

The Quest in Time *by* **EDMOND HAMILTON**

fantastic

ADVENTURES

244
PAGES

The
GIANT *from*
JUPITER

By
GERALD VANCE
and
BRUCE DENNIS

JUNE
25c



PITYROSPORUM OVALE, the strange "Bottle Bacillus" regarded by many authorities as a causative agent of infectious dandruff.

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**VOL. 4
NO. 6**

ADVENTURES 1942

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JUNE,
1942**

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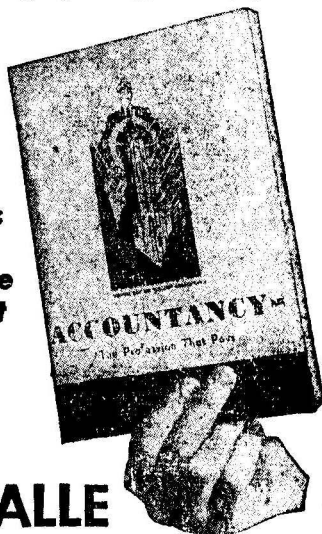
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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

AROUND us as we write this, the last few pages of this issue to wend their way toward "bedtime," whirl strange ghostly figures; weird squeaking bat-like creatures who suck human's ideas from their brain cells; little fairies, lovely and impish; horrible little green goblins who seem determined to pull our socks down, and a fiendish monster who laughs and laughs because our pay check is written in vanishing ink on perfectly transparent paper.

In other words, this is the most fantastic issue, and we modestly hope the best, we have put to bed in a long time.

WE have seen Americans turn to Aztecs; a man become a wreath of smoke; Fate incarnate; the Pied Piper in Chicago; the Nazis in incredible confusion; a hat many of us might like, or hate, to own. We've begun to doubt our eyes, especially when beauty becomes less than skin deep; when even a magician doesn't understand his own illusions; whether a silver disc is a soldier, or a soldier is a stein of beer. Do giants really exist; what's under piano keys if not fairies; is the Earth doomed?

AND we're plenty dizzy. But that ought to give you an idea of what we've covered in this issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES! Thirteen great stories, and we do mean great. Take a look at the contents page. Just the list of authors ought to be enough to convince you. Hamilton, Wilcox, O'Brien, McGivern, Cabot, Farnsworth, Shelton, Coblentz, etc. Yup, we've got 'em *this time!*

AND we've got two new authors whom we'd like to strangle! We refer to Gerald Vance and Bruce Dennis. Faced with a deadline, and a cover by Malcolm Smith without a story, we called upon Fate, and entrusted a story job into the hands of these newcomers. We showed them the cover, and we told them what the lead illustration would be. They promised to write that scene into the story.

Ah, what trusting souls managing editors be!

ANYWAY, you have undoubtedly admired the cover on this issue, and ohed and ahed the illustration to "The Giant From Jupiter," by Robert Fuqua. Now, if you haven't read the story, go ahead and enjoy yourselves—it's good!

And if you are one of the readers who catches inaccuracies in illustrations in comparison to the text of the story, prepare for the *piece de resistance* of your career. For nowhere in the story does that scene occur! Or at least, *exactly* that scene. But we blush and hide our editorial heads, and covertly sharpen up our letter-knife for the reappearance of these two remarkably fine amateurs, who write stories we will certainly continue to buy, but whom we will never trust again.

SAID they: "We couldn't work that illustration into the story." Said we: "Nuts!" And we're going to publish the illustration as is, and prove to them it could have been worked in! In short, this editor will pay \$5.00 for the best letter from a reader telling how the plot to "The Giant From Jupiter" could have been changed enough to permit that illustration to illustrate an actual scene. If we know our readers, boy, will we tell 'em, eh? Just address your letter to "Giant From Jupiter Contest," Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., 540 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

BOTH FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and our companion magazine, *Amazing Stories*, are looking for new artists. If you happen to be an artist, and are capable of doing this sort of illustration, why not send us some samples. Many of our readers have become famous authors through just such a procedure. O'Brien, Bloch, Swain, Farnsworth, Vance, and many others read us first, then decided to throw their talents in with us. Why not artists? Come on, don't be bashful. Maybe you've got something there.

SPEAKING of Robert Bloch, he's in this issue with another of the Lefty Feep stories. This amazing author is making another smash success with his newest series. And we know you'll enjoy "The Pied Piper Fights the Gestapo," as much as we did.

ROD RUTH, who does "Romance of the Elements," has been down with a nervous collapse due to overwork, and we are glad to learn that at last he'll be able to return to his illustrating. He has become quite popular with you readers, and we hope to be able to present him again next issue.

WITH the entrance into the Marine Corps of top fantasy artist Julian S. Krupa, we have

been searching for a man to take his place. Undoubtedly our readers will be pleased to learn that Malcolm Smith has become a member of the Ziff-Davis staff, and that his work will hereafter be seen regularly in our pages and on our covers. Welcome to our midst, Malcolm.

EARLY in *Fantastic Adventures'* history, we ran a story by Edmond Hamilton called "The Horror Out of Carthage." It was a very good story, so you said. Recently we got an inspiration and we asked Hamilton to do another yarn with as much guts as that one, and in a similar vein. The result is in this issue. "The Quest In Time" held us on the edge of our chair as we read it, and we guarantee it will do the same thing for you. They used to call him "world-wrecker" Hamilton. Maybe because he used to write stories where whole worlds were destroyed. But now he ought to have the title of "world-builder"! Because he has a knack of building a whole new world of thrilling adventure with a few typewritten words. If you don't actually "live" the quest into Mexico's thrilling past, you just haven't any blood in your veins!

WE WERE especially pleased to see the return of those little Irish leprechauns, Tink and Nastee, in a new adventure. This time it's a novelet, and we anticipate that Mr. McGivern will receive some of the most enthusiastic fan mail of his meteoric career. But confidentially, we think that little brat, Nastee, ought to be strangled!

LAST month we made some predictions, ala Nostradamus, without trying to hide our meaning in evasive and figurative verse. The only trouble was that we had to contend with a faster moving chain of events than old Michel de ever had to. Let's just glance backward a moment and see what *did* happen.

FIRST, Java fell, even before our book hit the stands. Burma hasn't yet, but Rangoon is gone, and a heck of a lot of Burma. Japan already is heading for India, has occupied islands in the gulf preparatory to an attack. MacArthur was not driven from the Philippines; his soldiers still fight there, although he himself is now in a vaster scale of operations. Australia finds itself battling for its life in a much shorter time than we predicted. The Burma road is closed to China.

FURTHER (we quote), "The United States Fleet will spread havoc in a series of daring raids . . . Jap forces at two (unnamed for obvious reasons) islands will be wiped out."

We can only refer you to the two raids, of which Wake Island was most important, in which this prediction came true to the letter.

AUSTRALIA and America, it became evident in a most spectacular manner, *did* join hands in the "down under" defense. MacArthur made an epic journey to the Australian mainland and took over command of the United Nations' forces with the intent of eventually bringing the war to Japan.

IN SHORT, we have thus far scored one hundred percent correct in our predictions. The only predictions which have not materialized as fact, are those of longer range, dependent on spring developments.

NOW, how about stepping into our time machine and looking at the next things to happen? First, you're going to say "oh, anybody can generalize, and hit close to the truth." That's true. But we don't intend to generalize, any more that we did last month. We specifically mentioned the number of islands to be attacked, and the result. Naturally we could not mention the names, for obvious reasons. Enemy listening "posts" in this country, fifth column agents, report every whisper heard. If we were to say Wake is to be attacked, even that might be construed as having basis in fact, and a trap laid. Therefore generalization if only because we are Americans and cannot speak until the fact is accomplished. But we *were* right, you know. So, here we go.

INDIA will be invaded. Hitler will attack for oil in Iran, will strike for the Suez canal. Turkey will be forced into the war without any chance for other choice.

(Concluded on page 63)



"What would you call a guy like me down on your earth?"

THE GIANT FROM JUPITER

ADMIRAL RICHARD HALLET, U.S.N., retired, entered the Office of Naval Intelligence hesitantly. For a man who had spent thirty-eight years of his life in the navy, there was no reason for his feeling of bewildered embarrassment, but nevertheless he couldn't escape the sensation of having returned to a new and strange world.

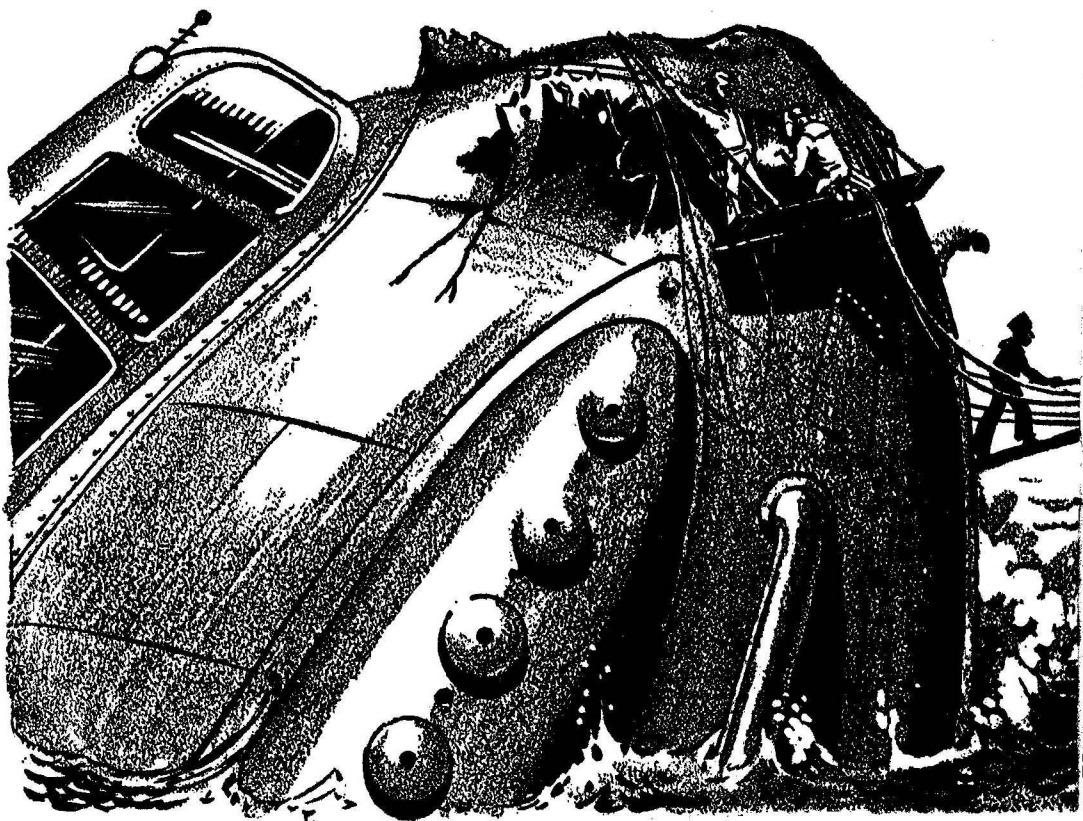
Nothing had changed since he had walked out of the office a half dozen years ago for the last time, but now everyone seemed younger and fresher and more intent.

The switchboard operator, a blue-

jacketed yeoman, was plugging calls in and out of the office as fast as his fingers could move. The long corridors that branched off from the main reception room were thronged with serious-looking civilians, and hurrying yeomen, carrying correspondence from one department to another.

Occasionally young ensigns, painfully conscious of their rank, strode through the reception room, grim and unsmiling, striving mightily to convince the world that they were worthy of their stripes.

Vice Admiral Hallet smiled. It had always been like this, and he supposed it always would. Nevertheless, the



by
GERALD VANCE
and
BRUCE DENNIS

An incredible being stood
there in the ocean; a man who
was taller than a warship. He
presented a problem that was
very hard to solve indeed!

This was his spaceship, and in it he
had flown to Earth from outer space



bustle and the air of grim excitement made him feel a little older and little more useless.

There wasn't much a man of seventy years could do when his country was at war. Vice Admiral Hallet belied his three score and ten with his straight spare frame and keen, frosty blue eyes, but it was evident in his snowy hair and in the slight stiffness of his walk.

A hurrying ensign collided with him as he turned.

"Sorry, sir," the ensign said automatically. "Anything I can do for you?"

Vice Admiral Hallet was wearing his plain gray civilians, but there was something in his bearing and in his eyes that stamped him more expressively than any uniform could.

"Is Commander Ward in?" he asked gently.

"He's pretty busy, sir. You may have to wait. Possibly I could help you."

Admiral Hallet smiled at the youngster's earnestness.

"I don't doubt that you could," he said, "but the commander and I are old friends. In fact I believe I was the first captain he served under in the last war. If you just tell him Admiral Hallet is here I think he'll see me."

"I'm sorry, sir, I didn't know. I'll tell him you're here."

He turned, hesitated, then saluted smartly and strode away.

ADMIRAL HALLET felt a warm glow around the region of his heart. The ensign's salute seemed to strike away the years and the uselessness that burdened him. Damn it! A man was as young as he felt. Why couldn't the navy see that? It wasn't as if he wanted a command, or even an active post. He'd be satisfied anywhere, doing any-

thing that was necessary and had to be done.

How could a man putter around a farm and listen to the radio at night when his country was at war? Admiral Hallet threw back his stiff shoulders as these thoughts flitted through his mind. This was his war as much as anybody else's and he didn't intend to stay on the shelf for the duration.

The ensign returned a moment later.

"Commander Ward will see you," he said. "Room 204 at the end of the corridor."

"Thank you, mister," Admiral Hallet said.

The ensign saluted and went on his way.

Room 204 bore the plain legend

Office of Recruiting.

Admiral Hallet opened the door and entered. There were six or seven uniformed officers working at desks, and a clattering teletype was set up in a corner of the office.

A door that led to a private office opened and a tall, dark haired young man with ruddy cheeks strode into the outer room. His eyes lighted as he saw Admiral Hallet.

"This is a pleasant surprise," he said with a smile. He strode to the admiral's side and pumped his hand enthusiastically. "How's the farming business? And when does that grandson of yours start at the Academy?"

Without waiting for an answer to either question the young man took the admiral by the arm and led him into his private office.

"Let me get my breath," Admiral Hallet laughed, as he sank into a chair.

Commander Ward sat down and regarded the old man affectionately.

"Too much easy living, eh?" he grinned.

"Hardly that, Paul," Admiral Hallet denied vigorously. "I think it's just the

excitement of being back here, ready to step into harness again, that shoots my blood pressure momentarily skyward."

A swift expression of discomfort and embarrassment crossed the young face of Commander Ward.

"Back in harness, did you say, Dick?"

Admiral Hallet's eyes were pained. "Yes, Paul. That's what I said. And that's why I'm here, seeing you. I felt certain that you wouldn't react to my wishing to serve the way the others have."

Commander Ward cleared his throat. He tried to keep the deep sympathy from his voice, knowing his old chief wanted none of it.

"But you're well over the retirement age, Dick," he protested kindly. "You know how Washington feels about that sort—"

"Washington be damned," Admiral Hallet said sharply, his eyes flashing. "Look at me, Paul. I'm an old sea dog, yes. But I'm just as sharp now as I was twenty years ago up here." He tapped his gray temple with a firm finger.

"But—" Commander Ward started to cut in.

"And physically," old Admiral Hallet went ahead, "I'm still the pride and joy of my life insurance company. Had a check-up just a week ago. Doctors admitted I was finer physically than half the fifty-year-olds they'd examined."

COMMANDER WARD noted those keen, frosty blue eyes, the set to those square, tough shoulders, the alert and combative way his old commander still held his head. He smiled ruefully.

