in her letter that an Indian turned up two or three weeks after the murder who said that he saw Mason riding away from Mr. Gunderstrom's cabin late on the afternoon of the murder!"

"I reckon they got that hombre hogtied all right," muttered Butts.

"It certainly looks like it," agreed Marvel, with little concern.

"Now they're trying to find the man who telephoned the sheriff's office and gave the clue!" Dora hastened on, wide-eyed, exulting in her nearness to a real life mys-

tery. "They can't imagine who it could have been, but now they're commencing to think that Mason was one of that rustler gang himself! For no matter how you and Butts scoff, Cory, there is a mysterious outlaw gang at work—Olga says so! And they have been robbing banks and rustling and all kind of things around there for the last year! Olga says that everybody is sure that one of Mason's own men in the outlaw band, somebody who had it in for him, tipped off the sheriff."

"That certainly sounds like a good theory," said Marvel. "But how are they going to find the fellow who called up?"

"That's where the trouble comes in," said Dora. "Olga says that the only clue that they have to him is that an old man by the name of Cage, who received the message, said that the man talked as though he had a harelip. Though he wasn't so sure but that the man might have had 'a busted lip,' as he put it."

"That's not much of a clue," said Blaine. "There's lots of men in the country with harelips."

KAY laughed low and amusedly.

"And they could sound the same way with adenoids," she said.

"Well, if they're going to hang all the men with harelips and all the men they haven't seen around Comanche County for the last three or four weeks they've got some wholesale job cut out for themselves," said Marvel with a careless laugh. "When did you say your friend Miss Gunderstom is coming, Dora?"

"I may get a telegram most any time," Dora told him. "She might be here tomorrow for all I know."

"I'll save a room for her," promised Blaine. "I'm expecting a party of four or five on from Detroit, but will make room some way for Kay's father and Miss Gunderstom."

Birdie Talbot suppressed a yawn. "My gracious!" she said. "I'm nearly dead. I think we should all go to bed."

"That's the first really bright remark anyone has made this evening," said Dora.

The suggestion seemed to meet with general approval and as the guests rose to go to their rooms, Blaine motioned to Marvel.

"I want to see yuh a minute," he said. "See yuh fellers in the mornin'," he said to Butts and Bud, and when they had nodded and loitered off toward the bunkhouse he turned back to Marvel. "How much longer yuh figgerin' on bein' here?" he asked bluntly.

"Oh, I like it here first rate," Marvel said, smiling. "I was planning on staying awhile."

"Well, I got all these people comin' now," said Blaine, "and I'll be needin' yore room."

"Indeed?" Marvel lifted his eyebrows slightly. Cory Blaine certainly did not mince his words. "When do you expect the people from Detroit?"

"They may be along any day now," Blaine said briskly. "Sorry, Marvel, but—"

"Then I'll wait till they come," said Marvel and, turning, he started to enter the house.

"Wait!" Blaine called after him. "There's one more thing."

Marvel turned in the doorway. "What is it?" he asked.

"I'm sort of responsible for these girls here," Blaine said, his eyes narrowing. "I got to look after 'em. I don't know nothin' 'bout you, so. . . . Well, it's jest hands off, yuh understand?"

"I hear, but I don't understand," Marvel said coolly.

"If yuh know what's good for yore health yuh'll understand!" snapped Cory Blaine.

For a moment the two men stood staring straight into each other's eyes, and the air was charged with hostility that was like crackling electric sparks. Then without a word Blaine walked down the porch to the entrance of his room, and Marvel disappeared within the interior of the ranchhouse.

"So," was in Bruce Marvel's thoughts as he entered his room and lighted his oil lamp, "Mr. Blaine is jealous. I'm glad it ain't anything else. He shore had me guessin' for a minute or two, though."

CHAPTER XII

Lone Rider in the Hills



WARIED after a hard day that had been emotionally as well as physically trying, Bruce Marvel hastily undressed. The bed looked good.

Once he had divested himself of his outer clothing, he paused, and for moments looked calculatingly at his brand new trunk standing there in its spick and spanness. Slowly he walked over to it then and opened it. From its depths he extracted a suit of silk pajamas and held them gingerly out at arm's length. They, too, were brand new and had never been worn.

He examined them critically as he had done many times before, then slowly shook his head. Buck Mason had not yet reached the point of decking his strong, lithe young body in silk pajamas—not while he was alone, at any rate. He replaced them carefully and slipped into bed in his underclothing.

"I s'pose I'll have to learn to wear 'em some day," he sighed. "But Lord, what if the house would get on fire when a feller was wearin' things like them!"

There was a frown on his face as he fell asleep.

Late that night a fire did burn that was potentially fraught with dire consequences. But it would not rout Buck Mason out—not that night. For some time it burned steadily upon the summit of a rocky hill below the ranchhouse, but none of the sleeping inmates saw it, and by morning it was cold ashes.



Marvel's keen eyes took in the men's mounts and their apparel

Bruce Marvel was a few minutes late for breakfast the following morning and again all of the guests were seated when he entered the dining room. He greeted them with the quiet smile with which they had become familiar, and a casual word here and there in reply to the banal remarks with which a group of assembled men and women usually start the day. Cory Blaine, alone, did not look up as Marvel entered—which in nowise abashed the tardy tenderfoot.

"Good morning, Cory!" he called cheerily.

"Mornin'," mumbled Blaine.

"Ready for the paper chase, Bruce?"

Kay asked eagerly.

"What paper chase?" Marvel's eyebrows lifted in puzzlement.

"Oh, that's so, you weren't at supper last night, were you?" Kay remembered. "That's what you get for being late. We arranged it all then. We are going to have a paper chase today."

"I'm sorry, Kay," spoke up Cory Blaine, "but I'm afraid we've got to put that off. I can't go today. Got to 'tend to a little business, and I figgered on lettin' Bud take you-all over to Crater Mountain. There ain't any of yuh seen that, and it's worth seein'. Tomorrer we'll have the paper chase."

"Oh, well, one day is as good as another," Kay agreed easily. "And I've al-

ways wanted to see the crater of that old volcano."

"I suppose that will break into my plans all right," Marvel said, frowning a little. "I was figgerin' that Bud could help me find a horse's tooth this morning. Remember I spoke about it last night?"

Blaine looked up at him in disgust, then suddenly the light of inspiration shone in his eyes. There was one way of keeping this tenderfoot out of his hair for one day, right to his hand.

"Well, I reckon that can be fixed up all right," he said good-naturedly. "Butts can jest as well take the folks over to Crater Mountain, and you and Bud can go tooth huntin'."

"Thanks, Blaine," Marvel said heartily. "That's fine! It certainly would relieve my mind." He glanced around the table, his eyes lingering a moment longer on Kay than on the others. "Maybe I'll find the tooth and catch up with the rest of you. That would be the first bit of luck the tooth could bring me."

AFTER breakfast they all hurried to the corral while the men caught up the horses for the day. There was the usual rush and movement and excitement that never seems to pall even those most accustomed to seeing it. The cleverness of the horses and the cleverness of the men, the kaleidoscopic changes of form

and color, the smell of horse, the clashing hoofs, the dust of the corral all combine to weave a spell that lingers forever in the memory.

Blaine was issuing instructions to his men, selecting mounts from among the horses that had been left at home during the lion hunt.

"I think I'll ride Baldy," said Marvel. "I won't be doing much today and he won't have a hard ride."

"Suit yoreself—he's yore'n," said Blaine, and turned to the lanky cowboy, Bud. "Bud, yuh got yoreself a job last night when yuh told Mr. Marvel yuh know where they's a dead hoss. Yuh're goin' with him huntin' teeth. Butts'll take the folks over to Crater Mountain."

"Yuh better take along a thirty-thirty," Butts told Bud solemnly. "Some of them teeth is pretty wild. I knew a tenderfoot once who come out from the East huntin' teeth. He went out alone without a gun and he got all bit up."

Butts got the laugh he was expecting, even from Marvel, who stood speculatively scrutinizing Butts' bowed legs.

"I wish Butts was going with me instead of Bud," he said thoughtfully.

"Why?" demanded Butts. "I ain't no wet nurse. I'm jest a cow nurse."

"But you're just what a fellow needs when he's hunting teeth," insisted Marvel.

"How do you make that out?" Butts squared off. He could sense something coming, and he didn't relish living up to his name.

"Well, you see, I'd take along a gunny sack and stretch it between your legs and chase the teeth in," Marvel said soberly.

"Well, I won't be along!" snapped Butts. "So yuh better shoot 'em. But be shore to aim at somethin' else or yuh won't never hit 'em."

"You win, Butts," said Marvel, grinning broadly. "I know when I'm licked."

KAYS'S horse was being led out of the corral. Marvel stepped over as she was about to mount and examined the bridle, the bit, and the cinches.

"I'm sorry you're not going today," she said in a low voice.

"Are you honestly?" he asked.

She nodded. "But I suppose there is nothing so important as a horse's tooth."

He looked up at her and smiled. "It means a lot to me, Kay," he said. "Anything would have to mean a lot to keep me from riding to Crater Mountain today."

There was something in his tone that checked whatever reply she might have made, and in silence she mounted as he held her horse. Then the others rode up around them and carried her along, but he watched her for a long time as she rode away toward the hills to the east.

"Here's yore hoss, Mister," called Blaine from the corral, and Marvel started as if only suddenly realizing that he was not alone. "Want me to top him for yuh?"

"Oh, I don't think he'll do anything," Marvel said confidently.

"He certainly won't do more than the

sorrel colt done," Blaine remarked, with acid meaning.

"That being the case, then, I guess I'm safe," Marvel said coolly.

As Marvel and Bud rode away down the valley, Blaine stood looking after them.

"I shore don't like that hombre," he muttered aloud. "I jest ain't got no time for him—but damned if I know why!"

MARVEL and Bud rode side by side at a slow walk as they drifted out of sight.

"I was thinking," remarked Marvel, "that that horse of Blaine's that fell dead a few weeks ago should have some good teeth that are not weather-worn."

"I'm afraid he's pretty fresh," said Bud. "But if yuh reckon yuh can stand it, why—"

"We can take a look at it anyway," said Marvel. "Where is it?"

They rode down the valley for about a mile and well off the road when, suddenly, several vultures rose just ahead of them.

"There it be," said Bud, with a shrug.

They rode closer. "It is a bit fresh, isn't it?" said Marvel, and Bud had a chuckle all to himself as he saw how the tenderfoot was trying to hold on to his breakfast.

Between coyotes, vultures and rodents the horse had pretty well disappeared, but the stench was still overpowering. Yet, greatly to Bud's surprise, Marvel rode close up to the putrid remains. He sat looking down at the grisly thing for half a minute, then turned and rode away.

"I guess it's a little bit too high even for me," he said.

"Well," suggested Bud, "there ought to be others. Seems to me I seen a hoss skull down the wash 'bout a half a mile further."

But Marvel seemed suddenly to have lost interest in horse teeth.

"Oh, never mind, Bud," he said. "I guess I'll let it go till another day."

"That's funny," said Bud, though he felt pretty sure he knew the reason for Marvel's change of mind. That dead horse could change most anybody's mind. But he shook his head. "Yeah, funny," he repeated. "Minute ago nothin'd do yuh but yuh jest had to have a hoss tooth."

He did not see the horseman winding into the hills in the west, and even if he had he certainly would not have connected the rider with the tenderfoot's sudden loss of interest in horse teeth. But Marvel had seen, and he had recognized both horse and rider, even though they were miniatures against the hillside.

Knowing considerable about a tenderfoot's stomach, Bud was not surprised when Bruce Marvel announced that he had also changed his mind about joining the sight-seeing party. Together they rode slowly back toward the ranch. Marvel was scrutinizing his companion meditatively.

"How long you been with this outfit, Bud?" he asked presently.

"I've always been on the ranch," Bud drawled. "I was born there. My uncle used to own it. When Cory turned it into a

boardin' house I went to work for him."

"Known Cory long?"

"Couple of years."

"I don't see how he makes a living out of his boarders," ruminated Marvel. "Of course they pay well—those he had—but there are not many of them at any one time, apparently, and the expenses of a place like this must be plenty."

"Yeah," informed Bud, "reckon Cory had a right tough time till recent. Business is pickin' up now, but anyways he always seemed to have plenty of *dinero*. He's got a mine somewheres, and a ranch, too."

Bruce Marvel gave a short, odd laugh. "I guess that he'd be needing them," he remarked, "to keep up this outfit, but I don't see how he manages to run two or three businesses."

"I reckon he's got some right good managers," Bud said, with little interest. "Besides, him and Butts go away every once in a while to look after his other interests. Couldn't say jest where they are, though, 'cause he's never took me along. Leaves me here to look after things while he's away. But I never give it no thought. He pays me good."

Marvel had dropped back until Baldy's head was about opposite Bud's knee. Riding in this position, Bud did not see his companion raise one of his feet and remove a spur, which he quietly slipped inside his shirt.

"I should think all these boarders would get on Cory's nerves," Marvel idly observed.

"Some of 'em do." Bud grinned widely, over his shoulder.

"Oh, I know!" Marvel laughed. "Me, for instance." Then he reined up short. "Hell!" he exclaimed. "I've lost a spur. You go on back to the ranch, Bud. I'll take a look for it."

"I'd jest as soon ride back and help yuh find it," Bud offered helpfully, but Marvel shook his head.

"No, you go on back to the ranch. Nobody needs to tell me—now—what a nuisance a dude is. I'd feel better if you'd just go on and let me find it for myself."

"Whatever yuh say," said Bud. "We aim to please, as the feller says."

"See you later," said Marvel.

Reining Baldy about he started back down the valley.

CHAPTER XIII

A Last Good-by?



AT A point where a dry wash came out of the hills from the west, Bruce Marvel stopped and turned in his saddle. Bud was jogging quietly toward home, his back turned. For a few seconds Marvel watched him, then headed into the dry wash, the high banks of which would hide him from

Bud's view should the lanky cowboy happen to turn his eyes backward.

Now Marvel rode more swiftly, spurring Baldy into a lope, until the ascent toward the hills became too steep.

The arroyo he was following led to the summit of low hills near the point where he had seen the rider disappear shortly before. As he neared the top he went more slowly, finally stopping just before he reached the ridge. Dismounting, he dropped Baldy's reins to the ground and covered the remaining distance on foot.

It was a barren ridge, supporting only a scant growth of straggling brush. As he neared the top he dropped to his hands and knees and crawled the remaining distance to a point just behind a small bush that grew upon the crest of the ridge. Here he lay on his belly and wormed himself a few inches further upward until his eyes topped the summit.

Beyond the ridge and below him lay a barren gully, in the bottom of which, a hundred yards up from the point at which he was spying on them, three men sat in their saddles. One of them was addressing the other two rapidly and earnestly. The man was Cory Blaine.

AN expression of satisfaction crossed Marvel's face.

"Them," he muttered enigmatically, "will be the other two."

For ten minutes Marvel lay there watching the three men in the gully below. Then he saw them gather up their reins and start away. Blaine spurred his horse up the side of the gully, while the other two turned down toward the valley.

Halfway up the hillside Blaine reined in his mount and turned in the saddle.

"Don't you fellers do no drinkin' to-night!" he shouted back at the two below him. "And see that yuh're there on time tomorrer."

"Shore, Boss!" one of them shouted back, in a thick, almost inarticulate voice.

"And what I said about drinkin' goes double for you, Eddie!" called Blaine, as he turned his horse's head upward again toward the summit of the ridge.

Marvel slithered away from his hiding place, returned to Baldy, and mounted him. Then he urged the horse at a reckless pace down the rough wash. Near the mouth of the arroyo he reined to the left, urging Baldy up the steep bank and across a low ridge. He put the spurs to him then and, ignoring the rocky terrain and the menace of innumerable badger holes, he cut downward across the rolling hills parallel with the valley at a run.

Where the ridge finally melted into the floor of the valley, he reined Baldy to the left and so came at last into the mouth of the barren gully in which he had seen the three men talking.

Riding toward him now were the two men he had seen in consultation with Cory Blaine. As he came into view they eyed him intently. With what appeared to be considerable effort, he stopped in front of them, while they reined in their own ponies and viewed him and his polo garb with ill-concealed contempt and astonishment.

"WHO let you out, Sister?" demanded one of them.

Marvel looked embarrassed. "My horse ran away with me!" he exclaimed, voice and tone frightened. "And I guess I'm lost."

"Where yuh lost from, Sis?" demanded the other rider with exaggerated solicitude, and in the scarcely articulate tone that Marvel had previously heard when the speaker had addressed Blaine.

"That," he soliloquized, "would be Eddie," and then aloud: "I am stopping at the T F Ranch. Could you direct me how to get there?"

"Shore," said Eddie. "Go straight up this here gulch. Yuh can't miss it."

Then, with broad grins that expressed their opinions more plainly than words, the two men moved on.

"Them directions of yore'n," his companion told Eddie huskily, when they were out of earshot, "will shore land that dude hombre plumb in Mexico, if he follers 'em."

"Well, such as him ain't got no business roamin' around Arizony without their nurses," Eddie declared truculently.

Standing his mount still, Marvel watched the two for a moment, his keen eyes taking in every detail of both men and horses. Then he turned and started to ride slowly up the gulch, as he had been instructed. But they could have no idea that shortly he was following the trail that the two men themselves had made going up and coming down, his eyes often bent upon the ground.

When he reached the point where Blaine had spurred up over the ridge, he did likewise and presently dropped down into the valley on the other side where the ranch lay. He took his time then, and as he rode into the ranch yard, Eddie, far away, was still chuckling over the joke he had played on the tenderfoot.

Seeing no one about the corral, Bruce Marvel removed the bridle and saddle from Baldy himself and turned the horse into the pasture. As he approached the ranchhouse, Blaine and Bud emerged from the dude ranch proprietor's room, which was also his office.

"Find yore spur?" asked Bud.

"Yes," said Marvel. "But I had a time."

"Yuh musta had to chase it all over the county," Blaine snorted contemptuously. "Bud says he left yuh three hours ago."

"I guess I got lost again," Marvel said ruefully.

"You dudes are a damn nuisance," snapped Cory Blaine, all his usual suavity gone.

Marvel raised his eyebrows. "Our money ain't such a nuisance, is it?" he asked coldly.

"I got all yore money I'm wantin' to get," snapped Blaine. "Yuh'll be leavin' now. Them folks from Detroit are comin' right away."

"I'm about ready to leave anyway," Marvel said steadily. "But I think I'll stay until after the paper chase. I certainly would like to be in on that."

"The paper chase needn't keep yuh none," snarled Blaine. "I'll be wantin' yore room tomorrer mornin'. Get that?"

"What's the rush?" demanded Marvel, but his eyes on Blaine were level and cold. "Whenever those folks come they can have my room."

Whatever reply Blaine would have made, or contemplated making, was interrupted by Bud.

"Here comes the bunch back from Crater Mountain!" he announced and he and Blaine hurried down to the corral to meet them, followed more slowly by Marvel.

CONVERSATION at supper was largely about the events of the day, and plans for the paper chase on the morrow. Blaine explained that he and Bud would be the hares, taking one other member of the party with them, someone he would select in the morning.

The guests retired early that evening, with the exception of Marvel who sat alone on the porch, smoking. Blaine and Butts were sitting on the top rail of the corral fence, talking.

"I'm gettin' rid of Marvel tomorrer," Blaine said, determination in the set of his lips.

"What yuh so scared of him for?" demanded Butts. "He's harmless as a newborn dogie."

"He's sweet on Kay White, that's why!" Blaine gritted. "I want her for myownself."

"Well, ain't yuh goin' to get her?" Butts asked blandly.

"Yeah, but I got an idea she sort of likes the dude and if he's around he may bust it up after I get it fixed."

Butts nodded. "Well, now that he's goin'," he said, "I shore would like to make him dance."

"Nothin' doin'," Blaine said flatly. "Anything like that would give us a bad reputation, and yuh oughta know how that—"

"I shore would like to take a shot at that dude jest the same," insisted Butts grumpily.

"Well, yuh ain't goin' to, and that's that!" snapped Blaine. "Not that he means nothin' to me except to get him out of the way of Kay as easy as I can. Jest you see yuh don't go mussin' things up."

"Jest as you say, Boss," Butts said, and sighed. "But my trigger finger shore itches every time I look at that son-of-a-gun."

On the ranchhouse porch Marvel had stamped out the fire of his last cigarette and was sitting with his feet on the rail, thinking.

"I reckon," he meditated, "that it's jest about as well for me to get out of here anyway, for if I don't I'm goin' to fall in love with Kay White—if I haven't done that a-ready. 'Course I ain't promised to Olga, except in my own heart, but I'm thinkin' she knew before she went away that I'd be waitin' for her when she come back. It's a funny world. Wonder what she'll be like."

He was sitting in the shadows at the end of the porch when a light step attracted his attention. Looking down the long porch he saw a slender figure emerge from the house, and a thrill ran through his husky frame.

He did not speak or move, fearing he might frighten her away. She came slowly along the porch toward him, reveling in the cool night air and the star-shot heaven against which the black hills stood out in sharply defined silhouette. She was quite close before she discovered him. When she did she gave a little exclamation of startled surprise.

"I didn't know there was anyone out here," she said and, coming closer: "Oh, it's you!"

"It's so much nicer out here," he said, "that I hated to go into that stuffy little box of a room."

"That is the way I felt," Kay said quickly. "And I simply could not sleep."

"Maybe I shouldn't say it," he remarked, grinning apologetically, "but I'm glad that you couldn't." And as he saw her eyes widen: "You know what I mean, don't you? Won't you sit down?"

HE HAD risen when she approached, and now he quickly drew another chair from near the wall and placed it close to his own.

"I might for a minute," Kay said, hesitantly, "but—"

"But you would rather be alone. I know how that is. Lots of times I feel that way myself. Most of the time, in fact, but I'll promise not to talk."

"I don't mind if you talk," she told him, "if you don't make me talk."

"Then I reckon it won't be very noisy out here," he assured, with a low laugh, as she settled herself comfortably in her chair.

"That will be nice," she murmured. "There are so few people who know when to keep still."

He smiled contentedly, but made no reply. And, having purposely arranged the chairs to this end, he sat admiring her profile and lazily permitted himself to indulge in thoughts that were not entirely loyal to another girl. It was a long silence that followed—a silence which the girl was first to break.

"Do you think the paper chase will be good sport?" she asked.

"I hope so," he said.

"Cory has promised that I can be one of the hares," she continued. "He and Bud and I."

"Oh!" In the dark she could not see his eyelids narrowing.

"Do you think you can catch us? We're experts, you know."

"I'm not going along," he said, and she turned in her chair to look at him.

"Why?" she demanded in surprise.

"I'm leaving tomorrow," he told her simply.

"Leaving?" she exclaimed, sitting erect and staring at him. "Not leaving for good?"

"Yes," Marvel replied, watching her movements very carefully.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said, but there was a dull note of disappointment in her voice. "I thought perhaps you would be here longer. We were getting to be such friends, in spite of—"

"Cory wants my room," Marvel said dryly. "He has other guests coming."