"I believe you, Dick. And for my money you'd be chief of operations to-

morrow. But there's the matter of your age on the records. You can't lick that, Dick. Seventy is seventy. It's navy."

"And I'm navy, Paul," Admiral Hallet declared softly. "Down to the last inch of this tough old frame. I can serve. Hell, man, these young sprig-gens they have in blue today can't know *everything*. They're a good, stout, fine lot. But experience is the final balance in any man's navy."

Commander Ward leaned back in his chair and pursed his lips thoughtfully.

Old Admiral Hallet watched the young commander breathlessly, as the barometer-clock on the desk between them ticked loudly in the silence.

"I don't know if we could get you a post commensurate with your retired rank, Dick," Commander Ward said after a moment.

"If I were young enough to enlist as an apprentice seaman, I wouldn't be here, Paul," Admiral Hallet said with quiet sincerity. "Any post, doing anything. That's all I want."

"We're in the process of organizing a civilian shore patrol defense outfit on the Pacific coast," Commander Ward said after a moment. "We were considering putting a well known yachtsman in charge of it."

Admiral Hallet leaned forward eagerly.

Commander Ward ran his hand through his close cropped dark hair. "I suppose I'll get in hot water with any number of civilian bigwigs who want publicity from this thing; but I don't know why it couldn't be supervised much more efficiently by a navy man. Under the circumstances, I couldn't appoint any navy man now in active service. But if I were to take a well known figure from the retirement ranks—" he paused, eyes twinkling.

"Well?" Admiral Hallet grinned.

"Get on with it, Paul. The suspense is terrible."

"If I were to appoint a well known figure from the retirement ranks," Commander Ward repeated, "there wouldn't be a damned thing they could do about raising a fuss. They'd have to like it. Want the post, Dick?"

Admiral Hallet rose, standing erect, shoulders thrust back proudly, eyes twinkling a little mistily. His lean features creased in a grin of utter elation.

The old man's hand flashed briskly in salute.

"Reporting for duty, Sir," he said.

Grinning, too, Commander Ward returned the salute from his old chief.

"Glad to have you aboard, sir," he said. . . .

CHAPTER II

Blackout

ADMIRAL RICHARD HALLET, U.S.N., retired, Commander of the United States Civilian Defense Shore Patrol, stood on the wharf of the yacht club harbor some twenty miles from Los Angeles and gazed out at the small flotilla under his command.

Good craft, all of them. Sturdy little power launches, sleek racing sloops, heavy, seaworthy steam yachts. As varied and odd a group of vessels as he had ever commanded. Fifty of them, all told, excluding the small boats under twenty feet—a full hundred of them—that had been offered to him for whatever auxiliary duty he could find for them.

At Admiral Hallet's side stood tall, bronzed, blond haired, Luke Forest, President of the Billings Yacht Club in whose harbor the strange little fleet was assembled.

Forest was lean, seawise from the

yachtsman's standpoint, and though five years over forty, still looked like a college kid at first glance. Since Admiral Hallet's arrival, Luke Forest had been of inestimable help. He knew almost every small craft on the California coast by name and owner, and it had been he who was most helpful in spreading the call for this civilian scouting fleet. And now, in just two weeks, Admiral Hallet already looked on Luke Forest as his second in command.

"It's quite a different command for you, I imagine, sir," Luke Forest observed with a friendly grin.

Admiral Hallet returned the smile. "We won't classify it in tonnage," he said dryly. Then, more seriously, he added, "But just remember, Luke, that it was a flotilla such as this that turned the tide at Dunkirk."

"We have a good bunch of amateur skippers," Forest declared. "I think I know most of them well enough to say there's not a one you couldn't depend on in a crisis."

"We've enough for a twenty-four hour coastal patrol in this area, seven days a week," Admiral Hallet observed. "But of course, until we can equip all the craft with similar apparatus, we'll have to depend principally at the start on those having radio sending and receiving equipment."

"We have twenty-five such craft," Luke Forest said. "And the cruising range on each is great enough to cover up the lack of radio equipment in the other vessels for a few weeks at least."

"I've put in a requisition for enough equipment to cover all our patrols," Admiral Hallet said. "I don't think it will be long before we get it. At any rate, ten of the steam yachts are already well armed. I'm placing navy crews at their guns tomorrow morning. They'll stay until they've trained the civilian crews to operate them."

Luke Forest nodded. "And at dawn tomorrow we get into operation, eh admiral?"

Admiral Hallet nodded. "They'll be test patrols to begin with," he declared, "to give us some idea of the working efficiency we'll have to count on."

The two turned back down the wharf.

"It'll be good to get this finally under way," Luke Forest commented, walking beside the Admiral.

"It will help destroy some of the complacency that's starting to crop up along the coast here once more," Admiral Hallet observed.

Forest nodded, frowning. "You've noticed it, too, eh, sir?"

Admiral Hallet's agreement was grim. "They seem to be forgetting Pearl Harbor already," he declared.

"Not all of us, thank God," Forest said.

ADMIRAL HALLET shook his head. "No, not all. But far too many. Their civilian defense organizations are beginning to take on the aspects of social teas. It isn't good for the morale of those who are more serious."

"You can count on none of that in our group," Luke Forest promised vehemently.

Admiral Hallet nodded. "I know I can, Luke. From every indication of the calibre of the amateur yachtsmen you've assembled in our group, I'm confident it won't degenerate into a social service."

"That's one thing about yachting," Luke Forest observed. "It is one sport that doesn't breed weak timber. It takes money, but those who follow it have to be tough—or they damn soon turn in their skipper caps."

They were paused now beside Luke Forest's battered roadster. Admiral Hallet gripped his hand briefly.

"You'll be back here later tonight to make the weather and course checks for tomorrow morning's primary patrols?" he asked.

Forest nodded. "You can count on it. I'll have time to be by here about midnight."

Admiral Hallet grinned. "See you in the morning, then."

He turned away then, and moved down the parking lot to his own modest, black coupé. Moments later he was wheeling the car out of the driveway and turning off along the beach road leading to the highway that would take him into nearby Los Angeles. . . .

ADMIRAL HALLET dined that evening in a small restaurant just off Hollywood Boulevard. And as he ate, a copy of the evening newspaper spread at his elbow came in for a thorough scanning.

Now and then the doughty old sea dog paused in his reading, while his white eyebrows raised in tufted annoyance.

"They're taking this whole damned thing too casually out here," he muttered.

A waitress, just setting his coffee on the table, thought he had spoken to her.

"What did you say, sir?" she asked politely.

Admiral Hallet looked up, startled. "Eh? Oh, nothing. Nothing at all. Say, do the people out here seem to realize that there's a war on?"

The waitress smiled. "Oh, yes, sir. Everyone is aware of that!"

Admiral Hallet shook his head disgustedly. "They seemed aware of it for about a month or so, but now where's the fever gone?"

"Why," said the waitress, her turn to be indignant, "there's a practice blackout in town tonight. It should be so exciting—*such fun!*"

Admiral Hallet held his breath and his temper until the waitress left. Excitement, was it? Such fun, was it? When in the hell were they going to learn it was a deadly serious business? His jaw went grim. If it would be at all possible for his duties to rouse them from their lethargy, by God, he'd see they soon snapped out of this!

It was fifteen minutes later when Admiral Hallet finished his dinner and stepped out of the restaurant into the darkness of Los Angeles.

A glance at his watch showed him that it was shortly after nine. He walked slowly to the side street where he had parked his car, idling occasionally to observe the happily laughing civilians thronging the boulevard.

Passing the bars, he could see that they, too, were crowded to the capacity point with careless, laughing men and women. He shook his head disapprovingly. Gayety had its place, he mentally acknowledged, in this war. It was, in fact, a necessary part of morale. But there should be a limit to it, and carelessness was beyond that limit.

Climbing into his coupé, Admiral Hallet started the machine, made a U turn, and started in the direction of Santa Monica Boulevard.

He had driven half a block toward his hotel when, throughout the city, the sound of an air raid alert took up. And suddenly, all around him, lights were blinking, people were shouting, cars were pulling over to the curb, and darkness was settling over the great coastal city.

The admiral pulled his car over to the curb and snapped off the headlights.

He recalled the statement of the waitress about the practice blackout. He settled back against the cushions and prepared himself for a short stay in that position. Unconsciously, his hand went to his pocket in search of a

cigarette. Then he caught himself and smiled.

"And I was muttering about the carelessness of others," he grinned aloud. Then his eyes were serious again. "At any rate, I don't believe I could be classed as complacent," he decided.

BESIDE him, a few yards from the curb, swinging along the sidewalk gaily, laughing loudly, were two men and two women, all four of them obviously a little drunk.

Admiral Hallet's face went grim again.

"It would be a hell of a note if those were bombers up above," he muttered, "and if our ack-acks were really raining flack all over the city."

He shook his head disgustedly, watching the foursome weave on along the sidewalk, pausing long enough to light two cigarettes at the corner.

Then he settled back against the car cushions once more and relaxed.

The minutes passed slowly. Several cars crawled snail's-pace down the street past his own, their headlights covered with special blackout preparation.

Admiral Hallet nodded mental approval at these.

"Probably wardens on special patrol," he decided. "Alert chaps, no doubt. Pity there's so few of them."

He thought then of his own group, and his mind went to work busily sorting and arranging the vessels he had to chose from for the primary patrols to be made first thing in the morning.

Then, before he was aware of it, and sooner than he had imagined, the all clear sounded. Admiral Hallet looked at the clock on his dash. Blackout had lasted half an hour.

Across the city, the lights began to flicker on once more. The admiral threw on his headlights and started up

the car. Back to the hotel for some shut eye. Had to rise early. . . .

CHAPTER III

The Mysterious Explosion

ADMIRAL HALLET had been asleep several hours when the sudden strident jangle of the phone awakened him. He raised himself on one elbow and switched on the night light.

He pushed his hair from his eyes and pulled a blanket up around his thin shoulders, before picking up the phone.

"Yes?" he said.

Luke Forest's excited voice came over the wire.

"Forest speaking, admiral. I'm at the club. How soon can you get down here?"

The admiral flicked a glance at the illuminated hands of the small clock on the night table. It was three in the morning.

"It'll take me a half hour," he answered. "What's the matter?"

"I don't know," Forest's voice was strained and breathless. "Nobody knows just what happened, but all hell is breaking loose. We're getting calls here at the club from a dozen spots along the coast. It may be an invasion."

"Steady now," Admiral Hallet snapped. "I'll be there as soon as I possibly can. Don't lose your head."

The admiral jammed the phone back to its rack and climbed out of bed in almost the same motion. In five minutes he was in a cab speeding toward the Billing's Yacht club.

He didn't allow himself to speculate on what might have caused the frantic call from Luke Forest. Thirty years of command had taught him to wait until he had the facts before making decisions or guesses.

But he couldn't curb his impatient nervousness. The cab seemed to be crawling along.

"Driver!" he snapped. "Can't we make a little better time?"

"Sorry, sir," the driver said. He was crouched over the wheel peering into the swirling green fog that shrouded the road. "I can hardly see ten feet ahead of me with this fog."

The admiral inspected the billowing fog with impatient annoyance. In his years at sea he had developed a personal attitude toward the elements. The fog that was rolling in from the ocean was heavy and green, a typical West coast phenomenon, and the admiral was disgusted with it.

Even though the windows of the cab were closed tightly, steamy wisps of fog seeped in and drifted about the admiral like vapors from a sputtering radiator.

There was nothing to do but wait. The admiral spent the interval sulphurously damning the weather.

WHEN the cab pulled to a stop at the yacht club, the admiral found Luke Forest waiting anxiously for him on the steps of the sprawling boat house.

With the young clubman were several navy officers, and a half dozen of the members who had offered their boats and services for coast patrol duty.

Admiral Hallet paid off the cab and strode up the steps of the boat house.

"Now, gentlemen," he said briskly, "just what's the situation?"

His keen eyes raked over the circle of faces, focused on Luke Forest's pale determined features.

"You'd better tell me, Forest," he said.

"There's not a lot to tell," Forest answered. "About an hour ago there was a tremendous explosion about three

miles off shore."

"Explosion?" Admiral Hallet repeated. "Just how did you determine that it was an explosion?"

"We haven't, really," Forest answered. "That's just the assumption of those who heard the noise."

The admiral's thin lips compressed wryly, but he only said, "Please, go on."

"Since that time," Forest continued, "we have had phone calls from a number of spots along the coast asking for information about the explosion. We have checked all the calls and they are within about a six or eight mile point of the club, so we feel sure that whatever caused the noise was located somewhere offshore, within a few miles of the club. The sound of the explosion wasn't heard in Los Angeles. I suppose it's just as well. There's no point in frightening the civilian population."

"I'm not so sure about that," the Admiral said grimly. "Frightened people sometimes make the best fighters. And at least it would wake them up. Did you hear anything after this noise?"

"Not a thing," Forest said.

"Have you taken any steps to find out just what caused the noise?"

"Not yet, sir," Forest said.

The admiral turned to the two naval officers. They straightened under his gaze. The taller of them, a thin, square-jawed intelligent looking young man said,

"Lieutenants Hawckett and Bedlow of the Second Naval District, at your service sir. We arrived here a few moments ago and we thought it best to wait for your orders, sir."

"I see. Were you sent here to check on this disturbance?" the admiral asked.

"No sir," Lieutenant Hawckett answered. "It's merely a coincidence that we happen to be on hand. Our

purpose here is the testing of a new PT boat to be put in service next month. Lieutenant Bedlow and I were instructed to give the boat a work-out here in choppy water before it is put into service."

"Where is the patrol boat now?" the admiral asked.

"In the yacht club harbor," Lieutenant Hawckett answered. "We were intending to take a trial run about seven this morning."

"You may make a run sooner than that," the admiral said. He turned to Forest. "Where can I make a phone call?"

Luke Forest said, "Follow me."

He led him into the boat house, and to a public phone.

THE admiral dialed Naval Intelligence and waited impatiently for the call to go through. When a brisk voice snapped, "Office," he said, "Admiral Hallet. There's been a little fireworks off the coast. I'm sending a PT boat out on a reconnaissance trip. It's fast enough to keep out of any trouble. But I'd like an observation plane to scour the area also. Can you have a plane over this district, in say, half an hour?"

There was a slight pause. Then: "I'll see to it, sir. But will an observation plane be of any use in this fog?"

"Fogs have been known to lift," the admiral said mildly, and hung up.

He turned to the two naval lieutenants who had heard one-half of the conversation. Their faces were impassive, but the admiral smiled slightly as he saw the eager expectancy in their eyes.

He chuckled. "Get that sea-going wasp of yours ready, boys."

"Yes sir," they answered almost in unison. Saluting, they turned and marched away.

The admiral watched their straight young backs with a smile on his face. Luke Forest asked worriedly.

"Supposing it's an Axis battle ship off the coast, sir?"

The admiral looked at him with just a touch of scorn.

"Why," he said, "they'll sink it, of course."

CHAPTER IV

Shan Finds the New World

IN the cabin compartment of the huge silver space ship, Shan of Jupiter tensed over the controls. Through the radii-screen on the mechanism board before him, he saw the bulk of the approaching planet growing larger and larger with every passing second.

"It is almost at hand," Shan thought. "Soon I shall be there!"

And the heart in his great body pounded with excitement, for this was the moment that he had long dreamed of. This was the moment where he, greatest of all the scientists of Jupiter, would justify the theories and claims he had long held on the possibility of a voyage such as this.

"There is life on that planet," Shan had long insisted in the courts of science of Jupiter. "There is life and, I believe, a civilization of some advancement."

Now Shan's great hand moved expertly over the delicate mechanism of the control panel. He was speeding toward the gigantically growing planet with tremendous velocity, and already it was time that he brought the degravitation instruments into play.