"Did he ask you to leave?" she demanded hotly.

"Yes, but I was about ready to go anyway."

"I don't see why he couldn't make room for you," she declared. "Dora and I could double up, or you could go in with Bert Adams."

There was a whimsical twinkle in Marvel's eyes that Kay caught even in the dim light.

"I sort of think Cory wouldn't thank anyone for the suggestion," he said.

"You mean that he doesn't want you to stay? Why in the world shouldn't he?"

"Maybe I haven't paid my bill."

"I know better than that," Kay said promptly. "You paid a week in advance when you came. I heard you and Cory talking about it, and I saw you pay him for Baldy, so I know that you can't owe him anything."

"I suppose he's got his own reasons," murmured Marvel.

"I don't see what they could be," Kay said, as much exasperated as puzzled.

"Don't you?" he asked.

THERE was a curious inflection to the question that perhaps he did not intend, but she immediately sensed a hidden meaning that she did not understand, and which piqued her curiosity. Though it brought a quick flush to her lovely face. "Why should I?" she asked in a low voice.

"Oh, nothing," he said, moving uneasily in his chair.

"It is something," she insisted. "It sounds as though in some way I were responsible."

"Oh, you ain't to blame. It's just that Cory has foolish ideas in his head." He added, after a moment's thoughtful pause: "Though perhaps they ain't so foolish, after all."

Kay leaned closer, to look straight at him.

"You've got to tell me!" she urged. "I certainly have a right to know if I have done anything."

"I told you you haven't done anything," he said, still more uneasy, for it was beginning to look as if he had started something that he couldn't—and shouldn't—finish.

"I want to know anyway," she said with finality.

"Well, it's just that Cory thinks—" He gulped, then gave a nervous cough and started all over again. "It's just that Cory thinks. . . . By golly, Kay, I can't say it!"

She looked at him, her eyes wide, for his halting speech and embarrassed manner had told her woman's heart every-

thing. Though, manlike, he was placidly sure he had told her nothing.

She slowly rose from her chair and stood looking out into the night for a moment. Then she was moving away, like some drifting spirit of the night, along the porch toward the doorway.

"Good night," she said, without looking around.

"Good-by, Kay," he said dully.

She did not reply as she moved rapidly now toward her room. He stood as if turned to stone, looking at the doorway through which she had gone, with his heart in his eyes. Icy fingers seemed to grip him while the chill of lorn winter seemed to close around him with the thought that this was good-by—their last good-by.

CHAPTER XIV

A Tumultuous Farewell



BRUCE MARVEL sat there alone on the porch, and in silence, until midnight. In her room, Kay White tossed sleeplessly upon her bed. Here was a problem that had suddenly become serious. Bruce Marvel's unconscious avowal of love for her had touched her more deeply than anything else had ever done in her life.

But the great trouble was that it had given her a glimpse into her own heart, too—one that startled her, made her almost afraid, and yet gave her a thrill that coursed all through her slender body. She had known of her interest in him, had been conscious of an awakened and enlivened interest in everything whenever he was near her; ever since the lion hunt. And in spite of her disapproval of one of his actions.

Now—she had to face it! She was in love! Thrillingly, desperately so, with all the fervor she had ever dreamed it might be. But she must not allow it! She knew so little about him—and he must not know—ever! Some way, somehow, she must conquer this thing instead of letting it conquer her. But how? When all she could think of was the tender look in his splendid gray eyes when he looked at her, with those eyes speaking the words his lips did not speak. And when even the touch of his hand made her blood race and dance through her veins with lightning speed.

She tried to tell herself that she was glad he was going away and she would never see him again, for instinctively she knew he might be very difficult to resist. With a dull thud of her heart she knew he would be just as hard to forget. But she must forget him—she must!

Repeating that like a litany she fell asleep. . . .

At breakfast the next morning, Bruce Marvel appeared in his street clothes, much to the surprise of everyone except Cory Blaine and Kay.

"What's the big idea?" demanded Dora

Crowell. "Is that rig the last word in paper chase raiment?"

"I'm leaving today," Marvel said simply.

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Birdie Talbot. "And we haven't had a single game of bridge."

"We shall certainly be sorry to see you go, Mr. Marvel," said Miss Pruett, in her low, cultured voice.

"Well, we made a horseman of him anyway before he left," chimed in Bert Adams.

"I'd like to get back to God's country, where there's a golf course, myself," said Benson Talbot.

"Butts is goin' down to the train to meet a party, Marvel," announced Blaine. "He'll take you and yore stuff along with him."

"What are you going to do with Baldy?" asked Dora.

"I'm going to take him along with me," replied Marvel.

"Want to sell him?" asked Adams. "I'll give you what you paid Cory for him."

"I'm not aimin' ever to sell Baldy," Marvel said slowly, and Kay White alone knew why he was so firm about that.

After breakfast Marvel watched the party get away on the paper chase. He saw Cory Blaine and Kay and Bud start up the valley fifteen minutes ahead of the others. He was remembering how at the last minute Kay had come and given him her hand in parting.

"GOOD-BY, Bruce," she had said, and he had not understood the tremulous note in her low voice that was there in spite of her determination to show no emotion. "I'm sorry you're not going to be here when my father comes. He will be sorry not to have been able to thank you for saving my life."

"I didn't do anything for thanks, Kay," he had assured her. "Anyhow, he couldn't be any more thankful than I."

"Hurry up!" Blaine had growled. "If we want to get back any time tonight we'd better get started."

Marvel had pressed the girl's hand. "Good-by, Kay," he had murmured, conscious that something was choking his throat peculiarly, and a moment later she was gone.

When the balance of the party had ridden away, Marvel found himself with Butts, alone in the corral.

The bowlegged cowboy swaggered up to the tenderfoot.

"We'll be leavin' right after dinner, Mister," he informed impudently. "The train's due about three."

"I'll be ready," Marvel said shortly, and turned back toward the house.

Miss Pruett was sitting on the porch, her embroidery lying in her lap, her eyes straining up the valley, following the dust of the riders. Marvel joined her.

"Rather lonesome for you here, isn't it, Miss Pruett?" he asked in his cheery tones.

"Oh, I don't mind it a bit," she assured.

"Only that I worry so much about Kay. I shall be glad when her father gets here. I

don't like the idea of her riding off with strange men."

"Mrs. Talbot and Dora are along on the paper chase," Marvel reminded her.

"But Kay and Cory and Bud started fifteen minutes ahead of the others, and I don't think it's proper at all." Miss Pruell shook her head sadly. "I just can't get used to the ways of modern young people. Mr. Marvel, I suppose I'm too old-fashioned, but probably I always shall be."

"I guess I'm a little bit old-fashioned myself, Miss Pruell," Marvel told her soberly. "Somehow I would much rather have seen Kay riding off with the crowd."

She glanced up at him, wide-eyed.

"Do you think there's any danger?" she asked, perturbed.

"Oh, my no!" he assured her, and his cheerful grin came back. "Nothing's wrong—except that you and I just will insist on being old-fashioned."

"I suppose so," she admitted a little forlornly. "That's what Kay is always telling me. But it would just about kill her father and me if anything happened to Kay. She is all we have. My sister, who was Kay's mother, died when Kay was a little girl and I have always had the care of her, so she's just as dear to me as though she were my own."

"I can see how that would be," said Marvel. "You ought to be mighty proud of yourself, Miss Pruell. You've done a fine job."

"Kay's a fine girl," said Miss Pruell proudly, "whether I had anything to do with making her one or not, but the trouble with Kay is she is too trusting. She thinks everybody is just as fine as she is. She is self-reliant enough, but somehow she doesn't seem to be as sophisticated as some of the other girls, and I am always afraid that she is going to be imposed upon."

"I know what you mean," said Marvel. "Kay's not like Dora Crowell, for instance. No one would worry about Dora, no matter how many men she went off riding with, and she's a mighty nice girl, too."

MISS PRUELL nodded her full agreement.

"Dora impresses one as being able to take care of herself," she said primly.

"Well, Kay can take care of herself, too," Marvel told her with conviction. "She'll be all right, Miss Pruell."

"I know it," reluctantly admitted Kay's uneasy aunt, "but just the same I'd feel safer if you were along, Mr. Marvel."

He looked at her in surprise. "But I'm more of a stranger than Cory," he reminded her. "It's certainly mighty fine of you to have confidence in me."

"Yes, Kay and I both have a lot of confidence in you, Mr. Marvel, especially Kay. She was all broken up this morning when she told me you were going away."

He made no reply, but he was thinking that if that were true, the girl had most successfully hidden her regret from him, but then girls were funny. He had never had much experience with them, but he

had read plenty about them. Besides everybody said they were funny. He supposed he would never understand them.

He was looking out across the ranch yard down into the valley, but his thoughts were in another direction, where a golden-haired girl in overalls rode with a man he did not trust. It was minutes before he realized that he was looking at something that in other circumstances he would have seen immediately.

"Here comes a car," he said to Miss Pruell. "You don't see many cars up here, do you?"

She looked up, peering through her glasses down the valley road.

"Why, bless my heart!" she exclaimed. "I believe that's John! Yes, that's Kay's father. I'd recognize his roadster anywhere."

Marvel and Kay's aunt sat watching the car as it came swiftly up the rough road and then, slowing down, turned into the ranch yard. Then Miss Pruell stood up and waved her hand, and as the car stopped before the house she went down the steps to greet a well built man of fifty with graying hair that accentuated the bronze of his tanned face.

"Hello, Abbie!" he said heartily.

"I'm so glad you've come, John!" Miss Pruell exclaimed. "Did you have a pleasant trip?"

"Where is Kay?" he demanded.

"She's out for the day—gone on a paper chase," Miss Pruell informed.

He had opened up the rumble seat and was getting out his bags.

"Can't I help you, sir?" asked Marvel, coming down the steps, and Miss Pruell hastily introduced them.

The two men shook hands and in the brief, keen scrutiny of the instant each saw something in the other that he liked. Miss Pruell took the opportunity to increase the regard of her brother-in-law immediately.

"Mr. Marvel saved Kay's life the other day, John!" she said, with something more of enthusiasm than Bruce Marvel had ever seen in the prim, quiet spinster.

"They are going to make a good story of that before they're through with it, Mr. White," Marvel said, laughing, but he had to listen again to a detailed narration of the whole affair.

"I'm sorry I cannot tell you how I feel about this, Marvel," John White said soberly, when Miss Pruell had given the last crumb of information. "But until you're a father yourself you cannot understand what I owe you."

AFTER helping White in with his bags, Marvel left the two and strolled down to the stable. Kay's father and aunt, he guessed, would probably have much of a personal nature to discuss. So he did not see them again until dinner was served at noon.

During the conversation at the table, Marvel learned many surprising things about John White that Kay's father seemed proud to relate. For one thing, he

discovered, White had started in life as a cowpuncher. He had become foreman of a big ranch in California and then a partner. Finally, with his own accumulation of wealth and the growth of the community in which he lived, he had drifted into banking.

It seemed almost like a fairy story to Marvel, or rather to Buck Mason, cowboy deputy sheriff. There were a hundred questions he would have liked to ask. But his natural reticence prevented, and presently the conversation drifted to other topics. Soon the meal was over and Butts was calling from the porch.

"Yuh better shake a leg, Mister, if yuh're goin' along with me!" he yelled.

"Just a moment, my man," replied Marvel, but he rose from the table. "I won't say good-by now," he said to Miss Pruell and White. "I'll see you before I leave. It will take a few minutes to get my baggage on to the buckboard."

WHEN he reached the porch with the lighter of his bags, Butts met him with a surly scowl.

"Give me a hand with my stuff, Butts," he ordered crisply. "My trunk's upstairs." "Rustle it yoreself," growled the puncher. "I ain't flunkin' for no tenderfoot."

"Have it your own way," Marvel said, with a careless shrug. "I ain't in any hurry to leave, but I don't leave without my trunk, and I ain't goin' to carry it alone." His eyes narrowed as he regarded Butts. "Maybe if Blaine finds me here when he gets back he's going to be a little peeved at you."

Butts hesitated a moment, glaring, as he growled something under his breath.

"Come on then," he gave in surlily. "Where is it? I don't want to see yuh around here no longer than I have to my-ownself."

Together they went to Marvel's room and carried his trunk and a larger bag out to the buckboard. While Butts was slambanging rope ends and swearing under his breath as he roped the baggage to the vehicle, Marvel returned to the house and said good-by to Miss Pruell and White.

"I hope to see you again sometime, young man," White said heartily, as they parted.

"Same to you, sir," said Marvel, but as he turned and left them he was thinking: "Yuh don't hope it half as much as I do."

"Well, yuh 'bout ready?" demanded Butts.

"Just as soon as I get Baldy," Marvel said placidly.

"What yuh goin' to do with Baldy?" demanded the bowlegged puncher.

"What do you suppose?" Marvel said, with maddening coolness. "Lead him down to the railroad, of course."

"Who said so?"

"I do."

"You ain't goin' to lead him behind this buckboard," Butts declared huffily. "Not none!"

Marvel sighed. "Then take my trunk off," he ordered. "I'm staying here."

Butts let out a long string of blistering oaths that only Marvel, however, could hear.

"Well, yuh got me again, yuh damn dude!" he admitted wryly. "But yuh're shore goin' to be sorry for it!"

"Not if I know it," Marvel said, his voice cutting like sharp-edged ice.

"Good-by, Mr. Marvel!" Miss Pruell called from the porch. "I hope you have a pleasant trip."

"Thank you, Miss Pruell," he said with his wide grin. "I'm expecting to."

Butts drove down to the stable and Marvel went in and led Baldy out, taking him close to the side of the off horse of the team.

"What yuh doin' there?" demanded Butts.

"I'm going to tie him up here where you can't get funny and lose him," Marvel said sternly.

"You know too much for a tenderfoot," complained Butts.

"He'll travel better up here anyway," said Marvel. "Besides removin' all temptation from your soul."

After he had tied Baldy's halter rope to the ring in the snaffle bit of the off horse, he came back and climbed into the buckboard. Cracking the whip as though he wished he were plying it across Bruce Marvel's back, Butts started the team toward town.

CHAPTER XV

Bandit Trail



RIGHT at the start, Baldy was inclined to make things awkward, and Butts expressed his opinion in growling profanity. After awhile, however, the horse settled down to the gait of the team, and traveled easily.

From the ranch stable to the little town sprawling along the railroad, two and a half hours away, neither man spoke. At the end of the journey Marvel briefly told Butts to leave him and his stuff off at the hotel, for the next eastbound train did not leave until early in the morning.

The westbound train on which Butts expected his passengers was late—how late the station agent could not tell. All he knew was that it had been held up by a wrecked freight train and that it might be several hours before the track was cleared.

But that did not interest Bruce Marvel. He got a room in the hotel and took Baldy to the livery stable.

The proprietor of the livery was a bleary-eyed, red-nosed individual who appeared much interested in Marvel's clothes.

"I reckon yuh be one of Cory Blaine's dudes, huh?" he said.

"Do you?" inquired Marvel politely.

"Yore hoss?" asked the proprietor.

"Yes. You haven't got a saddle and bridle you want to sell, have you?"

"I got an outfit I've been holdin' for a board bill for more'n a year now," replied the proprietor, brightening. He took the halter rope from Marvel and led Baldy into a stall.

"What you feedin'?" asked Marvel.

"I got some good alfalfa hay."

"Nothing else?" The tenderfoot looked surprised.

"What yuh want for this cayuse?" the liveryman sniffed. "T-bone steaks?"

"I saw some oat hay stacked in the shed when I come in," suggested Marvel. "Give him that."

The liveryman gave him a keen look.

"Yuh're shore particular," he observed.

"Just as you would be with one of your horses," said Marvel, with an ingratiating smile. "I know a horseman when I see him, and I'll bet your horses get nothing but the best."

"Yuh're dead right, young feller!" The bleary-eyed liveryman puffed up perceptibly. "Yuh shore keep yore eyes open, don't yuh?"

"And where's your grain?" demanded Marvel. "You can't never make me believe a man like you don't grain his horses. Oh, I see! It's in that bin back there. You fork him in some of that oat hay and I'll get the grain." He started toward the end of the barn where the grain bin stood.

The proprietor gave him another keen look, then shook his head and went to fork the hay into Baldy's manger. When he returned Marvel had measured out a generous ration of oats for his horse.

"Now let's see that horse rig," Marvel said brightly.

Ten minutes later he had purchased an old but serviceable saddle, to the pommel of which was tied a forty-foot hemp rope, and had acquired a bridle of sorts, and was on his way back to his hotel room. What would happen now was in the lap of the gods, but he had plenty to work on, at last.

The same thing was troubling him, however, that had been a great worry ever since the early morning. He could not get it out of his mind. If only Kay was not off somewhere with Cory Blaine! For that she was, he was certain. It would be so easy for a conniver like Blaine to get rid of anyone as ingenuous as Cowboy Bud.

ALL day, in his mind, Marvel had been following Kay and Blaine—and it probably was a good thing for what peace of mind he had that what he mentally saw was not an actual telepathic picture. . . .

As Cory Blaine, with Kay and Bud, had ridden away from the ranch ahead of the others, they bore to the southwest through a low pass that took them out of the main valley in which the ranch lay. At the horn of his saddle, Bud carried a sack filled with paper, cut into small pieces, and some of this he dropped occasionally as Blaine had instructed him to do.

"Yuh might as well ride on ahead, Bud," Blaine presently suggested. "Follow that

old, dry spring trail for about five miles, then cut across to the left, back into the valley. Drop a little paper when yuh hit a main trail, then yuh don't have to drop no more as long as the trail is plain until yuh leave it. After yuh leave a trail, ride about fifty yards before yuh drop any more paper. That'll make 'em hunt around awhile to pick up yore trail again.

"After yuh get into the valley, keep out of sight as much as possible. Hunt out washes and high brush to hide yoreself in, and keep on up the valley quite a spell before yuh cross. I don't care if yuh go as far as Mill Creek. We're goin' to give 'em a ride today that they'll shore remember."

"Hey!" objected Bud. "If I go that roundabout way to Mill Creek it'll be a ride of nigh on to forty miles 'fore we get back to the ranch."

"I don't believe some can stand that, Cory," Kay said hesitantly.

Blaine chuckled. "They'll have some-thin' to talk about for the rest of their lives, Kay," he declared, "and that's what most of 'em are out here for. It won't kill 'em."

"Bert Adams won't never sit down again," said Bud, wrinkling his nose.

"That's his funeral," said Blaine. "You mosey along now, Bud, and we'll foller. You got the best hoss in the outfit, so there ain't no use of our tryin' to keep up with yuh."

"All right," said Bud complacently. "So long." And he rode away.

Blaine held his horse to a walk until Bud was out of sight. He did not talk to Kay who followed behind him along the narrow trail, but presently she spoke to him.

"You're off the trail, Cory," she said, a little worried tone in her voice. "This isn't the main trail and Bud hasn't dropped any paper here."

"Oh, that's all right," said Blaine. "I know where Bud's ridin'. This is a short cut."

"I don't see how it can be a short cut," persisted Kay, whose own sense of direction was particularly keen, "when it's bearing off to the west, while Mill Creek is southeast of us."

"Well, it ain't shorter in distance, Kay," he explained easily, "but it's a whole lot easier going, and we'll make better time. The trail Bud's on gets mighty rough further up. We'll dodge all that. Mebbe even beat him into the valley."

THEY dropped down into a gully and crossed a low ridge, beyond which lay a barren and forbidding gulch, carved from the red soil by the rains of ages. It did not look like an easier way to Kay, but she had confidence in Blaine's knowledge of the country, so docilely followed where he led.

After a little a steep and precarious cattle trail led down into the bottom of the gulch, where they were entirely hidden from view in the winding bed of a dry wash.

"What a lonely place!" said Kay, shuddering a little.

She felt nervous, and could not understand why. This lonely place depressed her anyhow, made her suddenly fearful for some strange instinctive or premonitory reason. Anything might happen in such a spot. And Cory Blaine was not even carrying a gun! She noticed that now for the first time, and wondered why, because it was always his custom to carry one. She mentioned it to him.

"You forgot your gun," she said.

"That's right!" he said, surprised, as his hand slapped down to where his holster ought to be. "Reckon I was so busy this mornin' I plumb forgot it. Oh, well, not much chance I'll be needin' it."

"I don't like this place, Cory," Kay said, only a little further on. "I wish you'd take me out of it."

They were crossing the mouth of another deep wash that entered the one where they were riding. The sides of most of these washes were perpendicular, sometimes ten or fifteen feet in height, forming narrow, tortuous corridors, their walls broken occasionally by well worn cattle trails that led down one bank and up the other.

Something attracted Kay's attention up the wash they were passing.

"Cory!" she exclaimed in a startled whisper. "I saw a man up there! He had a handkerchief tied across his face!"

Just ahead of them the wash turned abruptly to the left, and Kay had scarcely got out her frightened words when a rider suddenly blocked their way. He, too, wore a bandanna about the lower part of his face, hiding all but his eyes.

"Stick 'em up!" he growled.

Blaine's hands went up slowly, as the man Kay first had seen started quickly down the wash to join his masked companion. And in that instant Kay wheeled Lightfoot in an effort to escape. For a bright light had instantaneously dawned on Kay White. She had been led into a trap!

Quick as she was, though, she was not quick enough. For as Lightfoot wheeled, the other rider spurred into the wash, blocking her escape.

"Set tight, Miss!" he yelled at her, flinging up his .45.

"Climb down!" ordered the man confronting Blaine.

"What you want?" Blaine flared. "If it's money, take what I got. I ain't armed."

"Shut up, and climb down, I said," growled the bandit.

Blaine reluctantly obeyed. The bandit also dismounted and came toward him.

"Turn around!" he snarled. "And don't make no funny moves if yuh ain't lookin' for lead poisonin'."

HE TOOK the riata from Blaine's saddle, forced the dude ranch proprietor to lower his arms behind his back, then secured Blaine's wrists with one end of the rope. Looping the reins of Blaine's horse

over the horn of his own saddle, he turned back up the wash leading the horse, while Blaine followed at the end of the rope, with Kay and her captor trailing in the rear.

Around the bend, a cattle trail led up onto the bank. Here captors and captives climbed out of the wash and halted beside a clump of high bushes. The man who had Blaine in charge made him lie down while his ankles were quickly bound.

Removing Blaine's bandanna from about his throat, the captor twirled it into a cylinder which he forced into Blaine's mouth, tying the ends tightly at the back of his neck, effectually gagging him. He tied the bound man's horse to the other side of the bush.

"I reckon they'll find yuh in a coupla days," he drawled, with a peculiar leer at his prisoner.

The other man had taken down Kay's halter rope and was holding it to prevent another attempt at escape.

"What are you going to do with me?" she demanded, her head flung up defiantly.

"Yuh're goin' along with us, Miss," said the harsh-voiced outlaw who had been tying up Cory Blaine. "As long as yuh don't get to actin' up, yuh won't get hurt none."

WITHOUT even a glance at Cory, lying there bound and helpless, he mounted and rode up the gulch toward the south, leading the way, while his masked companion prodded Kay's horse along. . . .

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when Bud rode into the ranch yard, unsaddled his pony and turned it out to pasture.

As he walked toward the bunkhouse, Miss Pruell called to him from the porch where she was sitting with Kay's father.

"Where are the rest of them?" she asked, when Bud came over.

"I guess they ain't far behind," he said. "I seen 'em a couple of times."

"I thought Kay and Cory were with you," Miss Pruell said uneasily.

"They dropped behind the first thing this mornin'," said Bud. "I haven't seen 'em since. Reckon they'll be in directly, though."

But they were not in directly. A half hour later the other riders commenced to straggle in. Dora Crowell was first, and fifteen minutes later the Talbots appeared and joined the group on the porch. Not until then did Kay's father and aunt discover that none of them had seen either Kay or Cory Blaine all day.

"Look!" John White suddenly exclaimed, pointing up the valley. "Here comes a riderless horse."

"Probably Adams'," said Benson Talbot. "The last time I saw him he looked like he'd a whole lot rather walk than ride."

Bud was standing at the foot of the steps, straining his eyes through the growing dusk.

"That ain't Adams' hoss!" he cried. "That's Cory's! Folks, somethin's happened!"

CHAPTER XVI

For Ransom!



EXCEPT for Miss Pruett who had dropped trembling into her chair, too frightened to move, and Birdie Talbot, the whole party raced for the corral to meet the horse as he came trotting in. The animal was dragging his halter rope, the loose end of which was knotted about a bit of broken brush wood.

"Oh, it ain't nothin', folks," Bud tried to calm them down. "It's jest that Cory tied him somewheres and he busted loose. Reckon Cory and Miss White is walkin' in, or mebbe they're comin' slow if her hoss has to carry double."

"Why didn't they stay with you?" demanded White.

Bud pushed back his battered Stetson and scratched his head in perplexity.

"That's jest what I'd like to know," he admitted. "I can't figger it out."

"Did the rest of you follow this man's trail all the way?" asked White.

"Yes," Talbot said. "It was plainly marked, and I think we never got off it once."

"Then if they weren't considerably off the trail themselves you should have seen them some time during the day," White said, his jaw suddenly hard. "This doesn't look good to me at all."

"It doesn't look good to me, either, Mr. White," said Dora Crowell, her eyes clouded and serious. "And there is something wrong. I know it!"

"A search must be made for them at once!" White straightened determinedly, and glanced at Bud. "How many men have you here?"

"There's me and two other fellers," Bud said. "We'll start right out if yuh say so."

"Immediately!" snapped White. "If I only knew the first thing about this country—" His eyes flashed fire as his lips drew tight. "Find them, Bud! You've got to find them!"

"We'll have to catch up some fresh hosses," Bud said. For once he had lost his happy-go-lucky manner. "We'll find 'em all right, Mr. White. Don't worry."

He started off at a lope for the bunkhouse, completely forgetting that he'd had nothing to eat all day.

As soon as he had gone, Dora Crowell drew Kay's father to one side.

"I don't want to alarm you unnecessarily, Mr. White," she said in a low voice, "but if I were you, I wouldn't trust entirely to these T F Ranch men, no matter how eager they seem to be. There's a sheriff in town. You could telephone him to start a posse after Kay."

"Do you think it's as serious as that?" he asked, becoming really alarmed now, where he'd had only worried thoughts of a broken leg, or even some minor accident before.

"I don't know," Dora said slowly. "But I'll tell you this, Mr. White. If you were not here, and this had happened, I should have phoned the authorities myself."

John White stared at her a long, thoughtful minute. She met his gaze, but did not answer his unspoken question.

"I wish you would be frank with me, Miss Crowell," he said huskily.

"I will," said Dora. "It's this: Blaine's in love with Kay." She paused a meaningful moment. "I don't think he's any too trustworthy."

"Does—does she care for him?" he asked.

"No! And to my mind that spells just one thing, Mr. White, where Cory Blaine is concerned—danger!"

"Where's the telephone?" White demanded.

"I'll show you," said Dora.

BERT ADAMS rode into the yard and put up to the corral as they disappeared into the ranchhouse. He was swaying in the saddle when his horse came to a stop. Painfully and laboriously he dismounted—and promptly laid down right there, while his horse ambled on into the stable. . . .

In the little cowtown, Bruce Marvel was sitting in the office of the hotel when the telephone rang. The proprietor was washing his face in a tin basin just outside the door, his hands, hair, face and eyes covered with lather.

"Will yuh answer that danged thing for me, young feller?" he called, and Marvel crossed to the phone to answer.

"This is John White at the T F Ranch," a voice said as soon as he answered. "I want to speak to the sheriff."

"Wait a minute," said Marvel, and called to the hotel man: "Somebody wants to talk to the sheriff."

"He's out to his ranch and he ain't got no telephone. Take the message."

"I can't get hold of the sheriff now," Marvel said into the transmitter, "but if you'll give me his message, I'll get it to him."

"My daughter and Cory Blaine are lost somewhere in the hills," White said hastily. "Blaine's horse came in alone five minutes ago. I want the sheriff to form a posse and make a thorough search for them. I'll stand all the expense and pay any reward he wants!"

Bruce Marvel felt stunned, but his voice did not show his excitement as he answered.

"One man who knows the hills will start right now, Mr. White," he promised, "and the sheriff will be notified to follow with a posse." He hung up without waiting to hear any more.

Briefly he explained the situation to the hotel proprietor.

"Can you get word to the sheriff at once?" he asked.

"I'll have a man on the road in five minutes."

"Good! And now listen to me—and though I've got no time to explain to you

now, I know what I'm talking about! Tell 'em never mind huntin' the hills. Ride straight for Hi Bryam's mountain cabin at the head of Mill Creek. If they don't find nothin' there, tell 'em to keep on along the One Mile Creek trail to Kelly's place in Sonora."

"Yuh seem to know a lot about this here country for a tenderfoot," commented the proprietor, eyeing him with puzzlement.

"Never mind that now—or what I know. Get busy!"

He spun around and took the steps two at a time to his room on the second floor.

Quickly stripping off his clothes, he opened his trunk and dragged out well worn boots and spurs, overalls, flannel shirt, Stetson, chaps and bandanna. He was into them in record time, and strapping about his hips a cartridge belt that supported two old .44s in holsters as darkened and mellowed by age as were his chaps and cartridge belt.

As he raced down the stairs and out into the night, no one saw him, for the hotel proprietor was hunting a man to send after the sheriff. The train from the east was pulling in to the station and Butts was waiting for his passengers, so he did not see Marvel hurrying to the stable. And Bruce Marvel-Buck Mason did not see Olga Gunderstrom alight from the train.

NO ONE was at the livery stable as Marvel dashed in, saddled and bridled Baldy. The liveryman was eating his supper at home.

Into one of the empty gunny sacks on the floor beside the grain bin, Marvel dumped several measures of oats, tied the sack back of his saddle, and a moment later was galloping south in the night.

Butts' none too lovely disposition had been badly strained by his enforced wait for the train. There were urgent reasons why he should have been back at the ranch early, and now as he wrestled with two trunks and three suitcases in an endeavor to strap them to the back of the buckboard, he silently cursed everything and everybody that came out of the East. Especially the supercilious girl who spoke to him as she had spoken to the colored porter when she tipped him.

"Get in, Miss," he said brusquely, when at last he had everything tied on securely. She seated herself beside him. "Yuh better hang on tight. We're goin' to travel."

Once across the railroad tracks he gave the broncos a cut with the whip, and as they bounded forward, Olga Gunderstrom's head snapped back.

"Please be more careful, you!" she cried angrily.

"You, huh! That was as bad—worse—than being called 'My man.' Butts gritted his teeth and struck the horses again.

"I shall report you for this!" snapped Olga.

"Report and be blowed!" Butts snapped back. "I'm sick of this job anyway. I've got my stummick full of dudes and dudesses."

A short distance out of town they passed a lone horseman who drew to one side of the road as they dashed past. Butts recognized nothing familiar about the rider, which was not surprising, but if he'd had a chance to note the horse more closely he doubtless would have found much that was familiar about him.

It was a dusty and angry girl who alighted from the buckboard at the foot of the ranchhouse steps of the T F Ranch. With a glad cry of recognition Dora Crowell ran down the steps to greet her.

"Olga!" she cried. "Cory never told me you were coming today!"

"Well, here I am," snapped Olga, "and it's no fault of this man here that I'm all in one piece. I never saw anyone so surly and impudent in my life! Where is Mr. Blaine? He ought to discharge him at once."

"Mr. Blaine is missing," Dora said soberly. "We're afraid something has happened to him and Kay White—I wrote you about her—in the hills."

Dora had rather expected that news to flatten Butts, but he heard it with little show of excitement.

"Bud and the other two boys have gone out to search for them," Dora said, her lips tightening as she stared at the bow-legged cowboy, angry at his indifference. "Don't you think you better go, too, Butts?"

"That's what I'm aimin' on doin'," he rumbled. "If there was anything here but dudes I could get started right away, but I've got to unload all this junk and put the team away."

"We'll attend to that," said John White. "I want every man possible who knows the hills out searching for those two!"

"I'll help you, Mr. White," Benson Talbot offered, and rose.

"I'd like to," Bert Adams murmured weakly, "but I don't think I can get up."

"We can manage it all right," said White.

"Thanks," mumbled Butts ungraciously, and headed for the corral.

THE only horses up were the sorrel colt and the old horse that was used to drive in the saddle horses. Butts being in a great hurry saddled the sorrel. He rode straight west, crossed two ridges and dropped down into a dry wash.

After he reached the bottom of the wash, he commenced to whistle occasionally, a few bars from a familiar old-time air. Presently, from the distance, it returned to him like an echo. He urged the sorrel into a faster walk, and a few minutes later a voice hailed him.

"Hey! I'm up here on the bank!"

Butts found the trail that led up from the bottom of the wash, and a moment later dismounted beside Cory Blaine.

"Yuh long-eared idiot!" Blaine said, fuming with anger. "Did yuh figger I expected to be left here all the rest of my life? The next time I pick a man for a job like this, it won't be you."

"I couldn't help it," Butts mumbled.

"The train was held up by a wreck. I ran the broncs all the way from the railroad and then started right out after yuh. I ain't had nothin' to eat, neither."

"Too bad about you," grumbled Blaine, as Butts fumbled with the knot of the rope that secured his ankles and wrists. "I've been layin' here all day with nothin' to eat—and nothin' to *drink*!"

"What happened to yore hoss?" asked Butts. "He come in jest 'fore dark."

"The damn fool got scared at some-thin' and pulled back till he busted the brush he was tied to. Then he high-tailed."

"Everything work out all right?" asked Butts.

"Shore—all 'cept this. I shore didn't aim on layin' here all day and half the night."

"Yuh shoulda brung a bed," said Butts.

"Yuh think that sorrel'll carry double?" asked Blaine.

"I reckon he's gonna have to," Butts drawled, "for I shore ain't goin' to walk. We better try it down in the bottom of the wash. If he started pitchin' up here he'd be shore to fall in."

Stiffly Cory Blaine mounted and rode down into the wash, reining the sorrel close to a low spot along the bank, from which Butts lowered himself gingerly onto the animal's rump.

"I guess he ain't goin' to do nothin'," said Blaine as the sorrel walked off like an old family horse. "Lot of excitement at the ranch?"

"Uh-huh," said Butts. "Her father come today."

Blaine whistled. "And 'course he'll be offerin' a reward," he said. "But when I do this rescue business from Kelly's ranch, I won't want no ransom money or nothin', if she'll marry me, for if I'm ever John White's son-in-law I'll be all set for the rest of my life."

"How about the rest of us?" demanded Butts. "We ain't goin' to be no son-in-laws and we want our cut of the ransom."

"Well, I reckon he'll have to pay the ransom," Blaine said thoughtfully, "but he won't have to pay no reward."

"'Cause you'll be a regular hero and refuse to take it," said Butts. "But I don't care what yuh get—or don't get—long as I get mine. It's yore business, too, I reckon, all of it, but I'd hate to trust my girl to that bunch. Specially Hi Bryam."

"They know I'd gun 'em," said Cory Blaine.

"Well, she's yore girl," said Butts. "But me—I wouldn't trust Bryam, at least not in Mexico where he could make his get-away."

"I ain't worryin' none," said Blaine, looking pleased with himself.

TO PROVE it, he changed the subject. "Say, did that Marvel feller get away today?" he asked.

"Don't mention that lobo to me," Butts grunted. "Every time I think of him I could chaw the head off a rattlesnake."

"He shore had me doin' some overtime

thinkin'," Blaine confessed. "Did I tell yuh how he rode this colt?"

"I knew he took him when he went to look for them fool hoss teeth," said Butts.

"I was watchin' him when he rode away, and I seen this little heller start to pitch down there jest before the road makes a big bend around the hill. He shore give that dude the works, but it never seemed to faze him. And when he come in that night he swore the colt never done a thing!"

"I can't figger it out," sighed Butts. "Mebbe it was jest a happen-so, and then again mebbe he can ride. But he shore can't shoot, and he ain't got good sense either!" He snorted disgustedly. "Huutin' for hoss teeth!"

"Did he ever find a tooth?" asked Blaine.

"He found a whole mouth full of 'em in that pinto of yore'n, but it smelt so that Bud said he lost interest, real sudden-like, and wouldn't even look no more."

"He shore was a loco damn fool," muttered Blaine. "But I wish I was shore he was a dude. He was the funniest dude I ever seen, if he was a dude."

"Well, he's gone now. Yuh won't never see him again."

"I hope not," Blaine said fervently.

CHAPTER XVII

Two on the Trail



CORY BLAINE and Butts found a depressed and worried company when they rode into the yard at the home ranch.

Dora Crowell was the first to spy him as he rode up.

"There's Cory!" she cried excitedly, and everybody fairly stumbled down the steps to surround him as he and Butts dismounted from the sorrel colt—all asking excited questions at once.

"Where's my daughter?" John White's commanding voice rose above the hub-bub.

"Yuh're Mr. White?" asked Blaine, and without waiting for a reply: "Somethin' terrible happened, Mr. White! I've jest come back long enough to get a fresh hoss!" He was panting, breathless, as he hurried on: "Two fellers stuck us up this mornin'! I didn't have no gun and we didn't have a chance! I thought they jest wanted money, so I didn't even try to fight, though it wouldn't a done no good, and I was scared mebbe Kay would get shot. They bound and gagged me, then rode off with her! Durin' the day I managed somehow to work the gag outa my mouth—jest 'bout chawed it in two—but I couldn't get my hands and feet loose."

"I found him tied up like a sack of barley over in Dry Spring Gulch," put in Butts. "If he hadn't got shed of that gag, I'd of rode right by him in the dark."

"Which way did they take her?" demanded White.

"I couldn't see 'em far," said Blaine. "But they started west over the ridge."

White groaned. "If we'd only known that sooner! The sheriff was just here with a posse, and if he'd known which way they went. . . . We'll have to have somebody ride after him!"

"Which way was the sheriff aimin' to look?" asked Blaine.

"He wouldn't tell me," said White. "He just said that he had a tip, but might spoil it if he said anything about it. They only stopped here long enough to see if we'd heard anything. Then they rode on."

"How'd the sheriff hear of it?" asked Blaine.

"I telephoned him, of course!" White said shortly. "Why wouldn't I? My daughter missing . . . in the night . . . off in these damned hills. . . ."

Blaine seemed thoughtful. "I wonder where he got his tip and what it was," he mused, more to himself than for answer.

AND then he suddenly seemed to come to life. He whirled toward Butts, his eyes flashing.

"Tell one of the boys to get Blue up for me, Butts—pronto!" he ordered.

"None of the boys are here, Cory," said Dora. "They're all out looking for you and Kay."

"Then I'll get him up myself!" shouted Blaine, at last losing all control of his emotions, apparently. "I'm going after Kay!" He was racing toward the corral and his voice was choked and harsh as he shouted over his shoulder: "And I'll never come back till I find her!"

"Get her, Blaine!" White shouted after him. "For God's sake, get her! Fifty thousand—a hundred—everything I've got to you or any other man who brings her back to me!"

Cory Blaine stopped so short his heels shot up gravel.

"Money!" he gritted. "Who wants money? I don't! It means more to me than all the money in the world to get her back to you safe and sound. Anyhow, it was all my fault this happened! If I had not forgot my gun. . . . But I promise you—anybody—I'll get her back! And if anything's happened to her, somebody's goin' to die!"

"They'll be brought to justice all right," White said grimly. "I've telegraphed to business associates in Mexico, and to the sheriff of adjoining counties to be on the lookout. Kay's kidnapers can't get away!"

His face drawn and haggard—not a difficult feat after his day's experience—Cory Blaine came slowly nearer Kay's father, as if forgetting his haste to reach the corral.

"I'm wonderin' if that was the right thing to do, Mr. White," he said, as if thought were painful. "Fellers like them is desperate. If they're surrounded, Kay'll like as not be done away with somewhere where she wouldn't never be found in a hundred years. Then they could scatter, and nobody'd ever know who they was. They was masked, and I couldn't never

identify 'em." He hesitated, then went on uncertainly: "If I was you, I'd telegraph all them people to lay off for awhile till I see what I can do. I know this country better'n anybody, and if I can't find her nobody can."

"I'll have to think that over, Blaine," White said noncommittally. "If you want to wait—"

"No, sir!" shouted Blaine. "I'm goin' now!" He whirled and resumed his race for the corral.

White walked slowly over to where Dora Crowell stood.

"Do you think you may have been mistaken about Blaine?" he asked. His face, too, was drawn, his eyes red from anxiety, and for the first time in his life he was at a loss which way to turn. No business methods would settle this desperate situation that meant more to him than his life. There was something pitiful in the way he clung to a clear-thinking girl—a girl barely out of her teens—for advice.

"Blaine certainly had no part in the abduction," he said reflectively, "and he's taking it mighty hard."

"Nevertheless, Mr. White, if I were you, I wouldn't call off those telegraphed orders," Dora said steadily. "If those men are so desperate they are not going to let Cory Blaine take Kay away from them single-handed."

"I guess you're right," sighed White. "He may need all the help he can get, but somehow I've got considerable confidence in Blaine, Miss Crowell."

"I wish I had," said Dora.

In the few moments during which Cory Blaine had stopped to speak to Kay's father, Butts had gone on and got the horses up. After considerable difficulty he had managed to get ropes on two of them. Those he saddled and tied to the corral posts, and was heading for the bunkhouse as Blaine saw they were ready and called out that he would hurry to the kitchen to grab some food to take with him. Kay's father heard that, and it impressed him, for he knew Blaine had not eaten all day, and that lying bound for long hours must have strained the man almost to the point of exhaustion.

In the bunkhouse, rummaging in the warbag tucked beneath his cot, Butts finally extracted a piece of note paper. The next moment the worried group on the porch saw him running toward them, waving the paper in his hand.

"Look!" he panted as he reached the foot of the steps. "A note from the kidnapers! It was stuck onto the bunkhouse door!"

WHITE grabbed the paper, and, followed by the others, hurried into the ranchhouse living room. By the light of the kerosene lamp he deciphered the crude scrawl. It read:

Tell Mr. White if he wants to see his daughter alive again to have one hundred thousand dollars in twenty-dollar bills ready one week from today at the T F Ranch. He will get more instructions then how to deliver the money and get his girl. No funny business or we'll slit her throat.

There was no signature, and the words were crudely handprinted.

Cory Blaine, with a package of food in his hands, came from the kitchen as he heard the excited cries in the living room. Silently White handed him the note.

"What do you think of it?" asked White after Blaine had read it.

"Where did this come from?" demanded Blaine.

"I found it stickin' on the bunkhouse door," said Butts. "It shore handed me a wallop when I read it."

"How could you read it?" Dora Crowell asked sharply. "There's no light at the bunkhouse."

"I seen the paper and then I struck a match," Butts said promptly, fast thinking for him.

"Oh!" was Dora's only comment.

"What would you advise, Blaine?" John White asked worriedly.

"Well, I might fail, Mr. White," Blaine said reluctantly. "And, after all, the big thing is to get Kay back. Mebbe yuh'd better have the money ready—in case I do fail."

"If you manage in any way to get in touch with them, Blaine," White said, his voice trembling, "tell them it'll be here! It's a lot of money to raise in ready cash on such short notice, but I'll do it—somehow."

"I'll shore do all I can, Mr. White," Blaine promised soberly. "Yuh can depend on that—and on me."

"I'm goin' with yuh, Cory," said Butts.

"You stay here," ordered Blaine. "If anything else about Kay should turn up while I'm gone there oughta be somebody here who knows the country and can ride hard."

Butts nodded, and left the house with Blaine as he walked down to the corral for his horse.

"One of us has got to be here," said Blaine. "If anything goes wrong and it ain't safe for me to come back, light a fire on the hill. I'll make a signal on Horse-camp Butte on my way back. Keep yore eye peeled for it, and if I don't get no signal from you, I'll know that everything is jake and I'll come on in."

"All right," said Butts, "but I hate to have to hang around here. I feel sort of uneasy."

"Why?"

"That Crowell girl. She come near gettin' me. I shore do hate all them damn dudes."

"Keep yore mouth shut and yuh won't get in no trouble," advised Blaine.

A moment later he had mounted and ridden off into the night. . . .

ON A MISSION that he knew was as desperate as any he had ever undertaken in his life, Bruce Marvel conserved the energies of his horse. In all likelihood he had a grueling grind ahead of him. This might be an endurance race in which speed could prove a liability rather than an asset.

Should he reach his goal with an ex-

hausted mount, all his efforts might go for nothing. No question but that he was pitted against a hard and desperate gang and that even should he be able to wrest Kay from them, his ability to return her in safety to the T F Ranch might still depend solely upon what stamina and speed were left in Baldy.

HE rode steadily until after midnight when he dismounted and, removing the horse's saddle and bridle, permitted him to roll.

A short time previously Baldy had been watered in Mill Creek and now when he had stretched his muscles in a good roll and both of them had rested for five or ten minutes, Marvel gave Baldy a small feed of oats. After the horse had cleaned them up, the man mounted again, and they headed once more along the trail.

All night Bruce Marvel rode. Just before dawn he halted for another brief rest. Again he removed the saddle and bridle from Baldy, rubbed down his back, and turned the blanket. But he saddled again immediately.

As he mounted he glanced down the valley, his eyes narrowing calculatingly as he saw a twinkling light ten or a dozen miles away.

"Must be the sheriff and his posse," he decided. "Wasn't nobody there when I come past."

And far up, toward the head of Mill Creek Canyon, other eyes saw the same light—the eyes of a watcher posted on the hillside above Hi Bryam's cabin. The eyes of the rough man whom Bruce Marvel had heard Cory Blaine call Eddie.