He thought of the scorn with which his first theories had been greeted by the other scientists. They had been jealous of Shan.

"A planet of water," they had scoffed.

"A planet of swamp and wasteland. The life there is but of the most crude animal variety. You would be mad to undertake such a voyage. What would there be to gain from it? What would it profit Jupiter?"

But Shan had brushed away their scorn and jealousy.

"If I, Shan, am right, if my theories are substantiated, and there is civilization, life, on this planet, then why cannot we merge our two civilizations?" he had demanded.

But not all those on Jupiter had been stupid, jealous. There had been many who believed in Shan's theory. And it was with their aid that the scientist finally prepared the great space ship for his voyage to the lesser planet.

"They will be proud," Shan thought, "when I return." He flicked a second degravitator device into operation. "I will justify their faith in Shan."

A union of Jupiter and this approaching planet!

Shan thrilled at the thought. It would be the first merging of the interplanetary system. His was a mission greater than any creature of Jupiter had ever undertaken. . . .

HOURS had passed, and now the great space ship was plummeting down toward the silver sheen of watery fog that crusted the surface of the approaching planet. Its deceleration had been great in these last hours, and now its speed was but enough to give it necessary momentum.

The first great fog bank was nearing, and Shan's great hands tightened on the controls. He switched on the cabin illumination as the mists shrouded the nose of the great craft. Vainly, he tried to peer through the radii-screen.

Some instinct made Shan cut the power completely as the ship was totally immersed in the fog layer.

And it was well that he did. For in the next half minute Shan and the space ship in which he sat were shaken by a violent, tremendous shock. Blindly, Shan threw full degravitation power on. And then he was climbing to his feet as the ship twisted slowly over and over. Climbing to his feet and moving toward the escape hatch exit. . . .

It was later, and Shan, the giant from Jupiter, stood up to his waist in a large body of water.

Behind him, almost covered by the water, was his huge space ship. His inspection of it, after climbing forth, had assured him that it was undamaged.

But now the fog was around his head, and Shan peered forward through it with difficulty, barely discerning the white stretch of land far in.

His great heart pounded furiously in his huge body. There was land in there. White sanded land, apparently, but not the desolate swampland the scoffers had said he would find.

But where were the inhabitants? Where were the members of this civilization?

Shan's large eyes were beginning to focus through the heavy fog now. And then he saw the city.

It was away. Farther off in the distance than the white sand ahead of him. But it was there, a metropolis of many structures strangely designed.

And then Shan noticed for the first time that the dwellings in that metropolis—if it was such—were tiny, fragile things. He blinked bewilderedly. Perhaps visual distances on this strange planet were not as they were on Jupiter.

Shan saw, then, that the water in which he stood was unlike that of Jupiter. It was greenish, almost the color of his own great body. On Jupiter water was crystal white, colorless.

For a moment Shan wondered why his arrival—there had been a great,

thunderous noise as the ship crashed nose-on into the water—had not already brought the creatures of this planet out to him.

Slowly, he started forward through the water toward the white sand stretches in the distance. As his great legs churned the green foam, he noticed that the water dropped away from his waist as the way grew more shallow.

And then Shan saw the small, beetle-like creature scuttling across the surface of the water toward him. He paused, blinking in amazement as he noted the small spray of foam it made nosing toward him. His amazement was even greater, however, when he saw the tiny figures, man-like figures, standing on the back of the beetle-like creature.

Shan stood still, watching in fascination as the realization grew on him. These were creatures of this planet. Men of this planet. They were infinitesimally small, and the thing in which they rode, the thing that looked like a mechanical water bug, was undoubtedly a boat.

Now he realized, too, that the metropolis he had seen through the fog shrouds, the city of tiny, fragile dwellings, was actually as small as it appeared. He'd been wrong in assuming that visual distances on this planet were varied.

And now the water craft containing the tiny men of this planet was drawing closer, coming toward him at what—to them—was probably tremendous speed.

SHAN inclined his great head slightly, the better to view the approaching delegation from the creatures of this strange planet.

And then he saw the tiny points of fire flicking from the nose of the small craft. He frowned, suddenly aware of

sharp, stinging sensations on his massive legs.

It took Shan fully a minute to comprehend that the little creatures of this planet were hostile, and that the fire from the mechanical water bug and the stinging pain in his legs were evidences of their desire to drive him off.

There was another, sharper pain, then, and Shan felt a small, hot projectile bury itself in the first inch of his thick calf. Instinctively, he bent down, reaching for the tiny craft with his huge hand. Then he scooped it up from the water, while the tiny man-like creatures scrambled wildly for the sides.

They leaped before Shan could prevent it. All five tiny bodies plummeting down into the water, as Shan, unaware of the fragility of the craft in comparison to his own tremendous strength, unintentionally crushed it in his huge hand like an eggshell.

Realizing what he'd done, Shan threw the remains of the broken vessel from his hand, and bent in search of the tiny creatures who'd leaped from it moments before. But though he ran his hand through the waters in which he stood and peered intently through the green murkiness, Shan could find no trace of them.

He shook his head wonderingly, and started forward again toward the white sand stretches in the distance.

"I did not wish to destroy them," Shan thought regretfully. His massive brow was wrinkled in a frown of bewilderment, as he sought to explain the hostility the creatures of this strange planet had displayed toward him.

But Shan took no more than four gigantic strides when a growingly audible buzzing reached his keen ears. He paused, listening, peering through the fog that shrouded him, trying to place this sound.

He heard it directly behind him, now,

even more loudly than before. Wheeling, Shan saw the cause of this new sound. Buzzing toward him like an angry bee was another incredibly small and curiously designed machine. He knew instinctively that this mechanical wasp—looking similar to a space ship with wings—was another delegation from the little people of this strange planet.

And as if to confirm his thoughts that this, too, would be a hostile greeting, tiny spurts of flame began licking toward him from the nose of this airborne craft.

And almost simultaneously, Shan felt the stinging burn of their impact against his huge shoulders.

Shan cried out, and even as he did so, realized that his voice would be thunderous to the little inhabitants of this planet; and that the words he used would undoubtedly be incomprehensible.

The tiny flying bug had shot up and beyond Shan's reach now. And he craned his big neck as he watched it climb higher still above him. He was unprepared for the swift, lightning-like dive it made on him from its new altitude.

THE flame points were lancing into his shoulders and neck once more, stinging and drawing blood from his thick skin. Shan threw out his hands to ward off the pinpoint fury of this new attack.

"My mission is peace!" Shan roared out, before recalling that his words and voice would be futile and only terrifying to these tiny persons.

But again, Shan's attacker shot up and away from his grasp, lacing hot needles of pain across his chest in a furious burst of fire before climbing above him again.

Shan turned, and started back

through the water toward his half submerged space ship. There would be a temporary refuge in there, he reasoned. And as he churned through the green water, he heard the buzzing of the air machine coming up on him from behind.

MORE to frighten it away long enough for him to get to his space ship, than in any effort to destroy it, Shan wheeled and slapped out at the angry mechanical gnat with his great hand. Slapped out as one might strike at a fly with a swatter.

And before Shan could check the sweeping blow, he felt the surface of the air machine crush against his broad palm, and knew, sickly, that he had destroyed another craft belonging to the tiny peoples of this planet.

Mutely, Shan stared down at the small, crushed wreckage of the air machine floating desolately in the water at his feet.

"If there were but some way I could communicate with the peoples of this planet," he thought sickly, "I might move through their tiny world as a friend rather than in this fashion."

Shan stood there, listening for the sounds of any more hostile delegations. There was nothing but fog, and silence.

"There will be others," Shan thought. "Others will come when it is learned what has happened to these. I do not wish to destroy them also. To do so would be futile. Perhaps," he reasoned, "if I take myself off and beyond their range, I will be able to return when daylight is here."

Having decided this, Shan turned once more, and started out toward his half submerged space craft. Out beyond it he would find deeper water. There he could remain unmolested until morning came to roll away the fog and darkness. . . .

CHAPTER V

The Call to Action

ADMIRAL HALLET waited with Luke Forest at the boat house as the gray, murky dawn gradually cast a pale light over the tossing waters of the Pacific.

The two men were seated at a small table in the barroom, a bottle and two glasses between them. They had said little in the four hours that had passed since the navy PT boat and observation plane had been sent out to investigate the mysterious explosion.

Occasionally the admiral glanced at his watch and occasionally Luke Forest sipped a bit of brandy from his glass. There was a tense, worried look on the clubman's tanned face.

"They should be back by now," he said anxiously. "Don't you think it's about time?"

The admiral shrugged his spare shoulders. His lean face was gray with fatigue, but his eyes were snappingly keen in the morning light. He glanced at his watch again.

"They could have gotten back," he said slowly, "but whether they 'should' be back is a different matter. If their reconnaissance isn't completed they shouldn't return until it is."

Luke Forest lighted a cigarette with a nervous hand.

"I see what you mean," he said, "but it seems to me they've had plenty of time to investigate the scene of the explosion and get back here.

"Maybe," the admiral said.

Ten more minutes passed and the feeble orange light of the rising sun was beginning to tint the grayness of the dawn.

Then the phone rang jarringly in the quietness.

Luke Forest reached it in two quick strides and snapped the receiver to his ear.

"Yes?" he said tensely.

He listened for a moment and his face turned gray.

"God!" he said weakly. "Are you sure?"

"What is it?" the admiral snapped.

Luke Forest replaced the phone in its cradle and stared dumbly, strickenly at the admiral.

"The wreckage of a navy PT boat has been found," he said dully. "A man discovered it on the beach about six miles from here. He reported it to the navy. The boat is demolished."

"The crew?" Admiral Hallet demanded. "What of the crew?"

"No trace," Forest said heavily. "No trace at all."

Admiral Hallet's shoulders slumped. Dazedly he passed a tired, feeble hand over his white hair. He felt suddenly old and helpless and futile.

Luke Forest was looking at him anxiously.

"What shall we do now, sir?" he asked.

Admiral Hallet stared at him unseeingly. His thoughts were on the two young lieutenants, the two eager, trusting navy men who had followed his orders, and in doing so had gone to their death.

"What now, sir?" Forest asked again.

ADMIRAL HALLET shook his head wearily. But he couldn't shake off the responsibility that Forest's question implied. What was to be done now? It was his authority, his duty to answer the question.

He couldn't quit now, although for the first time in his life he felt like doing so. He had asked for this, and he had to stick with it.

"Get a car," he said. "We're going out to the wreck."

The chauffeur was only able to drive the car to the edge of the steep cliff, and the admiral and Forest had to scramble down to the beach. By the time they forced their way through the tangled brush to where the shattered wreck of the PT boat lay on the white sands, it was almost ten o'clock in the morning.

The sun was almost completely obscured by the heavy green fog, only a few feeble, dull rays seeping through to cast their eerie illumination over the scene.

There was a crowd about the shattered wreck of the boat. Photographers, newsmen, navy officials and a scattering of men and women who lived in the vicinity.

The admiral shouldered his way through the throng until he could get an unobstructed view of the mangled PT boat.

And mangled was the only word to describe the once-slim, once-graceful little boat.

Both sides of the ship had been buckled and crushed together as if in the press of a mighty vise. Admiral Hallet shuddered as he looked at the broken, crushed ship. Its battered, demolished condition brought to mind rumors he had heard of Axis "secret weapons" capable of just such destruction as this. One rumor had it that Nazi submarines were equipped with giant pincers which could slice through the hull of a ship as easily as a hot knife through butter.

Looking at the mangled sides of the PT boat he wondered. Was it possible that some unknown, horrible instrument of war had been perfected by the Axis powers? And was it possible that this pitifully destroyed boat was a victim of that terrible weapon?

THE admiral spent nearly a half hour at the wreck, examining everything carefully. None of the ship's four torpedoes had been fired. Whatever had destroyed the ship had done so before the two young lieutenants could open fire with their torpedoes.

When Admiral Hallet finally left the scene of the disaster with Luke Forest, they drove immediately back to the yacht club's boat house. There an ensign from Naval Intelligence was waiting for him.

"Admiral Hallet?" he asked.

"Yes. What is it?"

The ensign glanced uncertainly at Luke Forest.

"It's all right," the admiral said irritably. "Speak up."

"A navy observation plane has been reported missing since early this morning. It was operating over this area and keeping in touch with its base by radio."

"Yes, yes, go on," Admiral Hallet snapped.

"Its radio went dead and it is believed that the plane crashed into the ocean."

Admiral Hallet received the staggering information without a flicker of expression. The PT boat, and now the observation plane! Both destroyed while investigating the mysterious explosion of a few hours previous.

He looked sharply at the ensign.

"What else do you have to tell me?"

"Nothing, sir. I am to relay your orders to GHQ. That's all, sir."

Admiral Hallet's jaw was grim.

"There'll be orders, all right," he snapped. "I want every available naval unit concentrated here without a moment's delay. Send a wire to the marine station at San Diego to stand by. Clear all private shipping out of this area, and order every available bomber and fighter plane in the coastal area

into action. We've been sleeping, but by God, we're awake now. Whatever it is that's menacing this coast line is going to be destroyed! Now get moving!"

CHAPTER VI

Shan Fights the Metal Fish

IT HAD been a matter of hours in which Shan, still concealed by the fog and water and darkness, kept wary vigil with his strong and unblinking eyes. By now his sight was adjusted to bring into focus the activities that went on along the shore line of the tiny metropolis and the areas around it.

Dawn had yet to break, but there had been activity on the part of the little inhabitants of that metropolis throughout the night. And as the hours of watching slipped by, it became more and more apparent to Shan that some sort of an attacking force was being readied. And there was no doubt in his mind that his presence, unseen though it was at the moment, was the cause of all that increased activity.

Sickly, Shan was aware that this would mean the frustration of his mission. Too, he realized that such a vast array of hostile inhabitants, tiny though they were, and small be their craft, might succeed in harming him where the two solitary efforts had failed.

And due to this, Shan had already made several inspections of his space craft, satisfying himself as to its readiness should it become necessary to leave this planet swiftly.

Through his solitary vigil, Shan had done much thinking. And the more he turned the problem over in his mind, the more was he aware that the chance for success in his mission was now almost gone.

Bitterly, he realized that the very

barrier which stood in the way of its successful accomplishment was the tremendous physical differences between the people of his own planet and the little creatures who inhabited this sphere.

Their hostility, their antagonism, could only be explained by sheer fright. And though their civilization might be comparatively as advanced as that of Jupiter, there would be no common basis of exchange between this planet and his own until the first difficulty was bridged.

Shan was not concerned with the jibes and scorn that would be his if it were necessary to return to Jupiter unsuccessful. He had accomplished much merely in the spanning of the great spatial distances that lay between Jupiter and this lesser planet. The data and information he had gathered on that alone would be of priceless value to the store of Jupiter's scientific knowledge.

His bitterness grew from the dawning realization that his mission was undertaken too soon in the ultimate scheme of things. Later, perhaps, many light years later, the link between this planet and his own might successfully be forged. And the sole satisfaction Shan got from this was the realization that the future linking of this planet and his own would be accomplished in some small part from his own first exploratory voyage.

Shan's thoughts were interrupted with increasing frequency by the buzzing sounds of grouped air machines which scoured the vicinity seeking his whereabouts. And on all such occasions, Shan crouched low in the water around him, thankful that the green of his body blended almost perfectly with the green of the water. Too, the fog was thickening perceptibly, making the chances of his being discovered by the

scouting air machines even more remote.

And it was in this manner that Shan waited out beyond the eyes and striking power of the little people of the strange planet; waited through the fog and the darkness, watching the distant shoreline yearningly, stretching out the time of his inevitable departure from this alien planet.

And it was toward the end of his watch, that Shan first felt the brushing of the strange, sharp finned, little metal fish against his legs beneath the water. . . .

THE young U-boat commander's face was lean and hard beneath the peak of his officer's cap. At the moment, however, his brow was streaked with sweat, and his eyes filled with anxiety as he stood at his submarine's periscope.

At his elbow stood another young officer, dark haired and granite jawed, and wearing a white turtle necked sweater beneath his uniform jacket.

"Our soundings and navigational chart checks place us fifteen miles off the California coast, Herr Commander," said the dark haired, granite jawed young officer to his superior.

The lean faced young U-boat commander's eyes didn't leave the periscope sights as he answered.

"It is good. Do tests show the rest of our undersea squadron within formation distance agreed upon?"

"The last check our operator made before we cut off radio communications showed formation status to be in order as agreed on, Herr Commander."

The lean faced young commander stepped back from the periscope and rubbed the sweat from his cold blue eyes. He glanced at the Swiss watch on his wrist.

"Our own craft we can count on," he

said. "Our undersea formation work is standard to us. But we must make certain that the ten other undersea craft, those of our yellow skinned allies, will keep formation as agreed upon."

"We can make a brief code radio check," suggested the hard jawed, dark haired second officer. "I doubt if the stupid Americans would pick it up, or recognize it in time."

"*Ja*, perhaps you are right," agreed the young commander. "They are stupid enough to have but fragmentarily mined these coastal waters, and should not be too alert if our signals are brief."

The second officer grinned.

"To see the expressions on their complacent faces when twenty undersea craft come to the surface just off their Los Angeles, and begin shelling, would be worth a year's pay," he said. "Ten of our craft, and ten Japanese. They will go mad with terror."

The commander smiled briefly, savagely.

"Order the brief radio code check," he said.

The second officer returned to his young commander's side five minutes later.

"Check made, Herr Commander. Formation intact, all twenty craft in mile radius."

The commander nodded in satisfaction. "*Ja*, it is goo—" he began.

His sentence was never completed. For at that instant the undersea craft jarred hard against an unknown submerged object, driving it off course and sending members of the crew sprawling from their stations to the floor.

"*Ach, gott!*" the second officer shouted. "Stations!" And he was scrambling to his feet from where he'd been hurled by the shock. Then he was at the diving controls of the ship, fran-

tically spinning the periscope wheel with one hand.

The commander had climbed to his feet also, and was at his second officer's side, pushing him from the periscope.

"Take full diving command," he ordered. "What was it that—" And he suddenly froze to the periscope wheel, his eyes widening in horror, his mouth opening and closing soundlessly.

Words came after another frozen instant of terror. Choked, hoarse, maddened words, tumbling one on the other.

"*Ach, du lieber, gott!*" the commander gurgled. "Hands, no, no NOOOO!!!"

The U-boat was suddenly twisting and turning crazily as a tremendous pressure squeezing in around its metal sides began to split the seams asunder. The confusion and terror inside the submarine was beyond imagination. . . .

SHAN held the first of the metal fish aloft, scrutinizing it carefully, as his huge fingers tightened inexorably around it, crushing it until it was a scant third of its original width. Then he tossed it from him, and bent again to search the murky green waters around his legs with both hands.

His haul this time was two of the metallic fish. One, like the first he had scooped from the water, was curiously marked with a crooked cross on the snout. The other was marked by a blazing red circle.

Shan shook the one with the crooked cross experimentally. Then he held it to his ear. The signs of life in it had stopped. He tossed it from him. The fish with the blazing circle on its snout was eliminated in the same way. Then Shan was groping through the water again, intrigued by this hunting game.

He scooped up three more of the metal fish, when he was suddenly aware

that others had converged on him, more than a dozen of the metal finned little monsters. And they were slashing angrily at his legs.

And Shan suddenly recalled that on Jupiter all undersea fish life—there was little of it—was poisonous. Perhaps these fish of this strange planet were likewise.

Shan lost no time in further contemplation. He went swiftly into action, scooping up others, crushing them with one wrench, stamping still others into the sand bed below the water as he threshed his great legs about.

And finally there were no underwater metal creatures remaining, save for a scattered, dying few that floated off out of striking distance to him.

Shan had been so absorbed in the metal fish that he had forgotten the preparations that had been underway along the shoreline of the city of tiny dwellings.

And now the dawn was coming up over the horizon, and Shan could see the fleet of many hostile craft manned by little creatures turning forth to seek him and cut him down.

Shan sighed. He did not like leaving this way. But of course there was no other alternative. Some other time, some other year, and all this would be accomplished.

He sloughed through the water over to his great space ship. After a few minutes tinkering of valve mechanism on the side of the craft, it floated to the surface of the water.

Minutes later Shan was in the cabin compartment, sitting before the maze of controls at the instrument panels. He turned to look into the rear radii-screen once before gunning the rockets. The hostile little people were starting out. But they wouldn't see his departure in this extremely heavy fog.

Shan threw the rocket compression

power on full. The tubes blasted deafeningly, and the craft shot forward, lifting from the surface of the water. . . .

CHAPTER VII

Doomed Nazis

THE United States destroyer, *Huxley*, sliced through the gray Pacific waters, listing slightly with the swirling foggy winds that howled over her decks.

On the bridge, Admiral Hallet braced himself against the pitch of the ship and swept his gaze over the choppy, cold water.

The destroyer he was aboard was one of the units scouring the area for an explanation of the explosion heard the previous day.

The lieutenant commander who was acting captain of the destroyer came to his side.

"Our lookouts haven't sighted anything as yet," he said. "I have contacted the other ships in the patrol and they report the same story. No evidence of anything—"

The captain's sentence was suddenly obliterated by a thunderous explosion off the destroyer's port bow. Before the stunning reverberations of the blast died away another sound was heard; a long, wailing, whistling shriek that grew gradually fainter and finally fading into silence.

Admiral Hallet peered worriedly up into the dense foggy sky. The wailing shriek had seemed to pass directly above them. The sound reminded him of the banshee-wail a sixteen inch shell makes as it screams over its objective.

The lieutenant commander was staring ahead, jaw tense.

"What now, sir?" he asked.

"Proceed in the direction of that sound," the admiral snapped. "Change

our course a few degrees to the port. The only way we'll ever find out what's going on out here, is to sail right smack into the middle of it. Radio our course and position to the other units and instruct them to proceed under full steam to this approximate location."

A moment later Admiral Hallet felt the ship shift slightly and ease off to the port. And it was only five minutes after they changed their course that they sighted the first U boat!

The fog lifted slightly. Admiral Hallet, straining his eyes to the limit, was sweeping his gaze over the ship's course, when, out of the swirling mists, he saw the slim black hull of a German submarine!

He caught his breath sharply. Even in the fog he could make out the bulky figures on the wave-washed deck of the sub, working furiously repairing the demolished conning tower.

"Captain!" he snapped. "Submarine off the port bow. Order the forward gun crews into immediate action."

The captain stared incredulously in the direction of Admiral Hallet's pointing arm, at the deadly U-boat slowly materializing out of the greenish fog.

"My God!" he gasped.

He turned and leaped for the communication hose, and Admiral Hallet heard him barking crisp dynamic orders to the chief petty officer on deck.

But the bulky figures on the sub's deck had seen the *Huxley*. Admiral Hallet saw them, frozen in astonished horror, then galvanizing into action.

TWO of them sprang toward the heavy swivel gun beside the conning tower, while the rest scrambled down the hatch below deck.

Almost instantly orange flame belched from the mouth of the gun and rattling tokens of death blasted into the destroyer.

The forward gun crew was stripping the tarpaulin from their deadly four pounder, swinging it around to cover the sub. The admiral saw one of the crew stagger back and fall to the deck, as the merciless fire from the U-boat sprayed across the destroyer's bow.

"Damn!" he grated. "We'll pay you back for that."

A roar from the four pounder blasted above the rattling noise of the German gun. A split-instant later the German gun was silent.

One of its crew lay sprawled on the sub's wet deck and the other was crawling desperately for the conning tower.

The first blast from the destroyer's gun had scored a direct hit!

The German seaman who was still alive dragged himself painfully toward the hatch, but before he could reach the opening, the cover closed with a sudden vicious bang and the sub began to submerge. A pitiful scream carried through the fog as the rising waters claimed him.

His head was visible for an instant, a blob on the cold gray water. Then it was gone.

"They *can't* get away!" Admiral Hallet barked.

"They won't," the lieutenant commander said.

Already the destroyer's giant steel arm that tossed the depth charges was going into action. It swung down and then up hurling its load of canned dynamite onto the back of the settling sub.

A thunderous explosion rocked the destroyer a moment later. A geyser of air and oil boiled to the surface of the water, and a wild exultant shout broke from the throats of the destroyer crew.

"They *didn't* get away," the lieutenant commander said grimly.

They heard a salvo off the starboard bow then. The admiral clenched his fists anxiously.

"We've run into a nest of rattlesnakes," he said. "They must have been attempting a surprise attack."

The lieutenant commander's brow was damp with sweat.

"We haven't enough naval strength here to stand off a flotilla of subs. If they were planning a mass attack on the West coast they have dozens of U-boats concentrated here. We're in for a battle and the odds are heavily against us."

BUT it didn't turn out that way. The only subs the American force discovered were on the surface and unable to submerge because of their battered condition. Three were sunk when they opened fire, and two others were captured, with their crew complete.

From the German crews Admiral Hallet learned that the original Jap and German attacking force had comprised twenty ships. What had happened to the great bulk of the force the Germans would not, or could not, say. They looked at one another and dropped their eyes. And in their eyes a furtive fear lurked.

"It would have been disastrous," Admiral Hallet said to the lieutenant commander, "if we hadn't intercepted this nest of snakes. They might have put our entire Pacific fleet out of commission."

"What do you suppose happened to the rest of the sub fleet?" the lieutenant commander asked. "If that fleet had reached this area in full strength the outcome of this battle would have been just in reverse."

"I know," Admiral Hallet said quietly. He was silent a moment, staring unseeing at the lifting fog. The sun's

rays were striking the waters like brilliant lances, and above the sky was blue. "Maybe I'm just plain old-fashioned," he said after a while, "but I think when *something* happens like it did today, *someone* is responsible for it. Napoleon said that God was always on the side of the strongest army, but I rather think he's on the side of the right army. If that's an answer you're welcome to it."

The lieutenant commander looked at the admiral's stern, chiseled profile and the silvery hair that fell over his keen blue eyes. He smiled.

"That's a perfectly good answer," he said.

ALREADY, on the radii-screen panel in the compartment of Shan's great space ship, the lesser planet was fading away into a tiny, blurred ball.

And heavy-hearted, Shan of Jupiter gave it one last farewell glance. Regretfully, he measured what he had lost, and sadly acknowledged that the union of the two planets might well have advanced the universe many millions of years ahead of the normal cycle.

In his heart Shan held not bitterness toward the little creatures on the planet fading behind him. It was no fault of theirs that his presence affected them as it did. It was merely unfortunate that he was so many many hands larger than they.

And yet Shan could not shake the futility of regret from his heart. One thought uppermost in his mind would not be dislodged.

"I could have done so much for them, for their civilization," Shan realized. "And instead, I failed."

Bitterly, Shan shook his great head in sorrow. . . .

MAMMOTH DETECTIVE—The Best in Detective Fiction!



CUPID *takes a* HOLIDAY

by DUNCAN FARNSWORTH

IT WAS one of those blue Mondays that crop up even on Olympus. The tall, blonde, bronzed young man with the deep and brooding blue eyes sat dejectedly behind his desk in the offices of *Deity Enterprises, Incorporated*, gloomily reading the terse and somewhat nasty communication from his boss.

"Dear Eros:

What's been eating you lately? Your department has shown nothing but red ink for the past two months. Even Valentine's day, which should always be a cinch for your dept., fell far below last year's marginal quota. Get the lead out of your toga. I'll expect to see a definite upswing next month, or else.

Cordially,
Jove."

A short, dark, swarthy young man with wide shoulders stopped before the desk of Eros. He wore a blue pin-striped toga and red sandals that refused to blend harmoniously.

"What's wrong, Cupie? Aren't the love bugs biting today?"

Eros raised a sullen glance. "Don't call me Cupie," he grated. "And as for the love bugs, have you ever heard of priorities?"

"Priorities?"

"Yes, demands that make equipment hard to get," Eros said savagely. "Priorities have played hell with my department. First it was the silk for bow strings. Then it was aluminum tips for



A strong arm seized Eros from behind

arrows. But you wouldn't know about those things, Bacchus. Your outfit doesn't have that to worry about. That's why you're the bright and shining young god around here."

Bacchus waved a hand airily. "Don't beef, Cupie. I've got my troubles, too. What's going to happen if any more taxes are piled on liquor and the high cost of having a good time? I'm going to be in a bad way."

"Humph."

"Humph, nothing. Think of the tough times I had when almost a third of the earth brought in that prohibition business," Bacchus countered.

"Just the United States," Eros said.

"But they'd been marvelous customers," Bacchus said. "Until they put through repeal down there I had to get along principally by concentrating on my rioting business."

Eros, the god of love, came to Earth on an important mission; he had to put romance back on its feet. But the master match-maker messed things up this time!

"I'd be sunk already," Eros grumbled, "except that the draft laws they inaugurated gave me a momentary lift."

"Why complain then?" Bacchus demanded.

"Because most of the eligible young men down there are either married or in the army by now. The fall off of my business will soon be terrific. As it is," Eros waved his hand to indicate the letter lying on his desk, "I already have a note from Jove, raising hell about my poor showing. What'll I do when it *really* falls off?"

BACCHUS shook his head sympathetically. "You're in a spot," he conceded. "In my department we've never really any serious trouble. If things are bad on Earth, people go out to drown their sorrows and raise the devil to forget it; if things are good, they go out to whoop it up in celebration."

Eros nodded glumly in agreement.

"All in all," Bacchus summed it up, "I feel sorry as hell for you old man. The product you're peddling seems finally to be on the way out."

Eros looked up indignantly. "Love never dies," he snapped.

Bacchus pursed his lips together and made a vulgar sound. "Pah, don't feed me that saw from your propaganda releases. I'm no earthling. You're going to be looking around for a new job one of these days and you know it."

Eros put his blonde head in his hands. "You certainly make things look cheerful."

"You could get out and do something about it," Bacchus said.

"That *sounds* fine," Eros answered bitterly. "But what could I do? Nothing—and you know it."

"Tsk," Bacchus grinned, "that's a defeatist attitude."

"But what *can* I do?" Eros groaned appealingly.

"What did Mars do when his business started falling off?"

Eros considered this. "His business was pretty bad for about twelve years or so, wasn't it?" he said reflectively.

"You bet it was," Bacchus declared emphatically. "But look at the way he's cleaning up now."

"That's right," Eros conceded. "He's got more business than he can handle. But what did he do to work it up?"

"He got out and hustled," Bacchus said briskly.

"Hustled?"

"Yes, he went down to Earth, looked around, picked out a couple of ripe countries and started a war," Bacchus explained.

"Just like that?" Eros asked, snapping his fingers to show how he meant.

Bacchus snapped his fingers. "Just like that," he declared. "But," he added, "it took a little bit of trying. It wasn't *too* easy."

Eros looked up. "Think he'd let me try it?" he asked.

"Who?" Bacchus wondered. "Who'd let you try what?"

"Jove," Eros explained earnestly. "Do you think he'd let me go down to Earth and take a crack at building up business?"

Bacchus shrugged. "You could ask him."

"Damn it," Eros replied, rising, "I will!"

Bacchus grinned approvingly. "Attaboy. It won't hurt to try."

Eros nodded and stepped out from behind his desk, flicking a speck of imaginary dust from the faultless white sleeve of his flannel toga. He straightened his shoulders purposefully.