"Not so good," muttered the watcher.

Clumping down from the hillside, he awakened two men who were sleeping outside the shack.

"What's up?" demanded one of them.

"They's a campfire this side of Mill Creek camp," replied Eddie gruffly, in his blurred, raspy voice. "Reckon we better be movin'. There shouldn't be nobody comin' this way that would build a campfire."

"Cory told us to rest here one day," complained the half-awakened outlaw.

"Don't care what he told us! I'm lookin' after my own neck and I ain't goin' to wait around here for no man."

"Me, neither," rumbled the other aroused sleeper, harshly, and as he straightened up, the repulsive features of Hi Bryam showed in the dim moonlight. "He shore give us credit for sense enough to get out of here if you fellers was follered, and it looks like yuh was all right."

"It's all the same to me," said the other man, crawling from his blankets. "I ain't hankerin' to have nobody see me here with this girl, whether they're follerin' us or not."

"Cory was jest figgerin' on givin' the girl a rest, anyways, I reckon, thinkin' she couldn't stand so much ridin'," said the bandit who had been on sentry duty.

"Well, she's had five hours' rest now," Bryam growled, "and that's all she's goin' to get."

to get for awhile. You and Mart here get saddled up, Eddie, while I rustle some grub. We got plenty time to eat and get a good start on them fellers down there, even if they start now, which like as not they won't."

"Prob'ly they'll be waitin' till mornin'," said Eddie, "thinkin' they could pick up our trail better then."

"That light's shore a long way off," said Mart, peering down the hillside. "Don't see how yuh seen it in the first place."

IN TRUTH, the distant campfire was a little more than a glowing speck in the far distance. Only the keenest eyes could have detected it at all, and even to such it did not burn steadily, but twinkled like a distant star of lesser magnitude.

"Well, you fellers get busy," ordered Bryam. "I'll wake the girl and get the grub."

"Better let her sleep as long as we can," suggested Eddie.

"To hell with her!" snarled Bryam. "She ain't no better'n we are."

"She's a girl," said Eddie. "Reckon we'd oughta treat her as decent as we can."

"Softy!" snapped Bryam.

"I ain't soft," Eddie's blurred voice said defensively, "but I ain't stuck on this business. Kidnapin' women ain't never been my business."

"Quit beefin'," said Mart, "and come on!"

Grumbling, Eddie followed off into the darkness in search of the hobbled horses. Bryam went to the cabin door and opened it.

"Say, you!" he called. "Wake up. We're leavin'."

Wake up? Kay White had been sitting wide-eyed through the long hours since they had brought her to Bryam's shack. She could not have forced herself to lie down on the filthy thing that Bryam called a bed. Even had she done so, she had known that there was no sleep for her. She was physically fatigued—terribly so—but her mind was too awake, too active, to entertain any thoughts of sleep.

"Yuh hear me?" demanded Bryam.

"I heard you," Kay said icily. "I am ready."

"I'm fixin' some grub," said Bryam. "When it's ready I'll call yuh."

Sitting in the rickety chair before the rough table, Kay made no reply. Her thoughts, bridging the interruption, once more attacked the tangled skein they sought to unravel. She had been able only to guess at the motive for her abduction, since her captors would tell her nothing, but the logical surmise was that she would be held for ransom.

The terrible thing that was tearing at Kay White, though, the thing that made her heart cold and dead within her, was that she knew who had done this cowardly, despicable thing to her, and why!

*Will Kay White Be the Victim of Cory Blaine's Grim Plan?
Is Ole Gunderstrom's Death Avenged? Follow Deputy Sheriff
Buck Mason as He Storms into Action for Justice and
Honor in the Third and Final Instalment of*

THE TERRIBLE TENDERFOOT

By

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

IN THE NEXT ISSUE



Twenty Feet Under

By EARL W. SCOTT

*Author of "Freedom's First Night,"
"Frozen Guilt," etc.*

*Ed Stormer Gets Slugged
and Dumped into a Boarded-
Up Well When He Tussles
With Grim Kidnapers!*

DARK—slimy dark. And the smell is awful. It's the smell of dead things. There's water drippin' somewhere. Quick, crazy chills rip down like red hot irons into my paralyzed legs.

"Cripes," I says, sort of comin' to. I'm aimin' to get up, but I can't. I'm held on all sides.

"You bet, all sides," I says. "There's mud, rocks and timbers piled on top of me," and I sneezes from the terrific stench of decay and moulding timber.

There's a weight like a freight car pressin' on the back of my neck. Twistin' around brings salty blood to my mouth.

I chokes, as rippin' pains like sharp tines fork my chest.

"I'm buried, that's it. Buried! Then why the hell ain't I dead?"

One arm comes, free and I twist sidewise in that grave of slime. I didn't know till then that my lips had been suckin' air from the end of



Hank knocked me cold with the poker

a cast iron pipe. The effort pulled 'em away and muddy water trickled into my mouth, shuttin' off my breath. I damn near passed out locatin' the thing, but coughing up muck clears my head.

Sure, I know where I am—at the bottom of Strobie's old grove well and gettin' only one break. The busted sucker pipe is feedin' me air.

From above comes the dim clatter of the broken windmill fans and the rusty pipe at my lips shudders as the busted wheel turns around. Quarter of a mile from the farmhouse it was, and buried in a grove.

I tries yellin' but my throat's swollen shut and no sound comes. I guess I'd been yellin' plenty without knowin' it and a hell of a lot of good it had done.

Only God knows how long I'd been here, stretched on my back, starin' up. I'm guessin' that casing lid hadn't always been so tight 'cause animals couldn't have tumbled in to die the way they had.

"Ed," I thinks, "you punk, you're checkin' out. That skunk, Hank Strobie, and his two skunkier sons, Lafe and Bud, have buried you plenty. You may be a tough egg, but you're up to yer neck in mud an' water, twenty feet under, with only one arm free. It's time for prayers."

IT'S plain enough what's happened. Tossed into the well, I likely struggled some and pulled a piece of scantlin' in after me. It had wedged crosswise just over my head, protectin' me some from the earth and rocks those hoosiers had shoveled in on top of me.

Layin' there, suckin' air from that scaly pipe end, it starts comin' back to me—the scrap in the farm kitchen.

Sittin' there, eatin' fat bacon and greasy potatoes, I calls the Strobies' hand. Lafe, on the other side, slams the table up, dishes and all. The cloth tangles up in my legs as I

grabs the butcher knife. Bud, sittin' besides me, socks me at belt level. As I fold up, he hooks my knife. But before he can slice me, old Hank bores in with the stove poker, slammin' me on the side of the head.

I was out and I wasn't, kinda half conscious. I heard 'em say somethin' about the old well as they toted me out the door.

Luggin' a hundred and ninety pounds o' meat a quarter of a mile was no cinch even for three men. So they stuck me in the wheel barrow. I know I was conscious enough to think what a damn fool I'd been. But it griped hell out of me, harvestin' three weeks for just the cheap chow I'd got, an' I was pretty mad the way those two half-wits, Lafe and Bud, had been followin' me around.

I'm no angel, but snatchin' and rough-housin' an innocent kid and holdin' him for ransom is outta my line.

Tried to count me in, Hank had, when I heard 'em spillin' the works in the barn Thursday night.

I was in the third stall milkin'. Wind was blowin' pretty hard and they didn't hear me, thinkin' I'd gone to the house for supper maybe. Hours on the Strobie farm was somethin' to cuss over. Lafe, the lazy ape, had shifted his share of the milkin' on me. Ten cows mornin' and evenin' ain't no cinch.

I got mighty still, listenin', when them three came into the dark barn, totin' a lantern, and squawkin' about the Paisly kid. Then that Jersey kicked over the bucket and hell popped.

"So," says Hank, roundin' the stall and suckin' air through his yellow teeth. "Spyin', huh?"

Bud and Lafe crowds in and for a minute I thinks they're goin' to gang me.

"You're nuts," I says, backin' off, luggin' the heavy stool. Then Bud

jerks a gun, only the old man knocks it up.

"Hold on," he says. "Boys, maybe we can use 'im," and he stands lickin' them tobacco-stained lips of his, squintin' in the yellow light.

"Why not?" he breathes, and I know whatever it is he's thinkin', I'm the goat. "Listen, Stormer, you're a smart guy," he says, "been around. We'll cut you in on a fourth of the twenty grand if you'll sit tight and keep yer damn head shut."

FOR a minute I didn't say much. Eyein' those three dirty bums crowdin' the stall-foot, I knew it was no time for hero stuff, but I was sure burnin' up inside.

'Course, I'd heard how the Paisly boy had been stole in Bragtown after his dad had won in the Irish Sweepstakes. How the kidnapers asked for all his winnin's, bein' twenty grand and him a truck driver with a family of eleven, the poor mutt, and needin' that dough hisself.

But hell, sow belly and beans with the dirty snatchers three times a day mads me up.

Well, learnin' all that finally rated me a sock on the lug and bein' tossed for dead into the well. Maybe they knew I wasn't. I don't know. But what the hell did the Strobies care!

There in the barn, ringed round by them punks, lantern light showin' up their scraggly whiskers and makin' 'em bigger'n they was, which was over six feet, I talked to myself.

"Ed," I says, "be smart, play along with 'em and watch yer chance."

"Okay, Hank," I says out loud, "no use denyin' I heard your talk and what a hell of a time you was havin' collectin' the dough from Paisly. I'll sit tight just so you don't harm the kid."

Hank squirts tobacco juice, looks wise at his two boys and nods.

"Sure, sure," he says, and right

then I knows the poor kid has already taken the count.

I didn't sleep much that night, Bud havin' moved into my bunk with me an' it wasn't for friendship's sake. Next day Lafe was my shadow, loafin' round easy with a gun bulgin' his pants, while I tinkers over odd jobs in the machinery shed.

Me, I'm gittin' sorer all the time, hopin' for some chance to slip out word to Sheriff Darby in Bragtown to smoke out the Strobies. I'm wheelin' cream cans to the stand out by the mail box Friday night. Spotting an old shipping tag fired to a lid gives me a hunch.

It's pretty-dark, wind's blowin' and Lafe backs up against a post to light a pill. He cusses plenty over blowed-out matches. Me, I've jerked the tag loose and am scratchin' words on it with the lead seal on the wire end, only time's too short and he rounds the stand before I can finish.

"What you doin'?" he asks, kind of suspicious, fishin' out his gun.

"This lid," I says, "won't go down." I've slid the tag inside before he grabs hold of the handle and yanks it up.

"It's fireworks, now," I thinks. But he don't see nothin'. I guess the lead has sunk the tag to the bottom, Strobie cream bein' thin an' poor like it was.

Well, he goes back to the house. I'm thinkin' I've muffed the only chance I had to tip off Darby. All I gets to write was "look for kid—" I couldn't even finish the word. Lyin' at the bottom of a half full cream can, what good was it anyhow?

LAFE must'a told Hank I was actin' screwy, 'cause at the supper table the old man barked at me:

"You're in no ways thinkin' of doublecrossing us, are you, Stormer? 'Twouldn't he healthy. Know what

we'd do if they tagged us? We'd swear you snatched the kid. Then see what the word of a damn hitchhiker does agin three respected citizens."

"You dirty rats!" I says, and yanks a butcher knife from the meat plate, but it was like Louis taking Schmeling and a quicker count.

Now, I ain't thirsty and I ain't hungry, I hurt too damn bad. I tries yellin' off and on, but the old pipes only croak and my mind starts wanderin'. Funny, but I got to thinkin' about those poor gobs caught underwater in the *Squalus* submarine. Lafe had brought a paper from town and they'd been talkin' about it.

"Signaled fer help with bombs," Lafe says. "Cripes, what if they couldn't 'a' told this here rescue boat just where they was? Corpses they'd all 'a' bin an' a sweet time dyin'."

"Hell," I thinks now. "They was better off than me, those gobs. Some of 'em got out."

Then, fumblin' round that water pipe with my loose hand gives me a hunch. I starts tappin' out a S.O.S. on the thing with a small rock. I'd picked up Morse on a section job in Utah, but was rusty and didn't try nothin' but the S.O.S.

At first the tappin' brought down hunks of rust into my mouth. For a minute all air was shut off, then it started comin' through again. I gets the jitters and drops the rock.

Fumblin' around for it after I gets desperate again, I feels a piece of cloth. I examine it with my fingers. It's a cap with a round band an' no visor. It's little, I thinks, like a kid's.

And there's a head under it, a head with soft curly hair!

"The Paisly kid!" I whispers. Sure enough, there is the cap badge in the soggy band that the papers described after the snatch a week ago.

I tried shovin' the muck away from

the kid's mouth, him bein' turned away from me the way he was. I knew all the time it wasn't any use. Look what a few hours had done to me, and he'd been there a week!

I quit that pretty soon, bein' a long reach. Besides the pain was raisin' hell in my legs after feelin' wooden so long.

Sure I was half nuts. Who wouldn't be? When I kinda come to myself, I was pattin' the little cap and talkin' like the lad could hear me.

"It's all right, kid," I'm sayin'. "Old Ed's goin' to get outa here some way, and we'll stick a rope round the necks of them two-legged lice! It's hangin' in the state for kidnagin'."

AFTER a little I gets to noticin' it's maybe five second counts between each drip of that water. I figures that makes twelve to the minute, an' that's seven hundred and twenty to the hour.

I counts fifteen hundred and sixty drips.

"You damn fool," I thinks. "That'll drive you nuts!"

So, havin' found my rock, I went back to tappin' S.O.S. again on the pipe.

After a long blank spell I comes to and finds my hand tappin' away.

"Maybe next time you won't come to, you damn sissy," I says. And just then somebody start rippin' planks off the well box above and there's a flock of stars twinklin'.

"Somethin' screwy here," says a voice. "Maybe it's me, but that tappin' on the pipe was an S.O.S. or I've forgot my code."

"You're nuts!" answers Hank's voice. "This well ain't been used nor open for years."

"Yeah?"

A flashlight starts fingerin' the rotting walls. It flips down, plasters the mess of dirt and rocks, lingers a minute, then shuts off.

"Hi!" I chokes. "Wait!" But no sound comes out of my mouth.

"Now you satisfied?" snarls old Hank. "It's all damn lies, me and the boys here bein' mixed up with that kidnagin'. Honest farmers like us—"

But by then I'm hammerin' hell out of that pipe with my rock. This time I sees a white face squintin' over the curb rim.

"Honest like foxes, you are," says the face. Then comes a grunt, sudden. "You dirty so and so!" says the face, jerkin' back.

Rocks and sand dribble down. I hear sounds of a scrap and the quick blasting of heavy revolvers.

"They tried to shove me in, the dirty skunks!" barks the voice, and light comes splashin' down straight in my face.

"Hey!" the bird yells. "There's someone down there, sure as hell! Call the other guys, Tom. Tell 'em to bring a rope from the car."

I kinda grins at that, 'spite of everything, an' reaches over to pat that soggy little cap.

"What'd I tell you, kid?" I says. And that's all I remember.

They shoved my cot up to the window in the Bragtown hospital when the procession rolled by.

"That's Hank Strobie headin' for the cemetery," says the guy at my elbow. "Hank took one through the chest tryin' to shove me into the well."

"Swell spot," I says, shiverin'. I pokes a head next the pane.

It's a cheap little funeral train down there. Rollin' behind the hearse comes an open car. It's loaded with guards and there's two handcuffed lugs in the back seat.

"Lafe and Bud," I says. "What a picture."

"Yeah, they didn't care much about attendin'."

I glances up where the shutter half covers the window pane and gets a squint of myself for the first time in the glass.

"Lookit," I says. "My hair's white! What do you know about that, Lieutenant!"

"Yeah, but the old heart's still sound, eh, bo'?" He thumbs my bandaged chest.

"Didn't know I had one," I grins back at him.

"Yeah? Talkin' baby talk to that poor little Paisly kid down in that well, you was, when we finds you. Tell it to the Marines—"

"Or G-men," I says. "Mean' you. It was my one chance gettin' the frame across. No sheriff would have got that code. He'd thought that tappin' was ha'n'ts or maybe a loose well rod."

"It's a miracle at that," says the G-man. "That bright lad at the cream station found the shippin' tag when he was makin' refills. Spottin' the can as Strobie's, he tips off the sheriff's office. Me and the boys had just hit town and told Darby we'd take the case over."

"And, boy, didn't you!" I says, grin-nin'.

I DON'T hitch-hike outa Bragtown when they turns me loose from the hospital.

I rides cushions of a fast train for the Coast with a wad of foldin' dough in my new pants.

Five grand was the reward for turn-in' up the Paisly boy and stickin' the finger on his kidnapers. They gives the little tyke the swellest funeral the country'd ever seen, and me, I was royalty in a wheel chair durin' the services.

But I say nuts to the handshakin' an' flash-box shots of the news-hawks.

"I'm no hero," I says. "I'm just a sap who didn't tumble to the frame in time to save the kid's life."

One thing's hard to get used to. Everybody calls me dad. Guess it's my white hair. Well, that ain't what bothers me most, though. It's the dreams. Maybe they'll pass. I don't know.

Appointment With Madness

By WILLIAM
O'SULLIVAN

*Author of
"One Without Glory," "Spy Flight," etc.*

*The Americans in
the plane watched
their expert work*



*"Rink" Dawson and His
Buddies Can't Take Orders,
but They Can Interpret
Them—and How!*

THE big Avro Anson swung its right wing down and under, drawing a sharp arc in the crisp air. The muted roar of the two big motors inside the cabin was punctured by a duet of indignant "Heys!" But "Rink" Dawson had

only grinned, yanked the "Dep" wheel to his big chest and spun the coastal-reconnaissance crate on a wing tip, high over the chalky cliffs of Dover.

"Ow!" he ejaculated in mock sorrow, with a burlesqued English ac-

cent. "So sorry, ol' chap. Don't give it a thought, old thing. What?"

"Bug" Chernowitz lay on his side with the banking of the ship and grinned. His blue eyes raked the darkening sky above his rear gun-pit. Bill Dempsey blinked at the bomb toggles and pushed himself back.

"You'll get yours yet, Rink," the bomber member of the Yank crew promised. "And if Colonel Watt-Jenkins doesn't give it to you, I will!"

"Baloney." Rink whirled the Deperdussin wheel and ruddered expertly with it. The Avro Anson snapped out of its spin like Rink Dawson coming up for a hearing before Colonel Mather Watt-Jenkins, D.S.O., K.C.M.G.

"Including B.O.," Rink had said once, after a hot session with the commanding officer of the Royal Air Force's Twenty-first Defense Squadron.

Bill Dempsey stared down at the dark shadow that night was drawing over the earth.

"Watch yourself," he said flatly. "You know your orders: 'Keep to the coast line!'"

"Five miles in," Dawson corrected, his gray eyes pointing up. "Hell, when we're retired because of old age we'll still be parroting 'Five miles in'! This is some war. I wish I'd stayed on at Oxford," He added, "Almost."

"We're having a swell time!" Bill Dempsey cut in quickly. "Bug and I were born for just this sort of thing. He twisted his head and looked quizzically at the pilot. "We can't all be big, fighting he-men."

He quirked his lips curiously.

"Has the War Office forgotten that riot you started in Piccadilly?" Dempsey asked sarcastically.

RINK couldn't stop the grin that spread over his face.

"Boy, that was a battle, wasn't it?" he reminisced. "Three Territorials . . . two Bobbies . . . a Limey sailor . . . a British pilot—"

"And us!" Bug yelled from his post in the aft part.

"And us," Dawson added quietly.

"And all because some Limey said America should be in it," Dempsey said, shaking his head.

"Nuts," Dawson told him. "What started it was, I said the British were in it but why in hell didn't somebody tell 'em about it, so they could quit drinking tea and start fighting!"

"They're slow starters," Dempsey said. "But they'll go when they get under way."

Dawson shook his head sadly. "I don't get it," he complained for the thousandth time since he had dropped his studies at Oxford to sign up with the Royal Air. "We're at war, aren't we? The Poles got the tar kicked out of them, didn't they?" He dug his head in Bug's direction. "Ask Chernowitz if he thinks any of his Polish relatives are still alive. And ask any American women and children who were torpedoed on the *Athenia*."

"And I'm asking you if you are planning to stay inside your five-mile coastal limit!" Dempsey said, pointing with his hand.

Dawson grinned and laid the Anson and its crew over with a whip of the wheel.

The other two grabbed for new holds.

Dempsey adjusted the radio headphones on his ears.

"Listen, mug," he said, growling, "we got ten bombs in this crate. Don't shake 'em up too hard."

"Ten bombs, two bums, and a fighting Yank pilot." Dawson laughed. He snapped level again and drilled along over the thousands of lights that winked alive on the ground. Above, a mass of opaque clouds slid along and chased the mother-of-pearl pink out of the western skies. "And a swell night for a bombing raid!" He snapped his port and starboard wing-lights alive, and twisted to look back at the tail light. There were plenty of ships guarding England

from the air, and collisions were not altogether unknown.

Silence fell over the cabin, and the roaring motors laid a spell over the men in it. . . .

London's fear of a bombing raid found a kindred fear in the hearts of the Defense Patrol; and it was this fear of attack that stirred impatience alive in Dawson and his mates.

A former American football star, Dawson had left his post-graduate studies at Oxford with the outbreak of war. And Chernowitz and Dempsey had gone with him. All pilots, they had nevertheless been broken in as a crew that worked together.

Being Americans, their reactions to Britain's cautious approach to the war was typical. As Dawson had put it, more than once:

"They're playing it wrong! Letting the Boche lord it over us is all cock-eyed. If we'd just go in and hit them—hit them in a way that would show them we're on the job, and show the world we mean business—there'd be less danger of an attack. It's this very playing it easy that'll get the Boche confident enough to take a crack at London!"

Now, he started to say it again. "If they would just do something! If only they'd let us fight. I'd even join the ol' infantry if it'd break the ice and show the Germans where we stand."

"You'll quit when you're dumped into your grave," Dempsey grunted. "I guess we all feel the same way, but some of us control it better. Take all the trouble you've been in, since we joined up. You stunt the wings off a job at flying school; you lose yourself in a fog and land near Paris; you start a riot in Piccadilly Circus; you—"

"Shut up!" Dawson clipped wearily. "I just have bad luck."

"You shut up!" Dempsey barked, his eyes narrowing.

He clamped his head-set tighter on his ears and snapped a hand to the

sending key near him. He flashed an "All ready!" signal and sat tense in his seat, his eyes on the other two.

DAWSON leaned ahead, clamped his own set of head-phones on and throttled down on the motors.

"Attention, members of Twenty-first Defense Squadron," came the warning voice from the ground radio. "North Sea Patrol reports unidentified flight of bombers angling for English coast, probable route Harwich!"

Dawson closed his eyes and opened them again, slowly. He stared at Dempsey.

"Maybe this is it, Bill! Maybe—" He stopped. Orders were coming through again.