"Here goes," Bacchus said.

Eros nodded again, and with a determined gleam in his eye strode off

down the office in the direction of an ornate door at the far end.

"JOVE, HEAD GOD," the gold letters on the ornate door said . . .

THE huge figure in the gold silk toga looked like General Grant, even to his black beard and the cigar that jutted from the corner of his mouth. He shook his head interestedly as Eros, standing before his desk, explained his idea breathlessly.

"So you see, Boss, it's just gotta be done!" Eros ended his plea appealingly.

Jove nodded his head again, shifting the cigar between his white teeth.

"You want to take a pretty big job on those young shoulders of yours, Eros," he said.

"But business is so terrible, what with priorities and wars, and conscription—" Eros began.

"I know," Jove broke in quickly. "I know all that. Mars has been cleaning up in his department, and pretty much to the detriment of the gods with departments such as yours. I must admit he's even getting a little too smug about it. Why, when he was in my office the other day, he rattled his sword incessantly and kept looking at my desk here as if he thought he ought to be loafing behind it instead of me."

"Then you'll—" Eros started eagerly.

"Just a minute," Jove grinned, holding up his massive hand. "Just a minute. I want you to think it over. You aren't going to have any snap going down to Earth with conditions the way they are now. I want to make certain you realize this, first."

Eros nodded soberly. "I understand all that," he said.

Jove grinned at the young god somewhat fondly. "Never been down to Earth, have you, Eros?"

Eros shook his handsome blonde head.

"I didn't think so," Jove said reflectively. "It's quite some place."

"But I've seen it," Eros protested. "I've seen almost all of it."

"You've looked down on Earth from Olympus, purely in the line of business," Jove corrected him. "That's quite a bit different from actually having to live there. Humans are funny people. I know. I took a trip to Earth when I was about your age." He paused reflectively. "Ahhhh, that Cleopatra," he added.

"What?"

Jove colored briefly. "Humph, nothing. Nothing at all," he said quickly. "I was just indulging in a bit of nostalgia. What I mean to say is that—oh," he broke off suddenly, "what the hell. Why not?"

"You mean I can go?" Eros yelped excitedly. "It's okay?"

Jove grinned. "It's okay. It'll probably do you some good. Getting around a bit might make you a more tolerant god."

Eros reached across the desk and grabbed Jove's massive paw in his own strong young hand. "Thanks, boss. Thank's a million!" he cried, pumping the other Deity's arm vigorously.

"You'll have to get someone to take over your job when you leave," Jove reminded him, drawing his hand back.

Eros nodded excitedly. "That won't be hard. I'll get Bacchus to fill in. He's a lazy loafer anyway. He never does much."

"You make your own arrangements with Bacchus, then," Jove said. "I'll leave the rest of the matters in your hands. Goodbye, son, and lots of luck to you!"

Eros bolted for the door.

"Just a minute," Jove called after him.

"What?"

"You'll need Earth clothes," Jove

reminded him. "Have my tailor fix up a wardrobe for you."

"Thanks, thanks awfully."

"And drop by our treasury and have them print you a few hundred thousand dollars in U.S. currency. You'll need it, and you won't be able to draw on the Bank of Olympus very well once you're on Earth," Jove said.

"Thanks a million!" Eros chortled.

"A few hundred thousand, anyway," Jove agreed. . . .

EROS found Bacchus loitering around his desk when he returned. One look at the blonde young god's face was all that Bacchus needed to tell him what had happened.

"All set, eh?" Bacchus grinned.

"All set," Eros laughed. "Easy as pie. You ought to try him, Bacchus. He's in a soft mood today." He looked down at the letter still open on his desk. "He wrote this thing yesterday, I guess. It was damp then and his gout was probably acting up."

Bacchus nodded a bit wistfully. "Yeah, I guess so." Then, even more wistfully, "I wish I did have the nerve to stomp in there and ask to come along with you."

"Why don't you?"

Bacchus shook his head and sighed sadly. "Not a chance. He let me go down to Earth about ten years ago. He still gives me hell about *that* visit whenever he's down on me."

"Whereabouts on Earth did you go?" asked Eros with the keen interest of the untravelled.

"Paris," Bacchus said. "Spent my time in the Latin quarter."

Eros whistled. "That was some spot there, at that time, at any rate."

Bacchus nodded in sad nostalgia. "It certainly was. What models they had, ahhh. But Jove jerked me back up here after a mere two weeks."

"Why?"

"He said I did enough corrupting of Earthlings in my status as God of Wine and Rioting up here on Olympus. He said if I hung around the Latin quarter much longer I'd have utterly ruined the reputation of the place."

"But next to Port Said," Eros protested bewilderedly, "the Latin quarter had the worst reputation on the face of the Earth."

"I know," Bacchus grinned wryly. "Insulting remark, wasn't it?"

Eros grinned in shocked amusement. "I'll say it was."

"What about the management of your department here on Olympus?" Bacchus asked suddenly.

"I wanted to talk to you about that," Eros began.

"But look—" Bacchus protested quickly.

"I'd do the same for you," Eros declared piously.

"Yeah," there was doubt in the voice of Bacchus.

"Honestly I would."

"I'm pretty busy right now," Bacchus started evasively.

"Not that busy," Eros said. "I know exactly how busy you've been."

Bacchus flushed. "Well, I suppose so. But you won't be long down there, will you?"

Eros shook his head. "Not long at all," he promised.

Bacchus sighed deeply. "Okay, I'll take over your department. But if it isn't run perfectly in your absence don't gripe; after all, love—as you propagandize it—isn't quite up my alley."

"You'll be able to handle the job," Eros assured him. "It'll be just routine stuff while I'm away. Your only important duty is to keep the heart rays running. They're pointing at Earth, all set, you won't have to worry about them."

"Okay, okay," Bacchus said. "I'm the goat. You can ease your mind on that, now."

Eros put a hand on Bacchus's shoulder affectionately. "Thanks awfully, old man. I know you'll take care of things."

"Yeah," Bacchus said absently. "Say, how much expense dough is the boss giving you?"

"A few hundred thousand," Enos said carelessly.

"Wheeeeeeeh!" Bacchus whistled.

"Is that a lot in Earth money?" the more naïve Eros asked.

"For a month's stay," Bacchus promised him, "it ain't moondust, brother!"

"Well," Eros said reflectively, pleased. "Well."

"Well is right," Bacchus agreed. "You've done very well."

"Clothes, too," Eros said, "a complete wardrobe of Earth clothes is being tossed in for nix."

BACCHUS whistled again. "When I went to Paris I was given four smocks, two suits, three shirts, and a tam."

"That wasn't so bad," Eros said. "What more could a god wear in the Latin quarter?"

"I had to buy my own socks and pajama tops," Bacchus said in nostalgic disgust. Then, irrelevently: "Have you picked out the spot yet?"

"What?"

"The spot," Bacchus repeated, "the place you'll stay while you're on Earth."

Eros shook his head. "No," he admitted. "I haven't thought of that yet."

"The United States, I suppose," Bacchus said.

"Oh, yes, of course," Eros agreed. "Europe's in such a mess, and so is Asia. It'll be somewhere in the U. S. undoubtedly."

"Where?" Bacchus persisted.

Eros looked undecided. "Can you suggest a suitable spot?"

Bacchus did a bit of thinking. He snapped his fingers.

"I got it," he said, eyes shining.

"Where?" Eros asked eagerly.

"Reno!"

"Reno?"

"Reno, Nevada," Bacchus said excitedly, "you goof."

"I know that much," Eros said frostily. "But Reno is the bane of my existence. That place has played utter hell with my business for years!"

"Of course," Bacchus said in exasperation. "And that's why it's a good place to go. Hit at one of the roots of the trouble if you want to correct an evil."

Eros considered this a moment. "You're right," he agreed, face lighting. "That's the most logical approach. I don't know why I didn't think of it myself."

Bacchus was fishing through a huge ledger at the side of the desk.

"What're you doing?" Eros demanded.

"Looking for a place for you. Wanta find a rich family you can stay with while you're in Reno."

"A hotel will be all right," Eros protested.

"Nuts to that," Bacchus declared. "You'll stay with the, ah," his finger was running down the ledger, "Keating family, they're listed here as Reno rich folks."

"But I don't know them!" Eros protested.

"Neither do I," Bacchus agreed. "But I'll take care of everything from here. Leave it to me. The Keatings of Reno it is!"

Eros opened his mouth to protest, then shut it. Arguing with Bacchus was always too much of a strain.

"And you'll have plenty to work on," Bacchus added. "The young Keating daughter is a deb who's been engaged six times!"

CHAPTER II

Soaked in Soup

MRS. SYLVESTER B. KEATING, having but recently risen from the luxurious softness of her downy bed, was breakfasting on the sun drenched veranda of the magnificent Reno family mansion.

Mrs. Keating was a large woman, with expensively bleached hair, expensively preserved features, and an air of complete and final authoritative determination. This determination was now in evidence as the good dowager tore ravenously into her melba toast, coffee, orange juice, cereal, and bacon and eggs.

This determination was also evident in the manner in which she frowned disapprovingly at the newspaper folded at the side of the table before her. Mrs. Keating almost invariably frowned in strong disapproval whenever she read the morning news accounts of her daughter Kay's escapades of the previous evening. And at the moment her eyes were fixed on exactly such an account.

"I'll have to speak to Sylvester about Kay," Mrs. Keating managed to tell herself wrathfully through a mouthful of melba toast.

"KAY KEATING BREAKS OFF SEVENTH VOW," was the terse heading over the news item occupying the attention of Mrs. Keating.

"Disgraceful," muttered Mrs. Keating, putting four heaping teaspoonfuls of sugar in her coffee. Then, irately, her eyes flew down the columned story beneath the heading.

"Last night in the swank surroundings of Mocambo's, Kay Keating, young Reno Society beauty, gave the gate in no uncertain fashion to the seventh suitor with whom her name has been linked in betrothal. The latest victim of young and glamorous Kay Keating's change of heart was none other than Prince Alexis Bolenoff. A plate of lukewarm soup in his face was Miss Keating's manner of informing the handsome Prince Bolenoff that she no longer considered him matrimonial timber.

The incident of the soup plate tossing occurred during the interval in which Prince Bolenoff had just asked the orchestra to play a congratulatory number in honor of his recently announced engagement to Miss Keating. It was at this moment, when the Prince stood up smilingly to acknowledge the applause and endeavored to have his fiancée do likewise, that Miss Keating drenched him with a plate of soup.

"It was at that instant," Miss Keating told reporters, "I realized Alexis was nothing but a stuff shirted ass. After all, there was nothing to do but drown his smug smirk in a plate of bouillon." Prince Alexis could not be reached for comment, but it was learned from his closest friends that he was considering two legal actions, one for breach of promise, and the second for character defamation."

Mrs. Sylvester B. Keating angrily tossed the paper to the floor. There was another news journal beneath it. And on the front page of this second paper there was a small, lower page, headline reading.

**"A BOWL'S ENOUGH FOR
BOLENOFF!"**

Underneath this gay heading there was a picture of the somber, moustached handsome figure of Prince Alexis Bolenoff, spluttering through a drenching just administered by an extremely shapely young lady in gorgeous evening attire. The young lady—her daughter, Kay—had her back to the camera, having just hurled the soup plate.

Mrs. Sylvester B. Keating gazed pop-eyed at this picture for an instant, then hurled the paper to the floor after the other, and dug savagely into her bacon and eggs.

A shadow fell across Mrs. Keating's breakfast table. She looked up sharply.

A tall, gray haired, somber man in a butler's uniform stood at her elbow.

"Well, Roger?" Mrs. Keating demanded.

The butler, Roger, held a silver plate in his hand. On the silver plate was a telegram.

"This just arrived, Madam," Roger explained neutrally.

Mrs. Keating took the telegram and Roger disappeared. Being a lady of wealth, Mrs. Keating was used to receiving telegrams like most people receive letters. Nevertheless, she held this envelope up to the light, peering curiously in an effort to see if she could ascertain its contents.

That procedure having failed, Mrs. Keating carefully opened the envelope.

"ARRIVING RENO THIS AFTERNOON. HOPE YOU HAVE ROOM FOR ME DURING BRIEF STAY. COUSIN SIDNEY BEGGED ME TO LOOK YOU UP.

EROS HEARTWORTH."

MRS. KEATING regarded the message with a blank frown. Then she read it again, studying it carefully, lips working as she spelled the words.

"Cousin Sidney," Mrs. Keating mused. "Cousin Sidney, now let me see. Hmmmmmmmm." She placed a well manicured hand against her brow, holding this attitude of reflection for perhaps thirty seconds. Then she gave it up.

"For the life of me," Mrs. Keating declared bewilderedly, "I can't recall Cousin Sidney. And I've never heard of this Eros Heartworth, or whoever he is."

She was engaged in this problem of recollection, completely engrossed in it, in fact, when footsteps sounded lightly behind her.

"Mama!" cried a delightfully liquid voice. "Mama!"

Mrs. Sylvester B. Keating looked up sharply. Her daughter, Kay, stood before her.

"Who is Cousin Sidney?" Mrs. Keating demanded frowningly.

Kay Keating smiled. The veranda sunlight took on a positive brilliance with that smile. Birds twittering outside the veranda quite suddenly became more wonderfully vocal.

"I think he's a sort of distant cousin of Dad's," Kay Keating said. "Someone with plantations or something in South Africa. Why?"

"That's right," Mrs. Keating exclaimed. "Now I recall. Of course, but of course. Cousin Sidney is a distant cousin of your father's. He's been in South Africa for ages. Ten years, anyway."

"Why, Mama?" Kay insisted.

"There's a friend of your father's Cousin Sidney, a Mr. Eros Heartworth, coming to stay with us during his stop in Reno," Mrs. Keating de-

clared, taking another glance at the telegram.

"Oh," said Kay Keating. "Is that all?"

Mrs. Keating suddenly noticed that her daughter was wearing white tennis shorts and swinging a racket impatiently. She smiled indulgently. And then she remembered the newspapers. Her carefully preserved features took on a glacier cast.

"Kay," Mrs. Keating demanded. "What's all this, this horrid gossip in the papers?"

"Gossip?" Kay's blue eyes were innocently uncomprehending. She smacked the tennis racket lightly against her lovely golden right leg, as if impatient to be off.

"Yes, about the Prince and you."

"That's not gossip," Kay said lightly. "That's the truth."

"The truth?" Mrs. Keating exploded. "The truth? Why, it's positively scandalous, that's what it is. It's positively disgraceful; You've called Prince Alexis this morning, haven't you?"

"Called Alexis?" Kay demanded as if her mother had lost her mind.

"Yes, of course. You go right to the telephone now and apologize. Tell him to come out for dinner tonight."

Kay smiled patiently. "But Mama, you don't understand. I loathe Alexis!" Her tone underlined the verb.

Mrs. Sylvester B. Keating looked at her daughter and started to splutter. "Why, why, why," she began.

"Mama," Kay reminded her, "your high blood pressure!"

"A soup plate!" Mrs. Keating managed. "A soup plate—how utterly revolting!"

"Handy," Kay corrected her. "The handiest thing I've ever hurled at a man. You should have seen Alexis!"

Kay burst into giggles of recollection. "He was *purple*!"

And with that as an exit line, Kay Keating's lovely golden legs took her racing lithely off the veranda and in the direction of the tennis courts.

MRS. SYLVESTER B. KEATING threw up her hands in despair. Glumly she returned to the mopping up attack on her bacon and eggs. A shadow fell across the table again, and she heard Roger's discreet cough as he reached out to remove a few plates.

"Roger," Mrs. Keating said.

"Yes, Madam?" the butler answered.

"With whom is my daughter playing tennis this morning?"