"Stay on the alert! We are signing off now, so the enemy cannot trace our position from signals sent out from here. Follow orders!"

A vacuum of silence succeeded the voice.

Rink Dawson stirred and licked his lips.

"What if we sight the flight?" he asked, after a moment of careful thinking. "What do we do then?"

"We awsk them in for tea!" Bug Chernowitz cracked.

"Nuts," Dempsey said, but then he laughed with Dawson. "These Limeys are tough. It's just that they—"

"Stall around too long," Dawson snapped. "Buzz them and ask for better orders. What do we do if we sight the flight. Ask them that."

"Listen," Bill Dempsey said patiently, "you heard the guy. They're signing off to guard their position. They don't want the tarmac traced. And besides, Watt-Jenkins thinks we're heels enough now."

"Ask them!" Dawson snapped, his mouth flattening to an evil slit. "I'm boss of this crate. Stop your yammering and ask them!"

The *click-click* of the key buzzed an accompaniment to the roar of the motors.

"Damn it! Why haven't they fitted these crates up with two-way stuff." Dawson complained as he listened.

"Weight," Dempsey said flatly. He tried again, his fingers coding out the question nimbly. But still there was no answer. The brooding silence took on the silent anger with which Watt-Jenkins was wont to regard his three Yanks.

"No soap," Dempsey said, finally.

"Okay." Dawson considered this for a moment, then swung the crate around and headed out over the dark mass below that was the water.

"Pick a clear spot and drop the eggs," Dawson clipped. "This crate will only do two hundred, at best. We got to lighten 'er up."

"But, Rink, why?" Chernowitz demanded in a soft voice. "Five miles in is—"

"Drop the eggs," Dawson ordered. "Lay them in the clear. When I receive no orders, I go on my own initiative. What the hell am I, a dope?"

"Often." Bug Chernowitz laughed. But there was a sympathetic gleam in his blue eyes. "We're all dopes, the three of us."

"Five miles in is our limit," Bill Dempsey said again.

"Who said?" Dawson demanded. "Five miles is our limit on patrol; but the minute we sight the Boche, we quit being patrol and become defense. Does the five miles still hold then?"

"Does it?" Dempsey shrugged.

"Ask them!" Dawson challenged him again. "Flash them and ask it once more."

"Not me," Dempsey said, sighing. He set the toggle lever at Salvo and sat back to wait.

Dawson sent the ship into a dive, aiming at a dark patch where no white wake marked some patrol boat on the surface. Dempsey moved easily, unhurriedly, and jerked the release lever. The plane zoomed high and twisted in a slow turn as the heavy bombs—all ten of them—dropped

clear and plummeted, unseen, through the dark below.

A GIANT geyser of foaming white water leaped alive, marking the burial of the death cargo of ten bombs in the waters below. Rink Dawson sighed and set the ship into a hard climb. He knew that the enemy planes—if they came—would try to come in above cloud-level.

The clouds dropped lower, even as they climbed, and the sight of the earth below winked slowly away.

It was twenty minutes later that a mass, darker than the surrounding gloom, seemed to drop like a curtain in front of their straining eyes. Dawson pulled up in a towering zoom, cursing fluently.

"Where the heck are those guys—" He chopped it short with a blink of astonishment when, from outside the cabin, a staccato stutter of machine gun fire screamed at their ears. Hissing lead rattled throatily on the big ship.

But only for a brief second. Moving with the speed of light, Dawson switched his telltale wing and tail lights off and peeled away from the dark mass that had dropped down near them.

"They're firing on us!" he blared. "It must be the Hun raid!"

Grimly, he swung back and tried to line the mass of that strange flight up.

Bug and Bill sat tense, eyes straining into the dark that whipped and curled around their racing wings.

Dawson sat immobile, his frown of concentration darkening. Then he swung slowly in a flat turn. Again that mass swung in at him from nowhere and again came that wicked stutter of machine gun fire.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat!

The wing guns of the Anson racked loud in the cabin, as Rink jammed his own guns alive. A hollow vibration signed into the racket as Bug Chernowitz, in the aft pit, found something

to line his sights on. And then it lapsed off into nothingness again as that dark huddle of big planes evaporated into the inky night. Rink Dawson licked his lips and stared at Bill Dempsey.

"We go in," he decided quickly. "They fired on us so they must be Huns."

He tooled the crate in a steep turn and nosed it northwest.

"Maybe they were British and thought we were Huns," Dempsey cautioned. "Remember your five-mile limit, Rink."

"Bunk," Rink said flatly. But his eyes were worried. "Bunk. How could they figure one plane to be attacking London? If that bunch was a British flight?"

Bill Dempsey nodded. "Yeah. That's right. Nobody but a lunatic would make a single-ship attack on anything. Especially a bombing attack." His hand leaped for the key again, to tap out a query to the tarmac; but he stopped short, reluctantly. "Nuts. I'd rather be shot down than have Watt-Jenkins jump me for buzzing in again."

Rink tooled the plane in a wide, essing turn that snaked them along in the general direction of northwest. And London.

"This is the way they were headed," he said. "Maybe if we ease along a bit—" He stopped short and peered into the dark ahead.

After a long silence, Rink Dawson throttled his motors down and pancaked through the thick gloom. Night had come over the land and the skies above it. The altimeter spotted them at four thousand meters.

"Twelve thousand feet," Dawson translated it into terms he understood better. He peeled his eyes for sight of ground lights below. But only that dark void answered his anxious look. He mushed the crate down to three thousand meters. "Funny," he muttered. "There ought to be lights of some kind."

"Maybe the clouds are below us, too," Dempsey suggested.

BUT Rink was thinking of something else. Maybe it was a black-out. Maybe the Hun planes were drilling for London, even now, were feeling their way along, looking for the glint of silver in the dark that would be the Thames river as it wound its way for the great city. Maybe the alarm had gone out and London was crouching, alert but helpless, hoping against hope that the Hun raiders would miss any telltale mark.

"Listen," Chernowitz spoke raspingly. "Listen, Rink, I'm getting nervous. I mean, what do we do? We got that five-mile-limit assignment to keep."

"And we got a report of a Hun raid," Dawson said sharply. "We're on our own. Patrol is over. Now defense begins."

He straightened and they flew on for several minutes in a straight line. The space of time stretched itself into a longer period of time. And still the earth below was black as a pickaninny. Off to the left something glinted dully.

"That must be the Thames," he said, excitement in his eyes and voice. The shadow beside him that was Dempsey moved restlessly. "We go over and line up the Thames, and stick there," the pilot went on. "If the Huns find it, they find it this way. If nothing happens within five minutes, we'll tool on back to Dover Cliffs and try to get something out of Watt-Jenkins—if he's found his tongue by that time."

They lined up the Thames under their wings and nosed forward. Dawson tried to calculate the distance they had come along the river; but there was a blank spot in his mind, a spot of time—it might have been two minutes, or a score of minutes—in which they had been ferreting out the shrouded flight that had opened fire on the Anson.

"No danger," he said, after a long silence. "No danger at all that we—"

He stopped. For beneath them a single finger of flame pointed a fiery finger into the skies and scraped at them like a human finger scraping at a lone fly on a low ceiling.

And then it came!

The three Yank buddies sat as if in a trance when the countryside under them prodded at the slow Avro Anson with fingers that were powerful searchlights. The area for miles around seemed transformed into a giant Fourth-of-July spectacle.

Above the roar of the motors came the *whooming* rush of air as ground batteries threw shells hard and high into the air. A sky-filling *whee* agonized the dark near the slow-moving target that was the Anson, piloted and manned by the Yank crew.

Ka-rumpff. Crash! Ka-rumpff, ka-rumpff. Crash, crash-crash.

Wind bucketed out from under the wings of the crate. It dropped two hundred feet in a crazy dive. Then it bucked on the rough air that the shells kicked up under it and leaped five hundred feet higher into the sky. Dawson slammed his throttles up to the stop-bar and zoomed hard, twisting on a wing as he went. A metallic crash deafened him. The floor of the cabin seemed to leap for the roof. A gaping hole stood behind them in the flooring, where shrapnel had struck at the plane with an iron fist.

Every gun in England seemed to be screaming at them. The air was filled with shrieking of shells and the noisy spatter of shrapnel. Rink blinked down, as he twisted the Anson hard over in another turn. He saw the fiery snouts of a score of pompoms—clusters of six anti-aircraft guns to one unit—stretching blood-red lips up at him.

HE WHIPPED the Anson hard again, sent it corkscrewing in a path down the Thames and through the whipping fragments of steel. The

searchlights blazed harder, as battery after battery came into action. The port motor coughed wearily and its prop spun brightly in the rays of the lights—spun so that Dawson could count the revolutions of it as it slowed.

"Port motor gone!" he barked, his eyes agonized. "The one on the right will carry us if we can throttle it down without having to go down altogether!"

He stepped more rudder onto the ship as the right motor tried to race in an arc around the shell-stricken left motor. His face was blanched with more than fear of a crack-up.

"It's that lousy altimeter," he tried to tell the other two, above the roaring racket from the nearby ground. "The thing won't keep track of altitude as quickly as we lose it. With the darkness below us, I was fooled. We were flying low over the heart of a London blackout."

A blaze of searchlights concentrated on the crippled plane; and then the firing ceased as abruptly as it had begun. Rink Dawson grimaced sourly.

"If they can make out our underwing insignia," he grated, "maybe we'll live."

"And maybe we'll wish we hadn't," Bill Dempsey said. "Wait until ol' Watt-Jenkins gets his blistering tongue on us!"

Into the bright shafts of searchlights leaped a score of fast Spitfires, England's famous "interceptor" planes. One ship pulled clear from the zooming flight of pursuits and a string of Very lights grew out of the darkness. Dawson caught on and ruddered in behind that ship. The others formed a steel ring of wings and guns and motors around the big Anson.

Landing lights flared brightly below, marking out a limelight of earth for the Yanks to set their ship down on. Rink Dawson licked his lips and cautiously cut his starboard motor and mushed in for a slow landing.

A riotous mob met the crippled An-

son and its convoy of fighters. Pilots, gunners, bombers, observers, overalled grease-monkeys, military police, ground officers, all fought for a vantage point to view the hapless men who climbed down from the big ship. The Anson was a veritable sieve, it was full of so many holes. Dawson quickly identified himself and his mates.

"Blawsted, ruddy Yanks!" Someone laughed. "Bargin' in like that an' scarin' the whole town to death."

Dawson glowered as he trekked along toward the Headquarters building of the suburban field.

"Some Boche jumped us," he explained, when inside. "I was following along after them."

"No Boche," the answer came. "The German navy is concentrating in the Bay of Helgoland. The North Sea Patrol got the wind up, when it spotted a flight of ships. It sent a warning ahead."

"A flight of ships fired on us!" Dempsey backed Dawson's story. "All we did was try and follow it up the river."

"Our own ships," a short, humorous-eyed major explained. "They were my men coming in from patrol. One of the lads got excited and fired a burst. I'm sorry you became confused." But the man sobered quickly. "I'm afraid you're for it, the three of you. All of London went into a black-out. Tons and tons of Archie ammo wasted. People rushing into bomb shelters by the millions. Traffic suspended . . . theaters emptied . . . diners deserted . . . palaces evacuated . . . the Underground tied up. And all for three Yanks nosing up the Thames!"

"Ouch!" Bug Chernowitz yapped, taking his helmet off and running his fingers through his stubble of blond hair. "So one of your guys fired on us? Well, how were we to know?"

"Your job isn't patrollin' the universe, is it?" the major asked. He yawned, then grinned suddenly. "Jolly

lot of fun you'll have, telling it all to old Watt-Jenkins. What'll you say then?"

THEY didn't say much when they were marched into Watt-Jenkins' office at two in the morning. They couldn't say much, with the ice-eyed, beefy-faced colonel roaring imprecations and threats at them. He finished with:

"As useless a lot of ruddy devils as ever I commanded. What have you to say? You, Dawson! Speak up, man. Speak up, I say!"

Rink Dawson strangled over part of it, but he finally got it out. And when the rest of it came, it was a flood of resentment, sweeping down onto the desk and surging across at the colonel.

". . . tried to get an answer from you—for orders—but everyone around here is so blamed scared, you couldn't even give us orders we could understand. Sure, we know what to do on patrol. We watch for subs. We watch for planes. If we see a sub and can't hit it with a bomb, we flash in its position to a destroyer. But what do we do if enemy aircraft attacks? Welcome them?"

Watt-Jenkins' face was beet red. But all he said was, "Go on. Go on, man."

Dawson, his rage welling up, went on.

"We signed in for a fight. We don't want to be cooped up on Coast Patrol like—like"—he found a simile—"like the Boche navy is cooped up in the Bay of Helgoland. We want action! Hell, this war is a combination of talk and hush-hush, and you can't get the talk even when you want it."

Watt-Jenkins waited for a full minute, then leaned across his desk and leered ominously at Dawson.

"You are Hell's own ace, that's what!" he snapped. "Hell's own ace, stirring up a riot wherever you go." He looked at his adjutant briefly. "So it's orders you want. You wouldn't understand an order if it bit you. In

fact, I would assume responsibility for any order I gave you that was mis-carried. Why?" He smiled tightly. "You just couldn't understand, man."

"For instance?" Dawson asked, his face pale.

"For instance," Watt-Jenkins said evenly, "you can't even understand what it means when I order you not to go inside a five-mile limit. You can't understand that planes just do not fly all over London at night."

"I explained that," Dawson said, a burning rage seething inside him. He searched Watt-Jenkins' face for some sign of his fate, and that of Bug and Bill. "I—er—I'm sorry for what happened, Colonel. But that lad shouldn't have fired on me." He looked hopeful. "Er—what are our orders now, sir?"

"Your orders," Watt-Jenkins told him, "are to—land in hell!" He set his head back and guffawed. "Go land in hell—Hell's own ace." He smashed his fist hard on the desk and roared. "The court-martial will give you orders, Dawson. Tomorrow."

Dawson started to open his mouth to ask for another chance, but he saw it was useless. He knew he was through, washed up, disgraced. And he didn't see it as his fault. He shut his mouth again and was turning away when Watt-Jenkins laughed heavily at his own joke and repeated:

"Go land in hell, you Yankee spit-fires!"

Dawson's eyes widened with a thought that struck him. He came close to the colonel's desk again and leaned on it, his face taut. He turned his head and looked at the adjutant.

"Colonel Watt-Jenkins said just now that I couldn't understand orders. I want a witness to that."

THE adjutant frowned and moved uneasily in his seat.

"Come now, let's not horse about all night," the colonel snapped. "What are you getting at?"

"You said I wouldn't understand an

order if I got it," Dawson repeated slowly. "I want to be sure you remember having said that."

"You're a witness, Sanders," Watt-Jenkins said crisply. He yawned. "What else, Dawson?"

"You have given me orders to go land in hell," Dawson said tensely. "Right?"

"Right," Watt-Jenkins snapped. But his eyes bugged out the next moment. Dawson came to attention and snapped his hand in a correct salute.

"Orders received, sir," he said crisply. "They shall be carried out, sir."

Bug and Bill stared, open-mouthed, when Dawson spun in a proper about-face and marched for the door. But they snapped out of it in time to fall in step behind him. Watt-Jenkins blinked and tugged at his jaw.

"Now, what in hell is coming off this time?"

Adjutant Sanders shrugged. "They're jolly good men," he said, "in a way. But—they're jolly well balmy, too. Shall we toddle off to bed, Colonel?"

But the three Yanks didn't go to bed. Instead, they sat close to a table staring at a map, computing distances and figuring loads. They were grim-faced, hard-eyed, tense.

"I figure it's just about three hundred and fifty miles," Bug said, fingering his rule and pencil. "With our load, we'd make it there and part of the way back. But not all the way."

"So what?" Dawson said flatly. "All I want is to get there."

Bill Dempsey looked at his hands and then at Dawson and Bug.

"It's okay with me," he said. "Perfectly. But hadn't we better wait and face it? The court-martial?"

"Not a chance," Bug agreed with Dawson's shake of the head. "We're for it. Might as well go right."

Dawson grinned. "If we live through it, I'll guarantee to get us all out of this. Nothing will happen, I promise. How about it?"

Solemnly, they slowly got to their feet. Their hands stayed clasped for a moment too long—as will men's hands when those men know the chances are strong they'll never meet again.

"You see," Dawson reviewed it again, "nobody but the British would figure a one-plane bombing attack." He shrugged into his Sidcot suit and looked at his wrist. "Nearly three-thirty, pals. Let's step."

"You think we can't get that big Lockheed Hudson?" Bug asked, on the way across to the darkened hangars. "But they'll give us an Avro Anson?"

"Cinch!" Dawson grinned. "Colonel's orders!" He winked. "We just misunderstood them, in case we're caught."

Colonel Watt-Jenkins stirred uneasily in his bed when the roar of

big two-motored plane. Bill Dempsey moved over the bomb toggles and wiped his hands carefully on his Sidcot suit.

"Let 'er rip," he said, grinning.

A FLIGHT of five planes loomed in the mist, slightly below them. For a long moment, Rink held his breath.

"Land alarm!" he guessed. "This is a mob looking into an *alerte*. Maybe."

He zoomed the big crate, with the throttles pushed forward to coax the limit of the big ship's 200-mile speed. The five planes flashed by, turning inland. A patter of rain started on the windows of the Avro.

"Luck," Rink whispered, "stay with us. Lady Luck, we need you like we've never needed you before."

They ripped out of the rain and the

Coming in June Issue: A New TARZAN

wide-opened motors came to his ears. But he didn't come fully awake. He yawned, turned heavily onto the other side.

Their luck held, and the Yanks flashed through a heavy mist, low over a nest of islands. Inland loomed the coast line, gray in the raising light of day.

"Friesian Islands!" Bug barked, his eyes on the map. "We're nearly there, Rink."

Rink looked at Bill and nudged the plane higher into the enveloping clouds.

"Posts," he said quietly. "Get to your posts, gang. You take the forward gun, Bug, after our eggs are laid. You, Bill—get aft to the gun pit there. And shoot like hell."

There was a calm about them that even the roar of the motors and the daring of their exploit couldn't shake. Bug waved a careless hand and made his way to the gun in the nose of the

mist, squarely over the bottled-up German fleet, just as the sun broke through some low-lying clouds.

"Dive her down!" Bill Dempsey sang out. "Aim for where that oil tender is hanging alongside that battleship."

"Check," Rink said flatly. He swung his eyes along the frightening panorama of armored ships and undersea craft. "Subs come next—that line of 'em over to the right."

The Avro Anson screamed down in a dive. The first two bombs released raised only columns of water near the tender. Rink cursed and zoomed up into a fast wingover. The second dive was better. A bomb smashed hard on the deck of the battleship with a deafening roar, spewing metal and smoke and men high into the air. Black smoke roared up from the severed oil line in the ship's side.

"Subs next," Rink sang out, his eyes dancing. He grinned when the

chatter of the forward gun told him that Bug Chernowitz had found some work.

The Avro roared down in another dive, and another. Bombs fell with each lifting zoom of the plane.

The scene below was one of bedlam. Men raced madly across decks and hurled themselves into the water. Small boats put off from the ships. Speed boats dashed up and down like maddened water bugs. Two planes started up from the deck of a battleship; but Bug's aim was good. One of them spilled before it had cleared the runway, and the other lurched heavily in the air and fell.

Then all hell let loose as the German gunners recovered their wits and manned the anti-aircraft guns.

Lead zinged through the left wing and Rink skidded expertly away; but

racked face and into the neck of his Sidcot. He wiped it away and looked behind him. Bug was climbing into place at the rear gun when three speedy Hun crates ripped along low, then stood on an invisible elevator and chinned themselves up for the Anson. Rink saw and shook his head sadly.

"Some Messerschmidts." He recognized the silhouettes. The speedy Hun planes were said to top 350 miles an hour. But the clouds were near when the Hun attack planes roared high above the Avro and swooped in to the attack.

Dempsey's aft-gun chattered busily, and the racking vibration of it brought new color to Rink's face. One of the planes flashed under and past and up, going into a twisting maneuver that would bring the guns spit-

Novel by EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

into a burst from another brace of pompoms.

Whoom! Crash!

A set of heavy Archie guns roared. Shrapnel gutted two windows and Rink let out a yelp when something hot seared his face. He whipped the big crate up and over and down again. Dempsey set the lever at *Salvo* and let the submarine line-up in for some very private hell. Two of the undersea craft were heeled at a dangerous angle, and another was going down by the bow.

"Get to your rear gun!" Rink belted at Dempsey. "Some Hun crates are coming up! We'll drill for it, guys!"

He swung to a line of clouds he had already picked out—a long, low, thick line that stretched from the scene of bedlam below and cut far out to sea in a northwesterly direction. If he could get into that bank of clouds. . . .

Wet heat coursed down his battle-

ting squarely into the faces of Rink and Bug. The forward gun came into the uproar with a hollow *rack-rack rack-rack-rack-rack*.

Rink took time out to snap the wing guns alive.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat.

Flame leaped from the propeller hub of the German crate—and then Rink remembered.

"My God!" he breathed. "They pack a twenty-millimeter gun that fires through the prop hub. If they hit us—"

All the sounds in the universe exploded inside the cabin. Rink fell back in his seat, momentarily stunned. There was a gaping hole in the right side of the cabin, and the wind tore at the very heart of the besieged ship. But Rink staunchly held his thumbs down on the trips of his machine guns.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat.

The Messerschmidt soared sud-

denly, climbed on a straight line. Rink eased the crate with his rudder even as he turned his eyes up to watch the Hun. At the top of the climb, the speedy German plane heeled slowly. A puff of black smoke came from the motor bed—and then the plane was diving for the waters below.

The rattle of gunfire came heavy from the rear. Rink zoomed up and ripped the plane in a hard turn. Bug galvanized into action on another Hun with his forward gun. Down below, a flight of Henschel Hs. 126s was drilling hard to join the running fight. Rink counted fifteen of them and then he stopped counting. He swallowed hard and looked at Bug. Chernowitz winked; but his mouth was taut from the heat of the battle.

"Clouds just to the right, Rink," Dempsey said solemnly. "How's about it?"

Rink sighed and whipped around in another wingover and blasted for the cover of the opaque cloud mass. Beyond those clouds lay the open sea. And beyond the open sea, somewhere beyond the towering hills of blue-green water, steamed the vigilant British Grand Fleet and that same North Sea Patrol that had sent Rink and his mates on a lone-plane raid of London.

The plane roared low and wobbly in the mist. A flight of British attack ships rose into the air from the carrier *Ark Royal*. Rink forced his eyes wider as he throttled down. He wondered why he had nearly the full left rudder on. And then it came to him. "Starboard motor conked out."

He smiled slightly at the anxious yelp that came from Bug Chernowitz.

"Shut up, Bug," Rink snarled good-naturedly. "I'm trying to concentrate on that damned deck below me. It looks like it's trying to zoom out of the water." Rink stared down at the pool of blood at his right foot and realized for the first time why he felt so weak. A slug had found a home in his ankle. He looked away quickly

and wondered about the silence aft. He watched Bug as the gunner went past him and to the rear.

"Bill got it in the shoulder," Bug said tightly, when he came back. "Twice. He's passed out, but he'll be okay, I think." He licked his lips. "He's got to be okay," he said fiercely. "We can't go through a thing like this, only to lose—" He broke off.

"He'll pull through," Rink said weakly. "All of us will pull through. Maybe."

The sun was shining again, but darkness was settling over him. He slanted the crate down for the stern of the big aircraft carrier and hoped the rise and fall of the stern was more imagination than fact. He nursed the flying wreck low, eased it up a bit, dropped it expertly for the deck. He was toppling forward when the landing hook took hold with a savage jerk.

BANDS were playing and cannon roared salutes. Brass hats were a dime a dozen. The tender from the *Ark Royal* curved a flourish of foaming wake toward the crowded docks. Someone pushed a London paper into Rink's hands, and his mates stared over his shoulder at the flaring headline:

LONE BRITISH RAIDER PANICS HUN FLEET!

Rink grunted and looked at Bill and Bug. "Maybe," he said, "things will iron out."

"Shucks," Bug said. "And I was worrying myself sick. Not being able to talk, and knowing that you might have said something—"

Rink chuckled. "I did say something. I said we had orders. Orders from Colonel Watt-Jenkins." He winked. "That made it official."

"But," Bill protested, "you didn't, Rink. You didn't have any orders. You did this to avoid court-martial, to get out of a scrape."

"Yeah?" Rink stared at him. "That's what you think. I did it for a reason."

He tapped the paper. "Read on, lads."

The article ran:

The American crew of a bomber attached to the Twenty-first Defense Squadron made a surprise raid on the German Fleet in the Bay of Helgoland, destroyed two planes, sank one submarine, damaged one of the enemy's famed "pocket battleships," and otherwise demoralized the Germans.

More than anything else, however, this daring gesture, ordered by London's new hero, General, formerly colonel, Watt-Jenkins, served to show the enemy and the whole world that English daring and resourcefulness is not yet dead. The Dominions beyond the sea have taken new spirit from this daring solo raid by three Americans in one lone bomber. And more important yet, the enemy will think long and carefully before they launch an air raid on London, a city guarded by such valiant defenders.

There was more. But Bug and Bill didn't bother with it. Bug shook his head.

"Very nice copy," he said morosely. "But you said Watt-Jenkins had ordered it. How do you get around that?"

"Maybe I don't," Rink grunted, as the tender slid in for a neat landing alongside the roaring crowds on the dock. "But I'm making a hell of a good try."

The Minister for War, the Minister for Air and a new general who was formerly Colonel Watt-Jenkins met them. The roar of the crowd punctuated each handshake, and the bandaged and limping Americans made a brave and heroic picture as they stood modestly in the center of it all.

"Er—that order I gave you, Dawson," Watt-Jenkins asked in a hoarse whisper. "I mean, the exact words of it? I must remember it."

"For posterity," Adjutant Sanders explained.

Rink pinned the man with a knowing eye, and repeated: "Go land in hell, you Yankee spitfires!" He cocked his bandaged head on one side and said, slowly, "Of course, I recognized the order, sir—even if it was in code."

"Yes?" General Watt-Jenkins *harumphed* noisily and sneaked in a quiet, "Decode it, please. Like a good fellow."

"It meant, in part," Rink explained, his eyes glinting, "*Helgoland*. Get it? '*Land in Hell . . . Hel-go-land*.' Of course, I caught on right away."

CHERNOWITZ stood there beaming at General Watt-Jenkins.

"Quite right," Watt-Jenkins beamed, the cloud lifting from his face and from his new insignia. "Quite right, old chap."

"And the rest of it," Rink put in. "Yankee spitfires, decoded, meant we were to get assignments flying Spitfires, in France, if we were successful. Spitfires—the speediest pursuit jobs in the air." He added quickly, "Of course, if I was wrong about that, I was wrong about the rest of it."

"Oh, you were right," Watt-Jenkins assured him. "Not a bit of doubt about it. Spitfires, of course. You are practically in them this very moment!" He beamed. "Never knew you to get an order wrong yet, Dawson."

Rink grinned.

"That's fine. Because I got a hunch that when we get to the Front, we'll be able to show these Huns some real action."

"Yeah," Bug added. "It's sort of quiet on the London defense."

"Quite, old chap," Bill Dempsey put in, as he shoved his arms through those of his mates. "And now, how's for a bit of biscuit and a spot of tea?"

Coming in Next Month's Issue: THE WRATH OF DAKUWANGA, A Story of Gold Lure, By CRAWFORD SULLIVAN, Plus Many Other Action Stories

Congo Drums

By CHARLES S. STRONG

Explorer, Traveler and Historian

Author of "The Siege of Quebec," "Finland's Fight for Freedom," etc.

*How the King of Belgium and Explorer Henry M. Stanley
Joined Hands in a Project of Colonization without Conquest!*

WHEN war drums sound on the Western Front in Europe, and the sound of drumbeats echoes in the barracks of Finland, Russia and the other countries of the East, it is not always easy to realize that there are echoes of these drumbeats in the heart of Africa. With the occupation of Ethiopia by the Italians, most of the attention of colonial-minded powers, both Germany and Italy, seems to have been directed toward a partition of British and French colonies or

mandates under the League of Nations.

In all this welter, observers may lose sight of the fact that German demonstrations of armed force along the Belgian and Dutch borders may have more far-reaching results than a mere, temporary desire to flank the Maginot Line. For Belgium and the Netherlands, though small countries in Europe have far-reaching Colonial Empires.

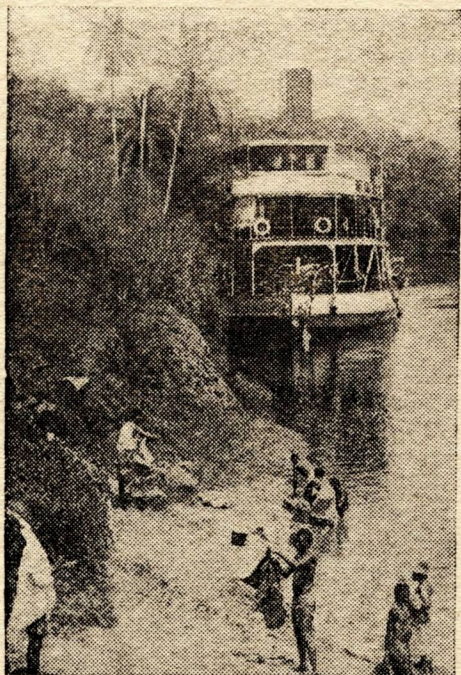
The possessions of the Netherlands extend to the Americas and the Far East.

Henry M. Stanley

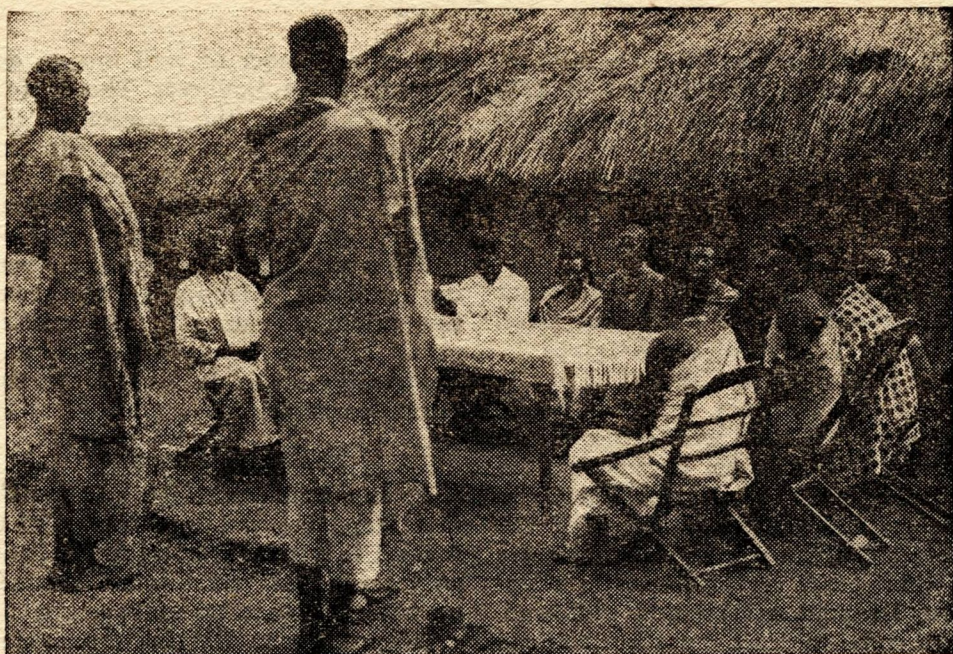
As for Belgium, its overseas territory is concentrated in Africa—and, of particular interest to Germany, a portion of this territory was formerly German.

We shall not in this article, however, attempt to analyze the war-situation of today but rather to go back a bit into the past. We shall deal with Belgium and its Congo possessions—possessions that developed in a manner that is foreign to most methods of colonization. The Belgian Congo or former Congo Free State was in a sense, the personal preserve of a famous Belgian, King Leopold II, and the personal achievement of a famous African explorer, Henry M. Stanley of Stanley and Livingston fame.

Many people have often wondered what became of Stanley after his search for Livingston. Few knew of



*River steamer and native laundry on the
Kasai River, Belgian Congo*



Congo criminals appearing before a native court of justice at Rutshuru, Belgian Congo

his connection with perhaps one of the most unusual colonization schemes in history, that of the Congo Free State.

Even before meeting King Leopold of Belgium and undertaking the work of exploring the Congo Free State, and aside from his search for David Livingston, Stanley had lived a rather wild and woolly life. Born in Wales, he had a number of school experiences that would have done credit to one of Charles Dickens' less fortunate characters, and finally, in 1859 at the age of 18, he ran away and shipped as a cabin boy on a boat sailing to New Orleans.

A Varied Career

In the South at the beginning of the Civil War, he enlisted in the Confederate Army, and was captured at

the Battle of Shiloh in 1862. He didn't like the idea of spending the rest of the war in prison, so was able to secure his release by enlisting in the Federal forces.

After leaving the Union Army, he started back to seafaring, and was wrecked off the coast of Spain. His next connection with the United States was when he joined the United States Navy in 1864. After the Civil War, he was with various wagon trains that went across the plains to Denver and Salt Lake City.

The year of 1866 found him fighting with General Hancock against the Indians. The following year he was with the British expedition against the Emperor Theodore in Abyssinia. Henry Morton Stanley certainly had a habit of getting around the world. His search for Livingston occurred in

THE LATEST IN A NEW SERIES OF THRILLING
ADVENTURES FROM THE PAGES OF HISTORY

1871, and the report of the search, together with his publication of Livingston's journals, took place in 1872, establishing Stanley's position as an African explorer beyond question of doubt.

King Leopold

But now let us turn to the other character in our little African Duet, Leopold II, King of the Belgians.

Leopold, who had ascended to the throne of Belgium in 1865, found himself confronted with rather mixed problems in Europe, because of the recent ascendancy of Napoleon III in France, and the development of the Austro-German war in 1866. In spite of this rather trying domestic situation, Leopold nevertheless followed, with some interest, reports of African exploration on the part of Livingston, J. H. Speke, Richard Burton, H. M. Stanley and others. It was his fond hope to have the unexplored sections of Africa opened up and developed by an international group. He averred that this would avoid friction and would give the native groups the best possible benefits.

In 1876 he called a meeting in Brus-

sels of a number of well known geographers and explorers. The conference resulted in the creation of the "International Association for the Exploration and Civilization of Africa." This was quite a different method of procedure from that in which a military chief provokes "border incidents" with native tribesmen, his publicity manager runs stories about citizens being molested, and the Army moves in to protect the place—permanently.

The Call to Stanley

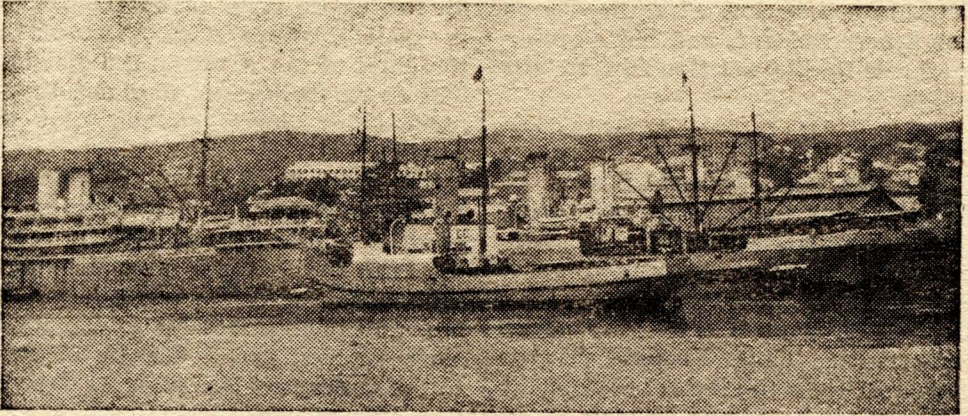
As an outgrowth of King Leopold's first step, national committees were formed in a number of countries, and an international commission was set up with headquarters at Brussels.

Originally the Belgian Committee had intended to interest itself in East Africa, but when Henry M. Stanley arrived at the mouth of the Congo in 1877, Leopold's thoughts immediately busied themselves with the marvelous possibilities to be secured by developing the basin of such a river. He immediately got in touch with Stanley and invited him to Brussels.

Like most English explorers, Stan-



Natives bringing their produce to a trading post on the Equator in the Belgian Congo



The bustling waterfront of Matadi, the deep-water seaport on the Congo River, Belgian Congo

ley was interested in having the results of his explorations turned to the benefit of the British Empire, but when he took up the matter with the English government and English merchants, they refused to have anything to do with such a "wildly speculative" undertaking.

Thereupon, Stanley, convinced that the Congo was worth developing, accepted the invitation of King Leopold, and in November 1878 he made plans to return to the Congo to build a chain of stations on the river, to survey a route for a railroad around the cataracts, and to sign treaties with the native chiefs.

In order to concentrate on the Congo, King Leopold II founded another committee, this time known as The Committee for the Study of the Upper Congo, which afterward became known as the International Association of the Congo. Stanley, as agent of the association, spent the next five years planning his course of action, and four years of this time in founding stations and making agreements with the native chiefs. The first trading post was established at Vivi in February, 1880.

African Grab-Bag

With Leopold's actions and Stanley's explorations stimulating inter-

est in the central part of Africa, other European nations that had been more or less lukewarm to the idea of colonization, immediately decided that it might be a good idea to establish their own rights in this part of the world. M. de Brazza of France reached the Congo from the north and established posts in what is now French Equatorial Africa. Portugal, on the strength of the discovery of the mouth of the Congo by her explorers following Vasco De Gama in the 15th century, advanced claims to the part of the continent now known as Angola.

England was already coming in from the East at the lower end of the Sudan, in Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika, while the Dutch were settling the present Union of South Africa and Rhodesia, with Boer Colonists.

King Leopold began to think that he had definitely started something, but he was not entirely certain that everything was working out as he had planned it. King Leopold, because of the limited financial standing of Belgium as a country, was paying for the development of the Congo out of his own pocket, confident in the hope that he would ultimately receive returns that would justify his investment. Because of this, he insisted

that his connection with the Congo was a personal one, and had nothing to do with his relationship to the Belgians.

Recognition by the U. S. A.

In 1884 the United States of America took the lead in recognizing the Congo Free State as an independent and properly constituted state. The following day, April 23, 1884, Colonel M. Strauch, a Belgian officer, representing King Leopold in the matter of the boundaries between the Congo Free State and French Equatorial Africa, received a request from the French government for an option to buy the Congo, whenever King Leopold decided he would like to sell it.

This proposition was before Leopold and the members of his association for three years, and finally France was given the preferential right to purchase the vast territory in Africa. This incident had a rather tonic effect upon the Belgians themselves, who decided that it would be a splendid idea if they did have a colony, and they took up the matter with the king. Leopold, after hearing them out, said he would give the matter his attention.

While these happenings were taking place on the diplomatic front, there was considerable activity in Africa. Arab slave-traders from Zanzibar had found Kenya, Uganda, and the Congo a fertile field for their slave raids and were drawing a good many workers from these districts. They resented the intrusion of the Europeans, and took violent steps to counteract it.

Tippoo-Tib Strikes

Because Leopold was in no position to provide funds for any military campaign in Africa, nor was the Congo Free State sufficiently rich to support an offensive of this kind, other methods had to be employed. Stanley advised the Belgian officers

on the upper river to be diplomatic in their dealings with Tippoo-Tib, the chief of the Arabs in the district. The Arabs themselves were not diplomatic—they destroyed the post at Stanley Falls.

Stanley still stuck to diplomacy. He appointed Tippoo-Tib the governor at Stanley Falls, thereby making it to the Arab's interest to maintain a post there. It seemed like an unconditional surrender to the Arab slave traders, and a definite menace to the tribes that had come to depend to a certain extent upon Leopold and Stanley for their protection. But the Belgians were not entirely asleep. While Tippoo-Tib was reclining in fancied security, the Belgians busied themselves with the erection of strongly fortified posts at Sankuru, Lomami, and the Arumiwi Rivers.

The Showdown

In 1891 the Belgians excited the anger of the Arabs when they imposed an export duty on ivory. About the same time, an expedition under Van Kerckhoven marching toward the headwaters of the Nile encountered and defeated a large Arab force. Tippoo-Tib decided that it was about time for a showdown, and he felt certain that the Arabs would be victorious.

The first act of aggression took place when the Arabs murdered M. Hodister, the representative of the Belgian Trading Company, and ten other Belgians at an isolated post on the upper Lomami River. When the news reached the lower reaches of the river, a Belgian expedition under the command of Commandant, later Baron, Dhanis was making its way towards Katanga. This expedition immediately turned East toward the affected area, and after a number of battles covering a period of several months, finally came before the Arab strongholds of Kasongo and of Nyangwe. Here a couple of decisive battles were fought, the Arabs were

completely defeated and a number of their chief leaders were killed.

Changes

From then on, the government of the Free State had fairly smooth sailing, with the exception of several small uprisings among the natives, principally the Batetelas. These were put down.

How did Belgium finally gain sovereignty of the Congo Free State? King Leopold II left it to the country in his will!

In the past twenty-five or thirty years, things have undergone radical changes for the better. Now it is possible to go to the Congo in any one of a dozen different ways, from steamships to airplanes. The boat is still the most popular method, however.

The first impression of the country is gained while still about fifty miles from the coast, when it is possible to spot the brownish tinge of the waters of the river mixing with the blue of the Atlantic. Then isolated coconut palms loom on the horizon, and finally the roofs of Banana Town come into view. Here the ship usually takes aboard Negro crews that will help discharge the cargo at Boma and Matadi farther up the river.

From Boma a railroad runs across the Mayumbe with its important forest industries and its rich plantations.

Matadi, thirty-four miles above Boma, presents all of the bustle and turmoil of any other large seaport, with its tanks along the outer stretches of the port, its warehouses along the docks, and its modern ho-

tels on the main residential streets several blocks away. From Matadi, inland traffic is carried by railroad and by the more primitive methods of the Congo.

Adventurers' Paradise

The building of the railroad from Matadi to Leopoldville, a distance of 227 miles, was an ingenious bit of activity in itself. The first locomotive reached the capital of the Belgian Congo on March 16, 1898, about the time that the Americans were deciding to do something about the sinking of the *Maine*. The rail line runs across the Cristal Mountains, and the builders were faced with almost insurmountable difficulties, but you scarcely sense that now, when you ride in comfort on the "White Train" from Matadi to Leopoldville in about twelve hours.

While the interior of the Congo is now pretty well dotted with settlements, towns, and cities of varying sizes, there is still plenty of wild life for those who have an adventurous feeling goading them to visit this part of the world. The Congo, because of protective legislation of the Belgian Government, will probably have its pygmies, its gorillas, and its other wild animals both in the Albert Memorial Park and other areas, for many years to come.

In more ways than one, the Congo has been an interesting experiment in colonization without conquest. It might well be an example for clear-thinking diplomats.

Photos Courtesy Belgian Consulate.

COMING NEXT MONTH

SWEDEN'S FIRST SKI PATROL

*Another Thrilling Adventure Taken from the
Pages of History*

By CHARLES S. STRONG

CRAB BAIT

By

E. HOFFMANN
PRICE

*Author of "Scourge of Allah,"
"Swedish Indemnity," etc.*

*Kirk Webster Used Honesty in the
South Seas Until a Crooked Trader
Loosed a Hurricane of Violence!*

WHEN Kirk Webster saw the fire glow and smelled the fumes that came from the pandanus grove, he knew why the natives of Pakalafa were selling all their copra to Pierre Lecoin. Webster's square jaw thrust a little further forward, and his big fists clenched.

Already, he recognized the voices. The burly Frenchman was in a huddle with old Mehivi, the village chief. Webster's native friend had gone over to the enemy.

Webster brushed through the broad leaved plantains.

Mehivi squatted near the fire in the clearing. He wore white canvas trousers, like those of the Frenchman, but he had no shirt. His brown body gleamed from palm oil. His shrewd eyes glistened as he watched the gin that dripped from the home made still. This liquor was given as a bonus to the natives who brought copra to Lecoin's trading station. No wonder that no one traded with Webster!

Webster had come to the islands with the idea that natives were human, that a trader could treat them right and still prosper. He believed



Lecoin swung the ax at Webster

that honest trading would in the end win good-will and trust and friendship. His idea had worked until Lecoin's arrival on Pakalafa. Now it seemed on the verge of failure.

"You've got your damn nerve!" the American growled, when he came within a few yards of the pair. "Trying to kill my business with rotten homemade gin! I wouldn't holler if the liquor was fit to drink."

"You don't like it, heh?" The bull-necked Frenchman's mouth loosened in a grin. "All right, you give them gin. But you are too late. Old Mehivi, he is my friend now."

"Listen, Lecoin. I'm not going to try to beat you at your own game. These people may be childlike and simple, but they're human. I've treated them that way, and you're going to. That lousy gun barrel gin'll make 'em sick, it'll finally kill 'em. You're through making it, see?"

Lecoin snorted. Mehivi looked sheepish, and edged away. He was as big as Webster, white-haired, unwrinkled. Half angry, half ashamed at having been caught working against his old friend, he had nothing to say. For a moment, there was no sound except the hissing of steam.

"You talk like a missionary. You are a damn fool. Look how Mehivi sold you out, heh?" Lecoin sneered.

Then Webster uncorked a punch. For weeks now, he had known that sooner or later he and Lecoin would clash. And here it was.

The blow knocked Lecoin sharply against a palm trunk. He rebounded, came back fighting. Webster's long caged fury exploded. There was no science, no headwork, just plain slugging. The American's face became a red pulp under Lecoin's big fists, but Lecoin was not faring any better.