"Tennis, Madam?"

"Yes, in other words, what man has she got out here as a house guest today?"

Roger reflected for a moment. "A Mister Victor Vaprenzi, Madam," Roger informed her.

"Victor Vaprenzi?" Mrs. Keating's face came up from the bacon and eggs, looking strained and anguished. "The gambler?"

Roger coughed discreetly. "Now that you mention it, Madam, I do believe Mr. Vaprenzi does run a gaming house of sorts in his night club, the Mocambo."

"Roger," Mrs. Keating said huskily after a moment's debate.

"Yes, Madam?"

Mrs. Keating had difficulty in framing this sentence. "Do you think, that is, from what you've noticed, do you imagine that Kay is, ah, uh, attracted to this Vaprenzi person?"

"She seemed very happy this morning," Roger said discreetly.

"But you don't think, do you, that she is, ah," Mrs. Keating was forced to flounder in her query.

"Engaged to Mr. Vaprenzi as yet?"

Roger helped her.

"Yes," Mrs. Keating choked. "Yes, that's what I mean." Her eyes searched the butler's face worriedly as he considered this.

"No, Madam," Roger said after a moment. "No. I don't believe Miss Kay is engaged to Mr. Vaprenzi as yet. It's only noon, you know. Miss Kay generally gets engaged in the evenings."

Mrs. Sylvester B. Keating let out a long sigh. "Thank God, Roger!"

"Yes, Madam. Anything else, Madam?"

Mrs. Sylvester B. Keating shook her head.

Roger was about to leave when, faintly, from the front of the Keating mansion, the front door chimes sounded melodiously. Both the butler and the dowager turned in the direction of the sounds.

"Answer that, Roger."

The butler left the veranda. Mrs. Keating finished off the last of the melba toast and drenched it in coffee. Roger returned a few moments later, just as Mrs. Keating was rising reluctantly from the ravaged table.

A tall, blonde, bronzed, incredibly handsome young man in a most expensively tailored pin striped suit was right behind him. The blonde young man was smiling uncertainly and worrying a homburg in his strong brown hands.

Roger coughed. "Mr. Eros Heartworth," he announced gravely.

CHAPTER III

Fancy Free

FOR a young god, Eros had been in pretty much of a dither of excitement when he lifted the lion head knocker on the front door of the Keating Mansion. He had been in such a dither of excitement that it hadn't oc-

curred to him to press the buzzer on the door until he'd waited without answer on the stoop for five minutes.

But pressing the buzzer had sounded the chimes inside. And the sounding of the chimes had brought Roger. And now Roger, after turning his luggage over to a houseboy, had led him into the majestic presence of Mrs. Sylvester B. Keating.

Eros stepped forward, taking Mrs. Keating's extended hand. He held it for a moment, dropped it, and grinned awkwardly.

"I don't feel quite at ease, barging in on you this way, Mrs. Keating," Eros said.

Mrs. Keating had appraised Eros from the cut of his expensive clothes to the flush of his handsome young features. Apparently she liked what she saw. She smiled.

"Not a bit," she protested. "We're delighted to have you. Any friend of Uncle Sidney's is more than a friend of ours." She was the twittering, rather than dominating, dowager now.

Eros looked startled. "Cousin Sidney, I thought he was."

Mrs. Keating caught herself. "Yes, of course, Cousin Sidney. He's on my husband's side, and sometimes I forget."

Eros couldn't get the explanation, but he let it go at that.

"Will you be in Reno long?" Mrs. Keating made conversation.

"I, uh, really don't know," Eros said.

"That's nice," said Mrs. Keating. "I mean, that's nice that you might stay longer than you intended to."

Eros shifted from one foot to the other. This drawing room stuff, or even veranda stuff, was tougher than Bacchus had intimated when he'd given him hasty, last minute instructions as to social graces.

"Won't you take a drink?" Mrs.

Keating asked. "And do sit down." She deposited her large form in a gaily colored glider.

Eros nodded and found a wicker summer chair.

Roger was still hovering about.

"What will you have?" Mrs. Keating asked.

"Nectar," Eros answered. Then he flushed. "I mean, ah," he fought to remember the drinks Bacchus had primed him on. "Scotch and soda, if you please."

Roger disappeared.

THIS was different than he had imagined, Eros told himself. It was much different, and a great deal more difficult. He'd come down here to Earth, to Reno, to give his Love Department the old buck-up-o, but getting started seemed to provide a few snags. But then he recalled Mars must have had to make his entry into Earth affairs in just some such manner as this. And look at the job Mars did.

"What do you do, Mr. Heartworth?" Mrs. Keating asked.

Eros winced. The last name, Heartworth, had been a brilliant stroke of genius on the part of Bacchus. But Eros wasn't particularly pleased with it.

"Do?" Eros raised an eyebrow.

"Yes," Mrs. Keating enlarged, "what business are you in?"

"Diamonds," Eros said promptly. Bacchus had told him to say diamonds.

"And that's how you met Cousin Sidney?" Mrs. Keating questioned. "I mean, both of you being in South Africa and all that?"

Eros nodded vaguely. Bacchus hadn't gone over those angles very carefully, and Eros felt on shaky ground.

"Sylvester will be in shortly," Mrs. Keating said.

"Uh?" Eros blinked.

"My husband, Sylvester," Mrs.

Keating said sharply. "Surely Cousin Sidney told you all about Sylvester. He and Sylvester used to be the closest chums in college."

"Oh yes," Eros laughed hastily. "That's right. Of course your Cousin Sidney spoke often of the times he'd had with your husband, Mrs. Keating."

Roger appeared at that instant to place a drink in Eros' hand. It gave the young god his first feeling of solidity in the last five minutes to have that glass in his hand. He gulped some of it hastily.

"I'd join you," Mrs. Keating said, "but I've just had my breakfast."

Eros nodded, groping for something to say. Then his desperate mental acrobatics were jarred by the sound of voices approaching the veranda from the sweeping lawn outside. The voices of a girl and a man.

Mrs. Keating looked unhappy. "My daughter, Kay," she explained. "Coming from the tennis courts with Mr. Vaprenzi. They didn't play long."

Glistening brunette locks flashed in the sun as Eros turned his head slightly. Then an exceptionally lovely girl, clad in white tennis shorts, was mounting the veranda steps. Behind her, dressed in a red blazer and white flannels and carrying three rackets, was a swarthy, thick shouldered, black moustached chap of about thirty. He was smiling and the girl was laughing.

Eros stumbled quickly to his feet, still holding his drink. He switched it to his left hand.

Mrs. Keating rose and swept grandly to Eros' side. She placed a fat well manicured paw on his arm possessively.

"Kay, dearest," Mrs. Keating trilled. "This is Cousin Sidney's friend, Mr. Heartworth."

EROS met Kay Keating's friendly, coolly appraising glance. Like her

mother, Kay seemed to study Eros from head to foot. And like her mother, Kay smiled. She, also, liked what she saw. In a little different way.

"Awfully glad you'll be able to stop with us, Mr. Heartworth," Kay said. Her voice was more delightfully liquid than ever.

"Thanks," Eros mumbled, reddening under her gaze.

"You know," Kay declared with wide eyed candor, "I expected that you'd be a red faced old fogey like Uncle Sidney. I'm tremendously pleased that you aren't."

"Kay!" Mrs. Keating protested sharply.

Kay smiled indulgently at her mother, then went blithely on. "Are you married, Mr. Heartworth?" Kay demanded.

Eros shook his head. "No, I'm not."

"Good," Kay grinned. "Then we'll have lots of fun while you're here."

"Kay!" This time it was a masculine voice that protested in shocked annoyance. The voice of the chap in the blazer and flannels.

Kay turned. "Oh, Vick, I almost forgot you. Mr. Heartworth, this is my very good friend, Vick Vaprenzi."

Vaprenzi, scowling blackly, extended his hand. Eros took a bone crushing grip and drew his own paw away hastily.

"Pleased," Eros declared. "And since we won't have to be formal I'd rather you all called me Eros."

"That's a funny name," Kay declared. Then, at Eros' look of indignation, she added swiftly, "I mean different, of course."

Eros looked somewhat mollified. "It is unusual," he admitted.

Kay looked pensive for an instant. Then she snapped her fingers unexpectedly. "I know!"

Eros looked at her in perplexity. "Know what?"

"Your name, where it's derived from.

You're named after the Eros who was the god of love, aren't you?"

Eros flushed uncertainly. "I, ah, guess I am, in a way," he admitted.

Kay gave him one last long appraising look. "HMMMMM," she decided, "you weren't badly named at that, big fella!"

Eros flushed to the roots of his hair.

"Kay!" exclaimed the horrified Mrs. Keating.

"Kay!" echoed Vick Vaprenzi.

"Oh, my," Eros said weakly.

Kay Keating gave him one long, slow wink, her button nose crinkling in an elfin grin. Then, grabbing Vaprenzi by the arm, she strolled blandly past the blushing young god of love and into the house.

"See you at dinner, Eros," she called back over her shoulder.

Eros automatically lifted his scotch and soda and drained the glass. His hand was shaking, and for the life of him he couldn't find a reason why.

"I am afraid," Mrs. Keating declared, "that my daughter has taken a fancy to you, Mr. Heartworth."

"You, ah, you think so?" Eros asked.

Mrs. Keating nodded sadly. "Yes, you poor dear boy."

"Poor dear boy?" Eros echoed blankly.

Mrs. Keating nodded again. "You'll find out what I mean," she promised ominously. . . .

CHAPTER IV

Preparation for Heart Rays

HALF an hour later, Eros was still considering Mrs. Keating's remark in the privacy of the bedroom which had been assigned to him. It was obvious to him, of course, that Kay Keating was the debutante daughter who—according to what Bacchus had

said—had been engaged six times. And under these circumstances, Eros felt certain that he'd already come face to face with at least one of the great bottlenecks in his Love Department.

"After all," Eros told himself indignantly, "this Keating girl is probably known as a glamour deb from coast-to-coast. She is probably a sort of heroine to countless young ladies all over the United States. When she laughs in the face of serious romance, she sets a style, and all her would-be imitators start doing the same thing. It isn't right."

There was a knock on the door of Eros' bedroom.

Roger pushed his head in an instant later.

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"Eh?" Eros looked at the butler in surprise. "Oh, that's all right, Roger, come right in."

Roger came right in, standing somewhat hesitantly before Eros.

"What's on your mind, Roger?" Eros asked.

"Mrs. Keating, sir, noticed that you'd come without a manservant, a valet. She informed me, sir, to place myself at your disposal during your stay here."

"You're to be my valet?" Eros inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, Roger, set about doing whatever valets do."

"Thank you, sir."

Roger began to prowl about in Eros' closet, taking down clothes and brushing them, unpacking some luggage, and generally making himself useful. Eros stood by the French windows of the bedroom which opened out onto a balcony overlooking a green terrace below.

"Roger," Eros suddenly asked, "is it true that Miss Keating has been engaged to be married on some six occasions?"

Roger paused in the unpacking. "No, sir. Last night she broke off another engagement. It is now seven times, rather than six."

Eros looked appalled.

"And the Mr. Vaprenzi you met," Roger continued, "seems to be in line as the eighth suitor, sir."

"You mean she'll probably get herself engaged to him?" Eros asked, astounded. "And on the day after she broke another engagement?"

"That's generally the procedure, sir," Roger replied. "She says, sir, that she detests carrying a, er, a torch after a broken romance. As a consequence, she generally endeavors to get engaged again as speedily as possible."

"Good heavens, Roger!" Eros exclaimed.

Roger raised his eyebrows despairingly. "Exactly, sir."

Eros paced back and forth in concentration a moment. "What does this Vaprenzi fellow do?" Eros asked suddenly.

"He, ah, is the owner of a night club and gambling house called the Mocambo, sir," Roger answered.

"Has he a good reputation?" Eros asked.

ROGER chose his words with care.

"He, ah, has never been in jail, sir," he replied. There was no mistaking his meaning.

Eros grinned. "I see, Roger. Well spoken. Very delicately phrased, if I do say so."

"Thank you, sir. Shall I lay out your dinner jacket?"

"I'm supposed to dress for dinner?" Eros asked.

Roger looked bewildered. "But of course, sir."

Eros flushed in embarrassment. "It's hard to get back into the swing of civilized living, Roger. South Africa is

different, you know."

Roger accepted the explanation. "Of course, sir. I understand."

"And what's the program after dinner?" Eros inquired.

"I believe Mr. Vaprenzi intends to have you all along as his guests at the Mocambo Club, sir."

Eros considered this. "Then, of course, I'll need a sizable bit of currency."

Roger flushed this time. "I presume so, sir."

"Then I wish you'd get my money from the grip on your right. It's packed in the side," Eros explained.

Quite a little bit bewildered, Roger opened the grip Eros pointed to. He felt in the side. His face went white. His hand came up with a massive stack of green bills.

"Good," Eros said. "I was afraid I might have misplaced it." He held out his hand and took the sheaf of bills from Roger.

Eros flipped casually through the stack. "Twenty, twenty-five, thirty-five, fifty, seventy-five, a hundred, hundred and twenty-five, hundred and fifty, hundred and seventy-five, two-hundred, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars." He smiled. "Fine. Keep out twenty-five thousand, Roger, and put it in the pocket of my dinner jacket so I won't forget it." He flipped the stack of bills back onto the bed.

Roger's eyes were bugging.

"If you don't mind my saying so, sir," Roger finally managed to gasp, "I think it would be wise of you to be a little less careless with your, ah, currency."

Eros looked genuinely surprised. "Do you? I hadn't thought of it."

Roger was still white and shaken. "Yes, sir. I think it would be quite a sound idea for you to deposit it in a bank, sir. I am sure any bank here in

Reno would be glad to keep it for you while you're here."

"That's nice of them, Roger," Eros observed warmly. "You take it down to them, then, won't you. But don't forget to leave twenty-five thousand in my dinner jacket."

"I, I'll call them, sir," Roger said. "That way they could send an armored car out for it. I wouldn't feel comfortable taking such an enormous amount to them personally."

"Any way you like," Eros conceded.

"I'll call them now, if you don't mind, sir. It would set my mind at ease," Roger declared.

"Go right ahead."

ROGER left the room hurriedly.

Eros went back to the French windows and looked down on the green terrace. He stood there with his hands behind his back, contemplatively biting his lower lip.

"So she's just broken off her seventh," Eros muttered to himself. "And this Vaprenzi person seems in line for the eighth." He considered this a minute.

"From Roger's attitude toward Vaprenzi," Eros continued to himself, "that gentleman leaves a lot to be desired in the way of an ideal mate for any girl. Nevertheless," he paused to search for one of his Departmental Propaganda Slogans, "Love Conquors All, Love Makes Good Men Out of Bad, and all that sort of thing. Maybe it would turn Vaprenzi into a clean, living model of propriety."

He thought this over a minute. "Of course it would," he decided. "And besides, I couldn't afford to have this Keating girl get engaged and get unengaged for the eighth time. It would ruin my business even more so."

Eros smacked his fist against his palm. "That's it, then. I'll see to it

that little Miss Keating makes this eighth engagement stick. I'll see to it that Kay Keating and Vaprenzi actually become man and wife!"

Eros walked excitedly over to a writing table in the corner of his bedroom. He found paper and a fountain pen and sat down. For a moment he chewed reflectively on the end of the pen, then he bent his head over the paper and began writing.

He wrote rapidly, pausing now and then to find a phrase, and when he had finished, he blotted the sheet, waved it an instant to dry, then read over what he'd written.