Then sundown drinks began to cut the Frenchman's wind. His punches went wild. He puffed. He wheezed. He had not enough breath left for cursing.

"Get out!" Webster panted.

HE SET himself to finish it. Sock! Nicely timed. Lecoin crumpled. He recovered, lurched face forward. He lay there, mumbling and clawing the sand.

Webster turned again toward white-haired Mehivi.

"Go home, you old fool! You ought to know better!"

"Maybe the gin does make us sick," Mehivi said, sullenly. "But it is fun drinking it."

With this piece of typically native logic, Mehivi, head down, went slowly from the clearing. Webster kicked a kerosene can of freshly distilled gin on its side. As the liquor gurgled into the sand, he considered the still.

Webster jerked the worm from the boiler and smashed it against a boulder. A yell made him whirl. Lecoin was crouching behind him. He had the hatchet which Mehivi had used to chop fuel for the still. Webster flung himself aside, just as the Frenchman lunged. The impact of Lecoin's shoulder knocked him flat. They rolled in a heap on the sand.

Webster saw the hatchet rise. He clawed for a rock the size of a small melon. He had no chance to use the weapon. A club cracked down on Lecoin's head. Old Mehivi had intervened. But he ignored Webster's yell, and raced across the clearing.

"Hanging around, hoping I'd not spill all the gin," Webster told himself. "Likes liquor, but doesn't believe in murder."

When Lecoin regained his wits, Webster said:

"No more gin on this island, or I'll make a job of it, next time"—the Frenchman could hardly know what had hit him, and Webster did not want him to suspect Mehivi—"like you tried to do for me. But I'll not wait for you to turn your back."

"W'at you think," Lecoin muttered. "I don't try to kill you on purpose, I just got the hot head. You make me sore."

Webster glanced at his own bleed-

ing knuckles. The Frenchman seemed willing to make peace.

"I feel kind of leaky myself."

"Maybe we are two damn fools, heh?" Lecoin forced a grin. "Like you say, plenty copra for two buyers. Okay."

They went to Webster's trading station and had a drink. But when the swarthy Frenchman went back to his own place, a quarter of a mile north, Webster was not entirely convinced that his competitor had really decided against hogging all the business.

Shortly after Lecoin's departure, Mehivi came in. He fidgeted, twisted his big toe in a knothole.

"I think that fellow no good. I do not like to see him hit you with the ax."

Webster recognized the first signs of penitence. He gave Mehivi a can of tobacco.

"He'll learn," he said, and chuckled.

Mehivi accepted the present, but he did not leave. After a moment, he went on:

"We are hunting *u'u*. You like crab meat. You come with us?"

The old fellow was trying to make amends for his thoughtless treachery. Webster followed him down to the salt water flats, where savage crabs lived among the rocks, the tongo scrub, and in hollow trees. As he walked along, he caught the scent of fresh coconut roasting on hot rocks. That was the bait to catch the *u'u*.

PRESENTLY, Mehivi halted. Several natives came out of the brush, and struck light to coconut torches. Then they headed toward the bait.

Scores of the vicious *u'u* had already come from hiding. They were deep blue, lobster shaped, and a foot and a half long. Their powerful claws could husk and crack a coconut. Their meat had a rich, nutty flavor, and their oil, so Mehivi said, cured rheumatism.

The torch bearers closed in, encircling the greedy crabs. Webster

got into the spirit of the game. He joined the chattering natives, took a basket and set to work. The savage creatures, for all their awkward looks, struck quickly as snapping turtles. While one tore into his hand, another went for his ankle. The natives howled gleefully as Webster cursed and tried to get rid of his captive.

"Look," Mehivi said, "this way. It is easy."

He reached casually into a tangle of clashing claws. Now irritated, the crabs were snapping at each other when nothing else was within reach. Half a dozen nippers went for his bare arms, but the old man picked his game, and withdrew without a scratch.

A week passed. And then the natives began to avoid Webster's station. On the following day, only old Mehivi came to offer copra. The day thereafter, even Mehivi went back to Lecoin. The Frenchman was offering a higher price, a price so high that he could not possibly make a profit. He was even buying wet copra at the price of dry. With the narrow margin of profit, Webster could not compete.

"You're taking a big loss, Lecoin," he said that evening. "Is it worth that much to freeze me out? It'll cost you more than you can get back."

Lecoin grinned maliciously. He gestured toward the corrugated iron shed, which was rapidly filling.

"Playing big brother don't help too much, heh?"

Webster turned and went back to his station. He did not blame the fickle natives. But he knew there must be a catch somewhere.

Lecoin was the hero. Webster, a gouger who had tried to rob his friends. Mehivi and the rest of the natives avoided him.

From his veranda, Webster watched the daily procession. He shook his head.

"There's something phony," he told himself. "I never saw a Frenchman throw money away that way! It's not in the cards."

THAT night, Webster went to the village and routed old Mehivi out of his grass-thatched hut.

"Let's take a walk," he said. "I want to talk to you."

"We won't sell to you," Mehivi answered, sulkily. "You are not our friend. You pretend you like us, but the Frenchman pays us more."

"You just think he pays more. Come along, I'll show you."

Mehivi muttered, but consented to go. On the way back, he maintained a skeptical silence. Money, as such, meant little to these childlike islanders. But it hurt their feelings to think that Lecoin would pay them so much more than the man they had considered a friend.

At the bungalow, the old native watched Webster weigh a basket of copra.

"Look. See how many pounds. Now figure out how much I would pay, at my price."

Mehivi scratched his head, scowled, took a stumpy pencil and painfully calculated, as he had learned in a mission school in Uvea.

"And look how much more the Frenchman would pay!" he exclaimed, shaking his head for emphasis.

"I'll go into that," Webster countered. "Come on, and bring the basket over to his place."

On the way out, Webster picked up a light steel pinch-bar. Then he led the way to Lecoin's station. The lights were out, and the brandy-soaked trader was snoring. The copra warehouse was locked, but a sharp tap on the shackle settled that. Webster beckoned to Mehivi, and then played his flashlight on the trader's scales.

"Weigh that same basket," he said. "And figure out how much Lecoin would have paid you."

Mehivi hooked his basket to the steelyard, and carefully slid the counterweight along the arm. He frowned. He looked up sharply, his eyes narrowed, gleaming. He was angry and puzzled and incredulous.

"Weighs less. Your scale weighs more."

Webster grinned and handed him a pencil.

"Figure it out. Remember, Lecoin's paying more than I am per pound."

Mehivi's hand shook. His lips moved. He was silently pronouncing every step of his calculation. Finally he straightened up.

"He pays more for each pound, but he steals a few pounds from each basket! How does he make the scales lie?"

Webster was ready to explain that. He indicated the chunk of lead that had been added to the sliding counterweight.

"Only as big as a net sinker, but look how it pulls down when it's out at the end of the arm!"

Mehivi was slow where arithmetic was concerned, but his natural wit made it all clear enough. He kicked the basket of copra into a corner and dashed out of the storehouse. Mehivi was in a hurry to spread the news.

Webster grinned as he went home. Lecoin would have a surprise when he opened up in the morning. Once the story got around, the natives would not trade with him even if he used honest weights.

"Maybe," Webster told himself, and kicked off his shoes, "that mug will finally learn."

It was perhaps an hour later when he realized that he himself had a few things to learn about the amiable natives. Yelling awakened him. It came from the direction of Lecoin's station, and it was not festive. Two revolver shots crackled, and rocks rained on a tin roof.

Empty-handed and barefooted, Webster ran to the veranda. Flames were rising from Lecoin's bungalow. Its thatched roof was dotted with fishing spears to whose bone heads tufts of oil-soaked coconut fiber had been tied and then set afire.

He lost only a moment getting his shoes laced. There was a revolver

in the dusty holster hanging on the wall, but Webster wanted no weapons. Lecoin, the fool, had fired at the mob, and now he was caged in a bungalow whose roof was ablaze.

When he reached the riot, a hundred tall islanders were kicking baskets of copra into the sea, scattering it in the sand, hurling it at the blazing roof. And then they got to the dry stock and flung torches into it. The oily stuff burned fiercely. Dense clouds of smoke poured from under the eaves.

"Cut it out!" Webster yelled, and jammed his way through the crowd.

No one paid any attention to him. They were too intent on getting Lecoin when he showed himself. Once he risked a shot from a window. A dozen spears splattered about the sill. Above the crackle of the flames, Webster could hear the half drunken Frenchman howling and cursing. He was frantic with terror.

"Mehivi, you damn fool!" Webster shouted, as he reached the inner curve of the mob. "The whole gang of you will be sent up for life! Call 'em off!"

While the French authorities did not bother to police the smaller islands, they would certainly take notice of a revolt. Webster wanted to spare his native friends any such reprisals. Also, he did not care to see the big trickster roasted alive or speared for petty larceny. So he dashed toward the veranda.

Lecoin saw him coming, but panic or fear of stored up vengeance had crazed him. He fired as Webster stumbled to the veranda. The slug went wild. Then Webster plunged through the doorway, and into the smoke.

The Frenchman whirled. Webster sidestepped, but the leveled revolver would not fire. As the hammer snapped down on the defective cartridge, he closed in, ducked the downward sweep of the barrel, and put all his weight into a punch.

That settled Lecoin. Webster

dragged him out to the veranda. Then he stopped, raised his hand, and shouted:

"Go home, you idiots! He's paid you, and now you've burned his copra! You're more than even."

"That is right. We are more than even," Mehivi said.

They carried the mumbling Frenchman to Webster's bungalow and left him there.

When he recovered, Lecoin sat up.

"By God, you started that! I'll finish you. I'll get the law on you—" he raved.

"Yeah? Try it. I checked those shortweights, my thieving friend," Webster retorted. "And I had a witness. See where you'll land if you holler. The more I see of your ugly puss, the more I'm sure that a *gendarme* is the last guy on earth you want to talk to!"

This was a guess, but Lecoin's change of expression showed that the shot had not missed. Lecoin and the law were not strangers, and neither were they friends.

Webster saw Lecoin's eyes shift, saw their wrath, then the quick looking away from the holstered pistol, in the corner. He rose, knocked the cartridges out of the weapon.

"Nice guy, huh? Don't try it!"

"Listen, I wouldn't," Lecoin protested.

"The natives would tear you to pieces. But if you'd tried treating them right, they'd be your friends, too."

LECOIN spat.

"You'll learn, some time! They sold you out for some gin, didn't they?"

Webster shook his head.

"Overgrown kids, that's all. But in a pinch, they treat a fellow right if he's square with them."

A week later, the trading boat arrived, but it left quickly. Lecoin had cornered all the copra, and his stock had been destroyed. It did not take

long to load what little Webster had. The burly Frenchman was the biggest part of the cargo leaving Pakalafa.

"One of these days I'm settling with you!" was his farewell.

A month later, a new trading boat, the *Sea Queen*, came to Pakalafa. She was freshly painted, a trim and rakish schooner, standing out beyond the reef. And her captain, bluff and hearty, presently told Webster how badly he needed copra.

"The company that chartered the *Sea Queen*," Captain Hilton said, "needs more cargo. Or they'll have to pay full tonnage on empty space."

Webster readily caught Hilton's point, but he shook his head.

"I've been dealing with the *Osprey*, out of Apia. We get along well enough."

"To be sure, to be sure." The red-faced skipper nodded. "But I'll pay a better price. I can afford to, you see. To keep the extra tonnage from going to waste."

That made sense, but Webster objected.

"How often will you be making me a deal like this? Hell, man, the *Osprey's* last trip didn't get much cargo, and if I let her skipper down again, where'll I be?"

Then the supercargo cut in, laughing.

"You're a hard man to deal with, Mr. Webster. My company needs cargo, badly, and I'd brought along a few trifles for you. Canned goods and liquor. But since you won't trade, why, no hard feelings. Come aboard and have dinner with us, won't you?"

The more Webster saw of the two, the less he liked them. While their story sounded logical enough, something warned him. Perhaps because paying premium prices for copra had such unpleasant associations. The crew who manned the captain's gig were white, not natives. They looked like hard customers. And Captain Hilton's shoulder holster did not seem necessary for peaceful trading.

"I guess you have some champagne in that batch of stuff you were going to give me, for good will?" Webster countered, still smiling.

The supercargo nodded.

"To say nothing of a case of ale, But all you get now is what you can take with your dinner."

The crew of the gig lounged on the veranda. Looking past his two callers, Webster noted that their weapons were not quite cunningly concealed. This was a landing party, he was now certain. Copra thieves, fully prepared to seize his stock. If he went aboard the *Sea Queen*—whatever her right name might be—Hilton and the supercargo would have a hostage to compel the natives to be cheerful about the looting.

"I've a better idea," Webster said. "Since I'm not trading with you, this good-will proposition ought to be fifty-fifty. Have all your men come ashore." He raised his voice. "Hey, Nito!" When the stalwart house boy padded into the room, Webster again addressed his guests. "We have a sea turtle. A whopper. The boys just caught it. And if you like green fat..."

HE SMACKED his lips, appreciatively. The supercargo and the captain exchanged quick, questioning glances.

"You're making my mouth water," the former said.

"Tell Mehivi to get the ovens going," Webster said to Nito. "Plenty of yams, and pork, and taro. And I want a bunch of robber crabs. For Captain Hilton to take along. Understand?"

"Yes, Master."

Nito stood there for a moment. Then he said:

"We can't get the *u'u* until tonight, late. Will that be soon enough?"

"Plenty soon. And don't forget. They're for Captain Hilton. Only nice big ones."

The sailors on the veranda separated to let Nito out. When the native was

gone, Hilton's round face squared a little.

"Let's quit playing games, Webster. We need copra, and we're going to have it. You needn't think your natives are going to stick by you when they face guns."

Webster was beyond reach of the revolver hanging in the corner. The supercargo, turning to watch Nito, had exposed a weapon in his hip pocket. Webster rose and made a gesture of resignation.

"If that's it, that's it. But Nito heard me say I wasn't selling."

"Am I supposed to worry?" Hilton spat on the floor.

"No!" Webster recoiled, slowly, for a pace, and raised one hand. "The boys might get hot-headed, with just a few of you. I don't want any of them hurt." He paced, apparently nervous, up and down the room. "But if your whole crew comes ashore, they won't take any chances with clubs and fishing spears."

"You're smart." Hilton grinned, and bit off a fresh chew. "I'd heard you coddle your natives along. It comes in handy, sometimes." He raised his voice, speaking to the men outside. "Vibert! Early! All hands ashore, except the watch. And never mind the wine."

The four got up and grinned. But while the end was by no means in sight, Webster at least had the satisfaction of knowing that the enemy had accepted his plan without suspicion.

Their number was divided, the odds now two to one.

If, after the proposed dinner, a riot did break out, Mehivi and his men would suffer severe casualties, regardless of ultimate victory. The *Sea Queen's* crew, with firearms, could more than hold their own. So Webster suddenly made a half-turn, snatching the revolver from the holster on the wall.

The move caught Hilton and the supercargo quite off guard.

"Hoist 'em," Webster commanded. "Or I'll blast the pants off both of you."

Hilton laughed. "Try it!" He went for his own weapon.

He should not have had a chance. Webster pulled the trigger before the red-faced man's hand got to his holster. But there was no explosion. The supercargo, who had not bothered to draw, thought it very funny. He doubled up, slapped his thigh, and said:

"You ought to try loading that gun."

A SECOND click convinced Webster. He remembered how he had forgotten to reload the weapon after Lecoin's departure. They had suspected it all the time. The disgruntled Frenchman, knowing that Webster had little use for weapons, must have spread the news.

"So Lecoin told you I unloaded it while I waited to ship him off the island?"

"You're finally waking up, huh?" Hilton countered.

"Let's all have a drink," the supercargo drawled. "As soon as I take the loads out of Webster's shotgun."

They had several drinks. Webster began to brighten.

"It'sh all in a lifetime. As long ash you boys pay a fair price, I don't care who buysh the copra," he said philosophically, and a bit thickly.

The supercargo chuckled.

"We'll give you a note," Hilton said.

"Lesh take a look and see the boys fix that oven right," Webster suggested, somewhat more thickly. "Gotta cook that turtle right."

"When Lecoin said you weren't used to liquor," the captain observed, "he wasn't telling the half of it."

But Webster was not quite as drunk as he seemed. In fact, he was entirely sober. The impending loss of sixty tons of copra and his wrath at Lecoin would have steadied him against a bottle, instead of three or four quick ones, slyly slopped over his chin.

Then he was thinking of the punch on the nose he was saving for Lecoin. He was certain that the tricky Frenchman was aboard the *Sea Queen*, keeping out of sight so that the islanders would not suspect until it was too late.

They went out where a group of natives were lining a pit with stones. In the meanwhile, there was copra to load.

"Put some of 'em to work," Hilton said. His revolver was in his pocket, its muzzle touching Webster's ribs. "Don't get any drunken notions. The quicker we get that copra in the hold, the better I'll like it."

Webster gave the orders. More than half the natives began loading the bags into their boats. Webster saw the crew of the *Sea Queen* coming ashore.

"Don't forget to lay out crab bait," he said to Mehivi. He wove a little on his feet, and sputtered drunkenly. "Nice, big crabs for Captain Hilton. To take along. Enough for the crew, too. Captain Hilton is staying here tonight."

Mehivi blinked and looked stupid. Webster repeated the instructions, very gravely and with solemn gestures.

"Nice crabs. Save big ones for captain. Staying here tonight."

Hilton's crew, except for the watch, were all ashore. Webster was in their midst. All had knives and pistols. In the small boats, he saw rifles. Only gun barrels could make tarpaulins bulge in such shape.

"Act natural," Hilton ordered, "but don't try to start anything. I'll blow the lid off if I catch you in any huddle with your natives."

WEBSTER grinned as he rambled around among the guests who occupied the veranda of the bungalow.

"Dig up that case of brandy, in the locker," Webster said to Mehivi.

"Thanks, we can use it. But later.

Think you'll get us drunk, so they can bean us?" The supercargo's smile was ironic.

The raiders seemed to think of everything. Webster's face lengthened. As he sat there, feigning sociability with his hard-bitten captors, he scanned the further shadows. Familiar faces were absent. Not everyone was watching the dance. Then he caught the far-off scent that flavored the breeze. Fresh coconut meat had been laid on hot rocks, and the *u'u* would be coming from their hiding places along the salt flats.

They'd end in baskets, as securely trapped as he himself was.

One of the *Sea Queen's* crew guarded the boats. No snooping native would have a chance to get at the half dozen rifles. Captain Hilton grinned, wiped gravy from his chin.

"Don't worry, Webster," he said. "You're having all that copra loaded before noon tomorrow. Might as well like it. We're staying ashore to keep an eye on you and the natives."

"Hell!" Webster glanced about. "Not enough bunks."

"That won't worry us," the supercargo put in. "We'll sleep on deck."

Mehivi had broken out a case of brandy. Bottles passed from hand to hand. But Hilton stopped that.

It was late when the captain said:

"Run along to your room, Webster. And don't walk in your sleep. We'll be watching."

The house was crowded. The crew of the *Sea Queen* spread sleeping mats on the floor. When Webster blew out his oil lamp, he lay there, listening to the subdued muttering of his guests. He suspected that some had cached a few bottles of brandy and were now taking some drinks on the sly.

But nothing came of that. Later, there was heavy snoring. But those awake—two as nearly as he could judge from voices that the door muffled—were not hitting the bottle enough to get groggy. Someone, he was certain, patrolled the outside

of the bungalow. The crunch of sand and coral was plain.

Finally, these sounds died out.

Webster waited for an hour to drag past. The luminous hands of his watch seemed frozen in place. He wondered if Mehivi had read the signs, if Mehivi had understood the repeated and double-meaning orders. Finally the man outside cursed, then cried:

"Here, you!"

Judging from his footsteps, he ran no more than a dozen yards. A native cried out, and brush crackled. The distraction lasted no more than a few seconds. On the face of it, it could be dismissed as a prowling islander trying to find a discarded bottle with dregs of gin or brandy. But that was the watchman's mistake.

At the very start of the detour, a white-haired man came to the open window of Webster's room. It was Mehivi, carrying two large palm-leaf baskets. Webster was on his feet before the distracted sentry's muttered curse indicated that the false alarm had been dismissed.

"Big ones, and I'll bring more, if I can," the old fellow whispered.

HE MELTED into the shadows before the sentry made his circuit. Webster grinned, and set the baskets beside the bed. From inside came the dry scrape of shells and claws. He tiptoed to the door, and spent moments listening. All but two of the men were asleep. They were drowsy, no longer muttering. Only the smell of fresh cigarette smoke assured him that they were awake.

Slowly, Webster twisted the knob. Breathless, he inched the door open, and prayed that the hinge would not squeak. He had oiled it with turtle grease, but it might not have penetrated.

From somewhere in front came the odor of fresh coconut, roasting on a hot rock. Webster, impatient, waited for Mehivi's return. Moments passed,

but finally the barefooted native outwitted the sentry's hearing.

"Turn them loose," Mehivi whispered. This time he slipped in over the sill. "There are clubs in this basket, too."

Webster seated himself on the bed and opened the baskets. There was no moonlight. He could not see the robber crabs, but he could hear them ambling over the matting of the floor. They scented the roasting coconut, which was well out on the beach. Having been cheated of one feast, they hurried to the new one.

The scrape and rustling blended with the night sounds. Webster took the carved warclub Mehivi handed him. He laid it down and fumbled for his shoes. But he had scarcely gotten them on when he heard a yell from the front.

"Oooow! What the hell!" one of Hilton's crew howled.

The sentry cursed and came pounding toward the veranda.

"Wot yer screeching about, gorblimme, you got a blinking nightmare?"

Captain Hilton echoed that query, and so did the supercargo. In the front room, the crew were scrambling. Every blind move brought bare hands, bare feet, bodies protected only by garments against the irritated *u'u*. The savage crabs could husk coconuts, and sleeping men were no problem at all.

"Get a light, God blast it!" someone yelled. "Owww!"

"Cut out that racket, you fool! Wake him up, someone!" Hilton yelled.

A match flared. The supercargo said, "Crabs!"

The feeble flame made that clear to the victims who were dancing about, trying to get free from the vicious creatures. Hilton laughed heartily. Startled, he had grabbed his revolver, but now he lowered the weapon, and relished the joke.

That was when Webster bounded

over the threshold. Hilton, going for a lamp, had not a chance. He started when Webster said, "Yeah, crabs!" and then cracked down.

The supercargo fired once, before Mehivi could flatten him. The old man ducked. The slug spattered a window pane, and then Webster's sweeping stroke brushed the supercargo's teeth into the tangle.

The man watching the boats came on the run. And just then, the natives broke cover. They knocked him down from the rear, and he sprawled face forward with his rifle. The sentry who had paced about the house had a pistol, but he dared not use it. In that confusion, he could not pick a target.