"Dear Bacchus:

Arrived intact, everything went according to schedule. Have already located bottleneck in this sector of U. S., but have ingeniously hit upon a scheme to eliminate same. I'll need your coöperation in this. At midnight tonight, Reno time, barrage a night spot called the 'Mocambo' with double the usual number of heart rays. Fifteen minutes of this extra special barrage should be sufficient. Train the heart rays principally on the garden outside the Mocambo. But, for the love of Jove, don't slip up on this! I'll write more later. Give my best to the Gods in the office.

Cordially,

Eros."

Eros smiled. That should do it. Already he was envisioning the success of his scheme. This personal management, right at the heart of his steepest sales resisting territory, should more than show results. Mentally, he was picturing himself receiving Jove's praise for a job well done. Why, he could continue on around Earth, handling other weak territories in his department. He might eventually take a fling at Europe.

He pictured Mars' savage rage at learning that love had triumphed over war.

"Yes, indeed," Eros told himself. It's the personal touch that counts." He grinned in smug self satisfaction . . .

CHAPTER V

A Game of Hearts

BY THE time that Eros had shaved and showered, the message to Bacchus had disappeared from the top of the writing desk. This didn't bother the young God, however, for he knew that a heavenly messenger had picked it up while he was in the shower. That was the form of communication that had been arranged.

Eros was singing happily as he adjusted the studs in his shirt front, gave his black tie a tug, and slipped into his dinner jacket. And when Roger appeared to announce that dinner was being served in half an hour and that cocktails were now in order in the drawing room, Eros grinned cheerfully and buoyantly strode downstairs.

In the luxuriously furnished drawing room, Eros found Mrs. Keating, her daughter Kay, Vaprenzi, and a short, fat, baldheaded man who turned out to be Sylvester B. Keating himself.

"Glad you could stop with us, Heartworth," Sylvester B. Keating boomed heartily. He was wearing a dinner jacket tailored to make the least fuss over his protruding paunch.

"It's really a pleasure," Eros said.

Mrs. Keating was wearing a black evening gown which successfully tented at least fifty pounds away from her huge frame. A pearl necklace, pearl earrings, and a pearl tiara on her expensively bleached blonde hair completed her costume.

Vaprenzi was dinner jacketed, freshly shaved, and displaying a huge dia-

mond ring on his dark hands and twin diamond studs on his white shirt front. He had a drink in his hand and nodded to Eros.

But Kay Keating, in a white evening dress, her ebon locks piled high in a striking coiffure, and her god-given figure displayed with tantalizing good taste, was the center of attraction in the drawing room. Looking at her, Eros found it hard to keep the admiration from his eyes.

"Hello, Eros," Kay Keating crinkled a grin in his direction. Her eyes swept approvingly over his dinner jacketed splendor.

Eros grinned tolerantly at this. Young Miss Keating, he felt certain, was due to be jarred from her man-crazy pattern before another day was passed. She would be in love, then, as she had never really been before. She would have eyes only for her betrothed, one Victor Vaprenzi.

And Eros contented himself with this realization all through the dinner as the unconventional Kay Keating pushed Vaprenzi into the background and made a highly concentrated play for her family's new guest.

Sylvester B. Keating was a help, however, for whenever he got the chance he chattered incessantly about his Cousin Sidney and questioned Eros constantly about South Africa and the diamond mining business.

Through this all, Vaprenzi ate sullenly, confining his remarks to occasional futile attempts to say something to Kay, or grunted answers to questions directed at him by Mrs. Keating.

And Eros, flushed happily with his approaching masterly maneuver, and glowing warmly from the four cocktails he'd downed before dinner, talked completely at ease, fabricating gigantic lies about South Africa and his purely mythical experiences there.

When the dinner was over, Kay insisted that she and Vaprenzi would drive to the Mocambo in Eros' car, while her mother and father could come in the town limousine.

"But what about my car?" Vaprenzi protested.

"We'll have Roger drive it back to the Mocambo for you, Vick." Kay smiled sweetly.

"But Heartworth could ride with your mother and father, and we could take my car!" Vaprenzi insisted.

Kay dismissed this laughingly. "Don't be absurd, Vick. This is the simplest arrangement. Unless you'd like to drive to the club alone."

Vaprenzi sullenly gave in . . .

EROS sat behind the wheel of his high-powered, sleek lined, crimson roadster fifteen minutes later. The night air was invigorating, the sky jammed with silently twinkling stars. The roadway before him ribboned out whitely in the moonlight and the only sound was the contented purring of the motor.

Kay Keating sat very close beside him, her perfume drifting faintly to his nostrils, her shoulders covered by an ermine cloak. On the other side of Kay, Vaprenzi sat sullenly smoking a cigarette and staring out at the countryside.

"It's glorious out here, isn't it?" Kay observed with a liquid sigh.

"Very nice," Eros commented.

"Can't you get some music?" Vaprenzi broke in suddenly.

"Sure thing," Eros declared, reaching down and snapping the radio button. After an instant, dance music blared forth. Eros reached down again and softened the volume.

"Ahhh," Kay sighed. "Starlight, soft music, a velvet night."

"Made to order," Eros observed mechanically, thinking of the cunning de-

tail Bacchus had gone to.

The Mocambo loomed up ahead of them after three more miles. It was a low, long, glittering place with a lavish electrical sign on the front. It was set back from the highway about fifty yards, and Eros turned the roadster up the gravel driveway. A uniformed doorman ran down the steps of the club to meet them.

"How do you do, Mr. Vaprenzi," he said respectfully, recognizing his boss. "And how are you tonight, Miss Keating?" he inquired.

"Shall we wait for your mother and father?" Vaprenzi asked dourly when the doorman had taken the roadster away.

Kay Keating shook her head. "No. They'll be able to find our table, Vick. Let's go on in."

Kay's right arm crooked into Eros' left arm, and as a sort of after thought she slipped her left arm into Vaprenzi's. In this fashion they strode through the luxurious foyer of the Mocambo.

Music came to Eros' ears. Soft carpets were beneath his feet, the lighting was rich and indirect. A white-tied headwaiter appeared, slick haired and smiling, and escorted the threesome into an elaborate dining room to the right of the foyer.

A dance band was playing from a bandstand at the far end of the room. Several dozen couples were dancing on an illuminated glass floor. They stepped through an aisle of tables crowded with expensively attired men and women, all of whom lifted their heads to stare at Kay Keating and her escorts.

THE table the headwaiter led them to was directly off the dance floor, in the center of the room. Vaprenzi stepped between the headwaiter and Kay and pulled out her chair for her.

Eros took a seat, looking around the place marvellingly.

"Like the set up?" Vaprenzi asked, seeing Eros look about.

"Great," Eros said enthusiastically. "Splendid."

This seemed to thaw Vaprenzi out slightly. "Order what you want," he smiled, "we've got the best liquor in the state. Champagne of any vintage. Tastes like nectar."

"Really?" asked Eros hopefully.

"You bet," Vaprenzi declared. He consulted with the headwaiter a moment, murmured an order. The headwaiter bowed and strode off.

"What time is it?" Eros asked abruptly.

Both Kay Keating and Vaprenzi frowned abruptly. But it was the girl who asked,

"Going any place, Mr. Heartworth?" Her voice was sarcastically polite.

Vaprenzi looked at his watch. "It's a quarter to eleven," he announced.

"I just wondered," Eros explained hastily, reddening. "That is, I wondered if this were the most crowded period at the Mocambo. The place seems packed."

Vaprenzi waved his diamond ringed hand casually. "You ought to see it about two or three a.m.," he boasted.

Eros raised his eyebrows in admiration. "Really?"

"You know it," Vaprenzi said. "Say, do you think this crowd in here is all we have at the Mocambo?"

Eros looked around for hidden rooms. "Isn't it?" he asked.

Vaprenzi chuckled. "Not on your life. Our gaming rooms are upstairs. Generally at this time there's a big crowd up there, too." He paused, then, "Like roulette, Heartworth?"

Kay Keating cut in. "Now, now, Vick. Family honor makes me warn you against fleecing a Keating guest."

Vaprenzi laughed. "You didn't let him answer."

Eros grinned. "I'd like to try my hand at some roulette. I've never played it before."

Vaprenzi lighted a cigarette and his eyes were interested. "That so?" he asked. "What games have you gambled on?"

"Hearts," Eros said unthinkingly, "and then only for small stakes."

Kay Keating let out an unnice squeal. "*Mr. Heartworth*," she giggled, "I'll bet that's no lie!"

Eros flushed. Vaprenzi looked annoyed.

THE drinks came, then. And the danceband started up again. Kay Keating pushed back her chair, rose.

"I accept your invitation, Eros," she smiled.

Eros half stumbled to his feet. "Invita—" he began bewilderedly.

"To dance," Kay grinned. She took his arm and led him to the illuminated glass floor.

And then they were moving slowly to music while Eros was conscious of a soft coiffure against his cheek and perfume in the air. He danced slowly, experimentally.

"Like Reno?" Kay said suddenly.

"Eh, oh, ah certainly. I like it very much. It's the first time I've ever been here, y'know."

"Like our place?" Kay asked.

Eros shook his head. "It's really magnificent," he admitted.

"Like me?" Kay demanded softly.

"Yes, of course, I—what?" Eros was shocked.

"Why, Eros," Kay Keating said, moving a little away and looking up at him. "Why, Eros, you're blushing!"

"But, but, of course, naturally I like you," Eros gulped in confusion. "I like your mother, too. I like your father. I

like Victor Vaprenzi. I like Reno. I like—"

"Oh," said Kay in a small, hurt voice. "You like them all as well as you like me."

Eros was definitely flustered. This was no kind of talk for a girl he hoped to unite with another man inside of another two hours. This wasn't scheduled. This was embarrassing. He felt acutely uncomfortable. Not the least bit god-like.

"You don't like me," Kay was going on. "You, you probably hate me." Her voice was breaking slightly. Eros had the horrible certainty she was going to cry unless he did something quickly.

"Look," said Eros, searching his brain wildly for an idea. "Look, I didn't say I didn't like you better than the rest of them. I, I, don't even know exactly how much I do like you. I've only known you a short time, and maybe I like you a lot more than I realize right now. We can talk it over later."

"When?" Kay demanded.

Eros got a brilliant idea. "At midnight," he said. "In the garden at the Mocambo here."

Kay drew closer to him. Her voice was a sigh. "What a wonderful idea!"

Eros knew his forehead was glistening with perspiration. He wished he had time to mop at it with a handkerchief. And then the music stopped.

Eros grabbed Kay by the arm. "Let's get back to the table," he said. "Victor is probably bored stiff by now."

Mr. Sylvester B. Keating and Wife were seated at the table when Eros and Kay returned. Eros beamed at them gratefully.

"So glad you got here," he grinned. "I was wondering what was holding you up."

Vaprenzi broke in. "I was telling Mr. and Mrs. Keating that you wanted to learn roulette. What do you say we

all go to the gaming rooms?"

Eros disregarded the kick Kay Keating planted on his shin. "I think it's an excellent idea," he agreed. Vaprenzi rose, grinning.

"I'll have our drinks sent up to the tables," Vaprenzi said . . .

CHAPTER VI

Knockout

EROS sat between Mrs. Keating and Kay. Before them stretched the flat numbered and segmented expanse of the roulette table. Vaprenzi and Sylvester B. Keating, stood behind the three. Seated around the rest of the tables were men and women in various stages of gambling hypnosis. The eyes of all were riveted on the wheel in the center of the table behind which the croupier, emotionless and hard eyed, stood supervising the betting.

Eros had a glass at his side. It had been refilled for the fifteenth time. He felt warm and glowing and very nappy. There were knots of spectators gathered behind his chair. He looked fondly at the tall stacks of chips beside his elbow.

The stacks amounted to seventy-five thousand dollars.

The croupier looked at Eros.

The room was hushed.

Eros pushed all the stacks out on the red marker. There was an audible gasp from everyone in the gaming room.

"You fool," Kay Keating hissed, kicking Eros in the shin for the fifteenth time. "Get out of here while you're ahead."

Eros just grinned, watching the croupier spin the wheel. There was silence while the ivory ball danced up and down the rim, balancing like a nimble little man on a rolling log. The wheel

was slowing. The ivory ball began to bob.

The wheel stopped. The croupier looked emotionlessly at the stack of chips Eros had pushed forward.

"Red," he announced flatly, "eighteen."

The room burst into a babble of excitement.

"You lucky idiot!" Kay Keating marvelled. "Quit now, for heavens sake!"

Eros still said nothing, grinningly sweeping in the chips that were pushed over to him. Vaprenzi's voice, behind Eros' shoulder, came to him a little sickly.

"Very lucky, Heartworth. One hundred and fifty grand is our bank limit at the roulette table. I'm afraid you've broken it."

"That's a shame," said Eros, sincerely sorry. "I was just beginning to enjoy the game. Are you out of chips?"

"Out of the green stuff to back them up with," Vaprenzi said flatly.

"Can't you call the bank and get more?" Eros asked.

There was an audible snicker around the room. Vaprenzi flushed.

"I can write you out a check," Vaprenzi said, "although I don't usually do that."

"Splendid," Eros beamed. "I'd like to play this all night. It's really great sport."

Kay Keating rose. "You two can postpone the roulette championship until tomorrow night," she said. "My nerves can't stand any more of it."

Vaprenzi looked suddenly contrite. "I'm sorry, Kay. I was just trying to oblige Mr. Heartworth." He looked at Eros. "If you don't mind," he began.

"Not a bit," Eros grinned, rising a little unsteadily. "Always make a fool of myself over games. We'll pick it up again tomorrow night, eh?"

THE normal gambling in the room resumed, people took over the chairs vacated by Eros, Kay, and her mother and father. Vaprenzi stepped back to allow Kay and her mother to walk ahead. Sylvester B. Keating was with them. Eros brought up the rear.

Vaprenzi touched his arm.

"I'd like to see you a little later, Heartworth," he said softly.

"Surely," Eros agreed. "Whereabouts?"

"Outside would be best," Vaprenzi answered.

"In the garden?" Eros suggested, struck by the cleverness of his idea. "In the garden about midnight?"

"Good enough," Vaprenzi agreed.

Possibly it was the champagne. Or possibly it was the smug feeling of a man about to pull off something awfully clever, but Eros felt exceedingly fine as they walked out of the gaming room and down to the night club mezzanine. He felt so fine he'd even forgotten that he now had one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars in his pocket. . . .

Half an hour later, at the table, Vaprenzi glanced at his watch and gave Eros a significant wink.

"Why," Vaprenzi announced, "it's a quarter to twelve. I hope you people will excuse me for a short spell. I've several very important telephone calls to make. Long distance arrangements." He rose.

When Vaprenzi had gone, Kay Keating looked at Eros. "Let's dance, Eros," she said.

"It's a quarter to twelve," Kay said when they were on the illuminated glass dancing area. "And you've a date at midnight with a certain brunette. Do you remember? Or have the drinks and the small fortune driven it out of your mind?"

Eros grinned smugly. "Of course I remember. I wasn't thinking of any-

thing else since the arrangement was made. In the garden, wasn't it?"

Kay Keating nodded happily. "Ummmmmm."

Eros said, "We'll finish this dance, then go back to the table. I'll excuse myself. Then you do the same. I'll meet you out in the garden, promptly on the stroke of twelve."

One chorus and a vocal later they were walking back to the table, where Sylvester B. Keating and mate looked up sharply, guiltily, faces flushed. They had been talking about something, strictly *entre nous*. Their manner was smug, knowing, secretive.

Eros and Kay sat down, and less than a minute later Mrs. Keating rose, beamingly.

"I'm sure you'll excuse me," she said.

Sylvester B. Keating rose also. "You'll pardon me, too, for a bit, won't you?"

Eros nodded blankly. "Why, er, that is, certainly."

Kay nudged Eros with her knee.