THE natives who rushed the house were followed by men with torches. But there was not enough resistance to count. Surprise, the savage biting and nipping, and the two who had overwhelmed captain and supercargo accounted for all hands. As the mate of the *Sea Queen* tore a crab from his hand and went for a knife, Webster knocked the weapon from his hand.

"Tie them up," he said. "All except Hilton and the supercargo. If their skulls aren't busted, snap them out of it."

While this was being done, the raiders' weapons were rounded up.

"How did you figure it out?" Webster said to Mehivi.

"You looked too drunk. Drunk too quick. Then I went to the ship. I saw Lecoin, when nobody knew it. So I knew why you wanted crabs for the captain." He howled with laughter. "Nice, big ones!"

"Captain, and you, fellow—we're going aboard the *Sea Queen*. Right now. Get going, and don't pull any funny work. My boys will finish your crew if I don't have a pleasant trip," Webster ordered.

(Continued on page 112)



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The GLOBE TROTTER



GREETINGS, fellow-rovers of the world! And to those of you who, by reason of youth or work or school, know little at first hand of things beyond the hearth and the home, I repeat: Greetings, fellow-rovers. For don't you roam the world with me each month in the pages of **THRILLING ADVENTURES**? And isn't that a genuine experience, made real to us by the magic of words? Of course it is!

And that's why, each time a new issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** rolls off the thunderous presses, I get a brand new kick out of it. I've seen plenty of the world at first hand, but I know that the next best thing to doing that is seeing it through the pages of **THRILLING ADVENTURES**.

Adventuresome living? Fine—if circumstances make it possible. But if not—adventuresome reading! There's even one respect in which the second has something on the first.

One lives in the present. But when one reads, one is not necessarily restricted to that.

The past, too, is brought to life on the printed page—and, in some instances, the future. Then, also, there is an amazing variety of scene which no one individual can ever possibly experience in his own lifetime.

Watch for Tarzan!

We cannot, for example, all be like Edgar Rice Burroughs, who is equally at home in the jungles of Africa and in our own Great West. How familiar he is with the West you have reason to know, since in this issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** is the second installment of his magnificent serial, **THE TERRIBLE TENDERFOOT**, to be concluded in the next issue. And how familiar he is with the Dark Continent you will have fresh reason to know when you read his latest Tarzan yarn — **TARZAN AND THE JUNGLE MURDERS**, a brand-new complete novel.

It's coming—coming soon! Complete in the June issue! Watch for it! Don't miss a single issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES**! Look forward to a brand-new complete Tarzan novel, by Edgar Rice Burroughs!

Speaking of jungles, let's hear from Ed-

ward Parrish Ware, the author of **JUNGLE MENACE**, appearing in this issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES**. Edward Parrish Ware's jungle is quite different from Tarzan's domain.

The Sunken Lands

Suppose we let the author tell about it. He addresses all of you as follows:

Dear Globe Trotter:

In the early 1900's the Sunken Lands of Arkansas—locale of **JUNGLE MENACE** in this issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** Magazine—comprising approximately 4,000,000 acres of virgin forest—was still a virtually trackless waste. A happy hunting ground for the out-of-doors man. Better yet, countless hunters, fishermen and trappers gained a living solely from it.

It was all United States Government property, and only a very small portion of it had been thrown open to homesteaders. As wild a country as anybody anywhere has ever prowled about in, it offered many hazards to the inexperienced and the unwary who ventured within it.

About the middle of the first decade of the present century a group of wealthy non-resident sportsmen obtained a grant of some thirty-thousand acres of wild-land in the very heart of the Big Swamp. They built a clubhouse on the western bank of the St. Francis River at a distance of four miles from the then Kansas City, Ft. Scott & Memphis Railway, built a dirt and log embankment from the K. C. F. S. & M. embankment in a diagonal course to a juncture with the St. Francis at the site of the clubhouse. A narrow-gauge railway was laid on the dump.

All this was done solely for the convenience of the members of the club and guests. And that clubhouse railway embankment was what started all the trouble.

The narrow-gauge embankment bounded on the west a triangular body of land of approximately 50,000 acres. Scattered about on those acres were professional hunters, fishermen and trappers. And, within that triangle, half a dozen hardy men had taken up land and were trying their hand at farming.

Naturally, to the so-called "Millionaires' Club" members, the presence of the settlers and the hunters and trappers was undesirable. They wanted nothing of the sort so close to their sportsmen's paradise.

Whether or not the club railway dump was deliberately planned to drown out the undesirables is even now a moot question, but the fact is indisputable that the four-mile-long dump was provided with only one water-gap, and that a trestle. Wholly inadequate, as the engineer in charge must have known.

During the three subsequent years, the Mississippi River, some thirty-odd miles eastwards, did not breach its levee on the Arkansas side, but the St. Francis and its countless small tributaries caused plenty of grief. Each spring that part of Sunken Lands was subjected to high-water ranging from two to ten feet in depth.

Before the clubhouse dump was built, the backwaters from the St. Francis did not stand for long on the triangular section of ground referred to. But the dump, having inadequate drainage gaps,

acted as a dam and held the back-waters sometimes for many weeks on the triangle. The settlers practically condemned to live in water, lost heart. The hunters and trappers, but for their habit of building their cabins high up on stilts, would have been drowned out.

But not for a minute did these men give up. On the contrary, they undertook to adjust matters to their own liking.

A section of the clubhouse railway dump was dynamited, pretty much as I have described the happening in **JUNGLE MENACE**. There were threats about blowing up the clubhouse itself.

The club members hired gunmen and brought them in as guards—and the natives did several sweet jobs of "bushing up" on those same guards. The hired gunmen faded out of the picture pronto. No telling what might have transpired in that far-off, wild section of the country if the Mississippi River had not taken the situation in hand. It did just that, in the spring following the exodus of the clubhouse gunmen.

The Mississippi breached its levee and came roaring into the Sunken Lands. The great flood destroyed, among other things, the narrow-gauge dump. Wiped it clean off the earth, leaving only ties and twisted steel rails to mark its one-time course. And that proved to the State of Arkansas and the United States Government that the dump, improperly constructed, was a menace. It was rebuilt—and the drainage-gaps were ample.

And what side did I shinny on? Well—whoever heard of a magazine fictioneer playing around with millionaire clubmen?

Good wishes to all you Globe Trotters and may your numbers increase!

Sincerely,

Edward Parrish Ware.

And greetings to you, Edward Parrish Ware, from all us Globe Trotters. As for
(Continued on page 104)

WATCH FOR



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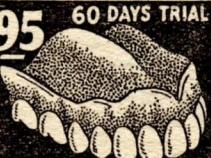
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(Continued from page 103)

your good wishes, they're a continuous actuality—our numbers are increasing.

Irrepressible William O'Sullivan

Those who read our words last month, heralding the printing of **APPOINTMENT WITH MADNESS**, by William O'Sullivan, in this issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES**, ought to know, after reading the tale itself, if the story lived up to our promises. As a matter of fact, how could it fail to do so with Bill as the author?

Bill O'Sullivan got into the last war when America did. He had to stretch the truth before the examining board on account of his age, but what was a little white lie like that? As he writes in his biography, published in the January issue of **T. A.**:

So there I am, a flying cadet, Aviation Section, Signal Corps. Two of my brothers are infantry officers—and one is in cavalry. The oldest. He gets into the Air Service—and I get him as a *cadet!* Oh, boy!

"Sir!" he addresses me, in front of the mob. I eye him icily and say: "Let's be democratic. Call me 'Lieutenant'."

William O'Sullivan injected something of this spirit into **APPOINTMENT WITH MADNESS**, for William O'Sullivan "writes as he lives."

The Mailbag

The letters from you **Globe Trotters** come in thick and fast; and as usual I am hard put to find space to print as many of them as I would like. But don't let that stop any of you. Even if I can't print

PARTIAL LIST OF MEMBERS of the

GLOBE TROTTERS' CLUB

(Continued from previous issues)

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Richard Tapcoch, 37 Plum St., Owensboro, Ky.
Louis Durr, Jr., 2342 Gleason Ave., The Bronx, N. Y.
James Roedel, 1332 Denton St., La Crosse, Wisc.
William K. McCown, 144 Woodland Drive, Huntington, West Virginia.
Harry Andresen, Box 244, No Miami Beach, Fla.
Thomas Mulkins, Box 174, Route 1, Homestead, Fla.
William E. Stone, Box 245, Oxford, Miss.
Harvey Bernard, 60 School St., Oshkosh, Wisc.
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N. Weaver, 21 Oliver Mount, Sheffield (9), Yorkshire, England.
Everett Parks, 2005 Shelby St., Indianapolis, Ind.
Frank E. Hart, 8 Jones St., New York City, N. Y.
George Anderson, 5 Queens Square, Methilhill, By Leven, Fife, England.
William Lavoie, 2400 East 3rd St., Los Angeles, Calif.
L. C. Mather, 5590 W. Imperial Highway, Inglewood, Calif.
J. A. K. Richards, 8439 W 4th St., Los Angeles, Calif.
Robert E. Arvin, 252 E. Base Line, San Bernardino, Calif.

all of them, I read all of them, and they tell me what you want and like.

To show you I am not indulging in mere idle chatter when I say that **THRILLING ADVENTURES** Magazine fills a vital need in the lives of those who are not always in a position to follow the adventure trail in actuality, I am printing the following letter:

Dear Globe Trotter:

Enclosed you will find my bid for membership in the Globe Trotters' Club, which I hope will come very soon.

At heart every man is an adventurer, but very few of us ever realize our dreams of travel. At the present time I can still consider myself one of these poor unfortunates. In joining your club I hope that I shall find some measure of adventure.

I had been working as a junior drug clerk, but have given it up so that I can try at Aviation as a career. Perhaps someone will write who shares the same interest in aviation.

With my best wishes for an even greater success of your column, I remain,

Yours friendly,

Henry Lissmann.

11806-101st Ave.,
Richmond Hill, L. I., N. Y.

And here is a communication from a seeker after adventure which sounds a somewhat similar note:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I would like very much to be enrolled in your adventurous club. I have always wanted to travel

(Continued on page 106)

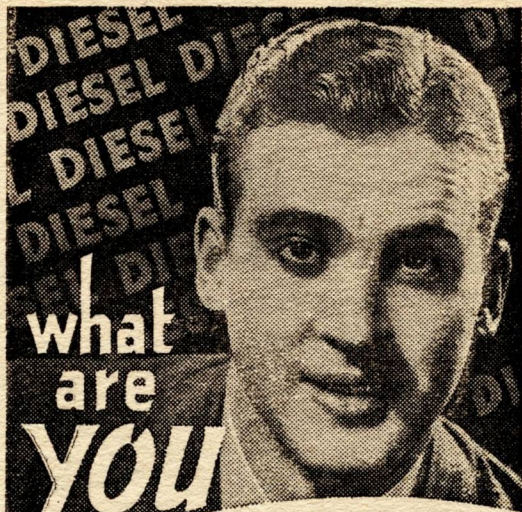


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(Continued from page 105)

to the far corners of the world, but as fate would have it, I am stuck in business, so my chances of traveling are practically nil.

So my best bet is to get as many pen pals all over the world as I can. I am twenty-four years old and very anxious to get started on my world cruise by the medium of pen and paper.

I will endeavor to answer all questions to the best of my ability.

Thanking you in advance, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

Harry Finer.

114 W. San Fernando Blvd.,
Burbank, Calif.

There you have it, fellow Globe Trotters—two people—one in New York and one in California—and both expressing similar emotions. Which only goes to show you that the spirit of adventure makes the whole world kin.

Let's jump from the ends of America to the middle, and listen to someone employed by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Dear Globe Trotter:

I enjoy your magazine very much. However, I have only been reading it for a short while. Just keep the good stories going and you will have a steady reader in me.

The main purpose in writing this letter is to enroll in your Globe Trotters' Club. I have served one enlistment in the Army and have been in every state in the Union, and have had quite a few things happen to me in the way of experiences in different parts of the United States. At present I am employed by the A.A.A.

Yours very truly,

Harry D. Turner.

Carrollton, Miss.

In printing the following letter, we cross the ocean to England, showing that adventure is not alone a national phenomenon but an international one as well:

Dear Globe Trotter:

Many times have I thought of joining your club, but I have considered myself hardly eligible, not being a globe trotter myself. But I guess you have many members who, like myself, long for adventure but never get any.

The only traveling I have done so far is round the Midlands. This was in the course of my work as a lorry-driver. (The British call trucks lorries. —Editor.)

But now that I am in the Army I am expecting to travel much further than that. As you see by the application form, I have several hobbies, the chief one being reading **THRILLING ADVENTURES**. The only trouble is I can't get it regularly here in England, but I buy everyone I see.

I hope you will be good enough to make me a member of your club, and I would like a few pen friends of either sex. I promise to answer all letters to the best of my ability, and give information on any places with which I am familiar.

Yours sincerely,

J. Bolton.

511470 M. T. Platoon,
"S" Company,
Yeomanry Drill Hall,
Warwick, England.

Get busy, pals, and see that J. Bolton gets some mail.

Here is a note from a chap who's been around some:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I wish to be enrolled as a member of the Globe Trotters' Club. I am interested in adventure and will endeavor to answer all questions asked me by

(Continued on page 108)

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(Continued from page 106)

other members regarding the places with which I am familiar. I am nineteen years of age.

Born in Panama City, Panama, nineteen years ago. Have been across the U. S. A. twice in the past year. Seen Frisco Bay with its magnificent bridge, geysers in Utah, Royal Gorge in Colorado, sugar plantations in Louisiana.

Plan a trip to Managua, Nicaragua, to visit some missionaries.

Very truly yours,
Melvin C. Boshner.

127 Tremont Street,
Hartford, Conn.

Glad to have you with us, Melvin!
Here's a letter from a potential mariner:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I haven't much globe trotting to my credit but I have had a few minor adventures connected with sailing, involving near drownings and freezing when upset in the dead of winter. However, we were out sailing again the next day.

Please accept my enrollment blank, and am thinking of starting to write some letter to my fellow Globe Trotters.

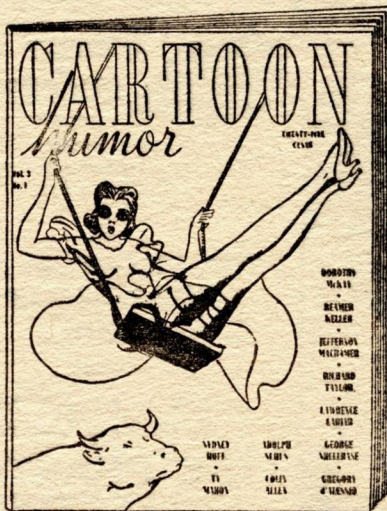
Your faithful G. T.
James Roedel.

1332 Denton Street,
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All glory to those who go down to the sea in ships, Jim!

An amusing letter comes from a constant reader who seems to be something of an arithmetician.

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Dear Globe Trotter:

I liked the stories in the January issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** very much.

I was rather curious regarding how many times the name "Macklin" was mentioned in the yarn, **WHEEL OF FORTUNE**, by David Brandt, so I made the count.

Just one hundred and ninety times. Some sort of record, I reckon.

Yes. I liked the story.

The reminiscences of William O'Sullivan made me chuckle, in his "The Pity of It All."

Success to **THRILLING ADVENTURES!**

George Owen Reed.

810-21st St.,
Sacramento, Calif.

And now one more letter. It comes all the way from France and is self-explanatory:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I thoroughly enjoy the stories in **THRILLING ADVENTURES**, especially out here somewhere in France, and I really hope that those in dear old England who send me your magazine don't ever lose my address.

I would appreciate it if my fellow Globe Trotters could find a little time to spare to write to me, for we find it rather lonely out here. I promise to answer faithfully as often as this war will permit.

I will try to paint the customs of the people of
(Continued on page 110)

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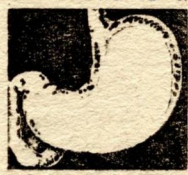
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(Continued from page 109)
 France in their proper colors and make my letters as interesting as the censors will allow. Therefore, until then, I can only say that the French girls are nice, French beer weak, and French cigarettes terrible. (English cigarettes are rather scarce here.)
 Cheerio and thanks,
 Harry Payne S75469.
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The Next Issue
 The May issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** will present the concluding instalment of Edgar Rice Burroughs' three-part serial, **THE TERRIBLE TEN-DEERFOOT**.
 In addition, the May issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** will include a feast of fiction that deserves in every sense the adjective, *extraordinary*. Do you remember what I said at the beginning of this department about adventuresome reading—it's power to give you command not only over the present but over the past?
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Then, to enrich the feast still more, there will be **THE WRATH OF DAKUWANGA**, a gripping story of gold lure by Crawford Sullivan. Those of you who have never been in the South Seas will feel as though you've just got back from there when you finish this enthralling tale.

Be on hand when the May issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES** comes out. Don't miss this fictional banquet!

Until next month—so long.

—THE GLOBE TROTTER

P. S. Readers who desire information on railroad, steamship or bus schedules and rates anywhere in the world may obtain same by writing to **THRILLING ADVENTURES TRAVEL BUREAU**, 22 West 48th St., New York, N. Y.



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CRAB BAIT

(Continued from page 101)

Mehivi had some natives man the boat. Another party left in a canoe. They were all armed, and Webster covered the two captives. As they crossed the reef, he said to Hilton:

"Hail the watch, and do it right."

"Uh-uh. Listen. What are you—you going to do?" Hilton was shaking. "Those boys aboard, they didn't..."

"I'm getting that champagne." Webster grinned.

Hilton hailed the watch. As Webster followed his captives up the ladder, the dozen natives swarmed up the cable. The presence of the skipper reassured the man on deck, until it was too late. He had no chance to sing out. The *Sea Queen* was taken without a blow.

Then Webster said:

"Bring Lecoin up, right now."

The big Frenchman looked sick when he was hustled on deck. Guns and fish spears hemmed him in, strong hands held his shipmates helpless. The moon was rising, and the light was good. Webster watched him for a moment, and fingered his revolver.

"I thought I told you to get out and stay out," he growled.

Lecoin choked, tried to break away. Webster pocketed his gun.

"I don't think it's worth the trouble," he said, "but I promised you this, weeks ago. Put 'em up!"

The natives booted Lecoin forward. Seeing that he was not to be speared or shot, he made a rush, fists hammering. But this time, Webster was cool, smiling, not angry.

He wore him down. He pounded him, battered him with short jabs, hooked him until his head spun. When Lecoin finally collapsed under the hammering, Webster panted, "That'll hold you for a while." Then he turned to Captain Hilton. "I ought to scuttle your ship. But I won't. I've got a better idea," he said.

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The captain was shaking. He licked his lips, blinked.

"Now get to work and put every pound of my copra ashore. I'm keeping your guns," Webster ordered.

One of the natives drenched Lecoin with a pail of salt water. The looter sat up, sputtering.

"Ask your buddies if my way of treating natives doesn't have its points," Webster said.

And then Mehivi prodded Lecoin to work.

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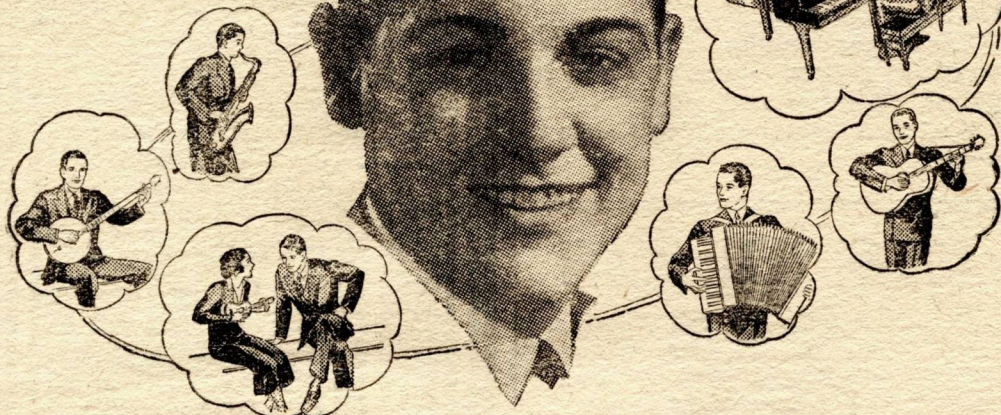
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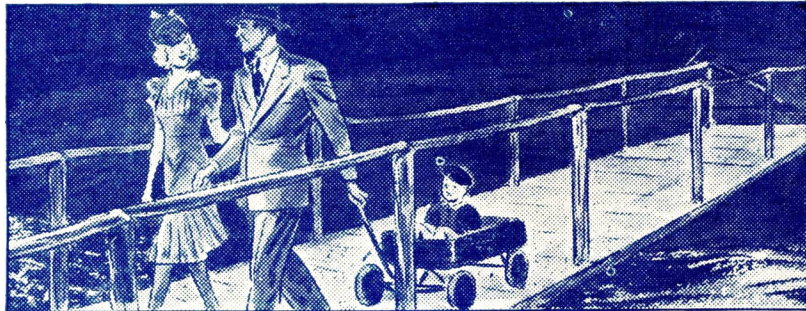
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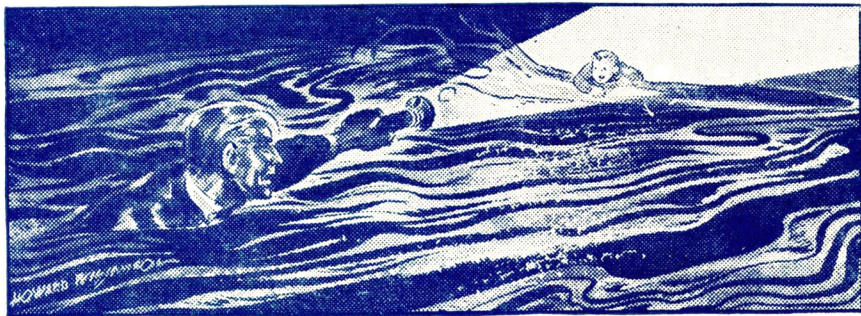
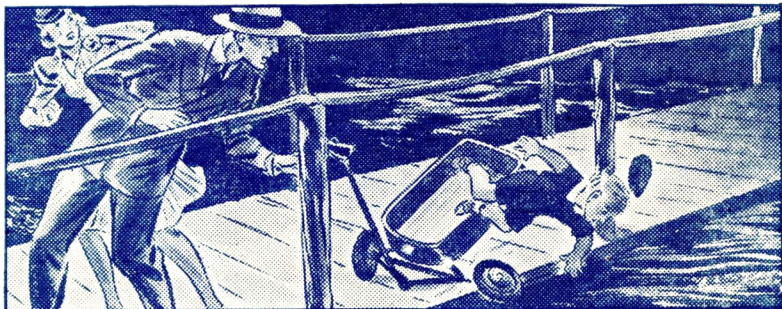


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