"It's much easier than we thought," she whispered. Eros was on his feet, smiling somewhat bewilderedly. The Keatings were moving away. When they'd gone, Eros sat down again and turned to Kay.

"Now why do you suppose," he began.

KAY cut in. "Mama and father are awfully understanding," she said. "And in addition to that, I think they thoroughly approve of you."

"Approve of me?"

Kay nodded. "They didn't approve of the others."

"The others?" Eros felt his voice rising an octave in an alarmed squeak. He was beginning to get the drift.

"Yes," Kay said blandly, "the other seven."

"But—" Eros began in protest.

"It's almost midnight," Kay said swiftly. "Remember that date in the garden?" She rose, and Eros got to his feet.

"Uh, now," he started.

"I'll meet you out there," Kay said. "Follow me in a few minutes." She leaned over to pat his arm. Then she moved off. Eros sat down heavily. This was not going along quite as smoothly as he'd like it. Kay Keating was getting a number of wrong impressions. They had to be corrected, somehow. But then Eros remembered Bacchus up there on Olympus probably even now glancing at his watch and setting the extra batteries of heart rays on the garden.

Eros took a deep breath and got to his feet. A lot would depend on his fellow god's dependability.

Weaving through the maze of tables, Eros made his way to the side veranda of the Mocambo which fronted the night club's garden. Vaprenzi would probably be out there in the garden waiting for him already. And Kay would meet Vaprenzi. Bacchus and the heart rays would take care of the rest.

Eros stood just inside the club, gazing out at the veranda and the garden beyond it. He fished for a cigarette, lighted it, and smoked slowly, killing time.

In his capacity as God of Love from Olympus, Eros had done a great deal of matchmaking in his day. But doing it all from up there had been like a puppet master pulling strings to manipulate his victims. This personal—literally down to earth—handling, however, was vastly different. Eros felt nervous.

A drunk staggered in off the veranda. He was red-faced, gloomy eyed, and middle aged. Eros tapped him on the shoulder.

"Have you the time, old boy?" Eros asked.

The drunk looked suspicious. Then he fished for his watch.

He stared at the timepiece for perhaps half a minute, then looked up at Eros, eyes searching the young God's face suspiciously.

"Thash's sa rottun lie," the drunk mumbled. "Ish mush later than that." He put his watch back into his pocket and reeled on.

Eros tried again when a portly, white haired old man passed in from the veranda.

"Five after twelve," that gentleman said.

Eros thanked him, grinning smugly. The heart rays were already at work, and Kay Keating and Vaprenzi were out there under them. Ten more minutes and they'd be droolingly mad about each other. Eros timed the interval that followed with a fresh cigarette. When it was a small stub, Eros stepped out onto the veranda.

SAVE for occasional couples sitting around in the gliders by the veranda railing, the garden seemed deserted. Eros went down the steps and frowningly proceeded up a gravel path that led to a sequestered bower.

Voices, loud and angry, came to him from the bower.

Eros turned the corner and faced Vaprenzi and Kay Keating. They were both arguing wildly!

"Hello!" Eros said in surprised dismay.

Vaprenzi swung on Eros, eyes unpleasant. "Well?" he grated.

Eros took a deep breath. This wasn't at all as it should be. The pair should be entwined in one another's arms, whispering sweet nothings at this stage of the game.

Kay appealed to Eros. "Punch this, this, gangster in the nose for me, Eros!" she demanded.

Vaprenzi clenched and unclenched his fists. "So that's how it is, eh?" he snarled.

"Look—" Eros began. He was beginning to realize that Bacchus was—true to form—completely unreliable. The heart rays couldn't have been trained on the garden at the appointed time. Eros felt more than a little sick. Mentally he damned Bacchus.

"Look, nothing," Vaprenzi spat. The man was furious. His eyes blazing. "I'm suddenly wise to the situation, Heartworth, plenty wise."

"Punch him in the mouth, Eros!" Kay Keating screeched.

And then there was the sound of hasty footsteps on the garden gravel pathway. A figure swung around the corner of the bower. Eros blinked in amazement as he recognized Roger.

"Mr. Heartworth, sir," Roger began.

Suspicion darkened the baleful glare on Vaprenzi's features. "What's this?" he demanded loudly, looking from Roger to Eros to Kay.

"A message, Mr. Heartworth," Roger said. "I found it on your writing desk, unopened, after you'd gone and I was cleaning up your room. One of the maids must have left it there and forgotten to tell me about it."

Eros snatched the envelope Roger extended.

He opened it, shielding the paper from the view of the others.

"Eros, Old Thing:

Heart Rays went on blink, needed bit of repair. Won't be able to provide their lovelush rays until about twenty after midnight. Sorry, old moppet, make your arrangements accordingly.

The best,
Bacchus."

EROS took a deep breath, then let it out in a sigh. So that was what had happened. A slight delay, nothing

more serious. Bacchus hadn't gone off and gotten drunk as he'd feared. Eros felt better, much better than before. He pocketed the note.

"What time is it, Roger?" he asked.

Roger looked at his watch. "Exactly twelve, ah, twelve eighteen, Mr. Heartworth."

Eros grinned. "Thank you, Roger. I'm very glad you thought to bring the message. I shan't forget it, old boy, never fear."

"I still want to know," Vaprenzi demanded in bewildered sullenness, "if this is some sort of a wise stunt."

Eros put on his most innocent expression. "Why, Victor, old man, I'm surprised you should talk that way."

"What's this all about?" Vaprenzi demanded.

"You wait," Eros promised, taking Roger by the arm. Unconsciously he glanced upward. "*Let 'er rip, Bacchus,*" he thought.

Eros started away, pulling Roger by the elbow with him. "You wait," he repeated, "and you'll find out in practically no time at all."

"Hey!" Kay Keating yelled after them.

"What IS this?" Vaprenzi screamed.

"Wait," Eros shouted. "I'll be back in a minute. Stay where you are."

Then he was dashing madly down the gravel path, Roger behind him. He was conscious that the moon was getting brighter and brighter, and that the stars were taking on a business like polished gleam of utter radiance. Bacchus was already setting the scene. The heart rays would be pouring down next.

Kay and Vaprenzi would be left alone together. That's all those heart rays would need.

Eros-cut sharply behind a high hedge of bushes. And then hands siezed him roughly, and a voice barked nastily behind the blunt nose of an automatic.

"Nice going, mug," said the voice. "I was waiting for you."

Eros opened his mouth. Whoever held him put a hairy paw over it quickly. Eros struggled futilely, staring into the muzzle of the gun before him. He was aware that there must be two men, one holding him, while the other held the gun. Roger was nowhere around.

Then Eros saw the gun barrel raise. He felt, rather than saw, it smash down on the top of his head. Explosions, one after another, then pinwheels, sparkling, whirling, sparks scattering through a blanket of blackness. Eros fell forward, still held by the captor behind him, quite unconscious. . . .

CHAPTER VII

Love Knocked Out

THERE was a buzzing, aching bedlam in Eros' head when he regained consciousness. He felt for a moment as if his mouth was crammed tightly shut with cotton batting, and then he realized that a gag was tied tightly around it.

He couldn't see a thing, inky blackness surrounding him. And then Eros realized that his eyes were covered also. It took only a moment's effort for Eros to become aware that his legs were tied, and his arms trussed behind him.

Faintly, Eros heard the strains of dance music. It seemed to be coming from below him. He pressed his ear hard to the deep rich carpet on which he lay and listened carefully.

Yes, it was a dance orchestra. A dance orchestra that sounded familiarly like the one at the Mocambo.

Eros did a bit of reasoning. If he were still at the Mocambo, he decided, then he was in a room of some sort directly above the dance floor.

Eros turned his attention from the

music and raised his head slightly from the carpet, listening for sounds in the room. He stayed that way perhaps a minute, hearing nothing. Apparently he was alone.

He lay there, then, trying to recall what the thugs who'd seized him in the bushes had looked like. Recollection was futile. It had all happened too quickly.

But what had happened? What was the reason for all this? Why was he still here in the Mocambo after such an assault?

Eros remembered the money he had won.

A hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Eros rolled over on his face, pressing against his chest to see if the money were still in his dinner jacket pocket.

It was gone.

Eros rolled over on his back and thought this out. These creatures of Earth were greedy grubbers. They'd knock a man out and almost kill him for a paltry hundred and fifty thousand dollars. That sort of thing would never happen on Olympus. But, sadly enough, this wasn't Olympus. This was Reno, U.S.A., Earth. Eros sighed.

But who'd do a thing like this?

Eros did a little more puzzling. Kay Keating? In spite of his situation, Eros had to smile at this. Kay Keating would be guilty of assault and battery in the pursuit of a fiancé, but not in the pursuit of money. She had plenty of money, much more than the scant supply of cash that Eros took along for his expenses. And, Eros further suspected, she would probably inherit scads more of the stuff eventually if she hadn't already.

That eliminated Kay.

Vaprenzi seemed quite logically to be next on Eros' list of suspects. But Vaprenzi, with this huge night club and

gambling establishment, the Mocambo, seemed also to be rolling in wealth. Maybe not as much wealth as Kay had, but certainly a tidy fortune. And yet Vaprenzi hadn't seemed particularly pleased to have Eros win one hundred and fifty thousand dollars from his roulette tables. Of course you really couldn't blame him. Still, Eros had offered to play again the next evening, and if Vaprenzi were a person nasty enough to have hired men leaping from bushes to club people, he'd not stop at fixing his roulette tables so that he could get the money back from Eros without any taint of violence or dirty work.

That seemed to eliminate Vaprenzi.

BY now Eros was beginning to have a flying start on an aching head. This was too much to be considered all at once. Obviously, he was now in a more or less precarious position. And, equally obvious was the fact that someone didn't like his having one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in his pocket and had deprived him of same.

Eros was an extremely puzzled and exceedingly anxious young god.

And then Eros heard a door open. The door to the room in which he lay trussed on the floor.

Voices, next. Ugly voices.

"Well, here he is," said the first voice.

"Yeah," said the second. "He's moved. Musta come around."

Eros lifted his head slightly and tried to talk through his gag. He only succeeded in half choking himself to death.

"Look at that," said the first voice sharply, "you're right!"

Footsteps, coming across the floor. Coming to Eros. A voice bending over him. The first voice.

"Well, well, Heartworth," said the voice. "Howyuh feeling?"

Eros gurgled against his gag.

The first voice laughed.

"Lift him up," ordered the second voice.

Eros felt hands dragging him unceremoniously to his feet. He swayed there, while strong paws held his shoulders to keep him from toppling forward on his face. Dizziness assailed him, caused, undoubtedly, by the blow he'd had on the head.

"Here," said the second voice. "I'll hold him while you untie his feet."

Eros felt himself turned over to another pair of strong paws. Then someone was bending by his feet, untying the bonds around them.

"There," said the first voice, "that's done."

Eros moved one foot tentatively. It was numb, but it was now unfettered. He moved the other. The same sensation. Blood was beginning to flow back into his ankles. The sensation was painfully pleasant.

"Got the car running downstairs?" asked the second voice.

"Yeah."

"Okay, then," the second voice commanded, "let's lug this mug outta here."

Eros felt something round and hard pressing against his spine.

"This is a gun," explained the first voice from behind him. "It can go off like nobody's business, if you make any false moves. You understand?"

Eros shook his head violently up and down to indicate that he understood quite readily.

"Good," said the first voice. "Now just move along like we direct you and everything's gonna be jake."

Eros felt himself being propelled out of the doorway, down a thickly carpeted staircase. Then he heard another door open, and cool air hit his face.

"Okay," the first voice said softly, "step lively, Heartworth. When I say

'up' raise your tootsies. We're getting in a car."

Eros felt gravel beneath his feet as he walked along.

"Up," commanded the first voice.

Eros raised his foot and felt the running board of a car. The door was open and the thug behind him shoved him in against the upholstery of the rear seats. Then the thug climbed in beside Eros. The other hoodlum was evidently driving, for Eros heard the motor roar to life, the doors slam, and then they were off.

FOR the next long interval Eros tried to time the passing minutes as they drove. Finally, losing track of his calculations, he gave it up, closing his eyes beneath the bandage across them.

The thug beside him woke Eros by jabbing a gun in his ribs after what might have been minutes or hours later.

Then he was being shoved out of the car and forced across an uneven rocky terrain. He could hear no sounds around him save for his own, and his captors' breathing. But he had a sense of vastness around him that led him to believe they were somewhere out on the desert.

They were pushing him up a flight of wooden steps. Then a key turned in a door and they stepped into a musty room. Eros heard the door bang and lock behind them. Then someone was opening a few windows, while the smell of kerosene came strongly to Eros' nostrils.

"Take his blinkers off," said the voice of one of his captors.

Eros felt hands loosening the bandage around his eyes. Then it was taken away and he found himself blinking bewilderedly in an effort to adjust his eyes to the light.

He was in a small, crudely furnished shack. There was a table in the center

of the room, on which the kerosene lamp flickered brightly, and in the corner were several bunks. In the other corners were a stove, a small, oil burning affair, another bunk, the flat, army cot type, and a small stand against which were leaning three ugly, ominous looking rifles.

"Take off his gag," said a large, exceptionally fat man facing him beside the table. The fat fellow was over six feet tall and his eyes were the only part of him that seemed hard. His features had the stamp of corpulent indulgence.

Hands behind Eros removed the gag from his mouth. Eros turned, staring at a thin, dapper, gray little man wearing a white fedora and grinning unpleasantly.

"What is this all about?" Eros demanded indignantly. "You've taken the money, whoever you are. What else do you want?"

The gray, thin, dapper little man moved over to the table beside his fat comrade. It was the corpulent captor who answered Eros.

"You'll find out, Heartworth," he declared, "in plenty of time."

"But see here," Eros protested. "I haven't harmed a soul. I haven't intended to. You must have the wrong fellow. That is, you must have the wrong man if you want something more than the money I won."

"Yeah," said the fat captor taking out a match and picking his teeth. "Yeah. That money was nice, too."

Eros turned appealingly to the short, thin, gray man. "Look," he said, "all this is ridiculous. Untie me and let me out of here. My hosts, the Keatings, will be wondering what in the devil has become of me. They'll—"

"They won't wonder a thing," the little gray man broke in. "They'll just think you ain't sending telegrams on

your honeymoon, that's all."

EROS made a wry face. "Don't be so stupid. I'm not marr—" His face went suddenly ashen as the full import of the little man's words hit home.

"What did you say?" Eros demanded at the top of his lungs.

"They won't expect no message from neither you nor their daughter. They think you two love boids is on a honeymoon. A sorta elopement, like," the fat captor removed the match from his mouth to announce.

Eros was spluttering futilely, while his spine congealed to ice. This was horrible. This was worse than horrible. This was—. But he had to find out. He had to get to the bottom of this.

"Explain," Eros begged hoarsely. "Explain!"

The fat man pushed a black fedora back on his bald head and explained. "This Keating dame, Kay, disappeared from the Mocambo just after we nabbed youse in the garden and took the dough."

Eros looked blank. "Disappeared?" he asked.

The fat captor nodded. "Yeah. Beat it. Left her folks a note. The note told them she would wire them later and telephone long distance the following morning. The note went on to say that she was eloping, and that dis time it was really love."

"But I didn't elope with her!" Eros wailed. "At least I don't recall having eloped with her!"

The fat captor bit off a piece of his match and chewed on it reflectively for a moment. "No," he agreed. "No, of course you didn't do no such thing. But you disappeared the same time she did. She had been sweet on you and had told her folks she thought she'd nail

you. You was the first young guy her folks ever took a shine to. They were solid for the idea and give the doll their blessing."

Eros groaned, remembering the cat-ate-canary glances that Mr. and Mrs. Keating were exchanging when he and Kay returned to the table from the dance floor. That's why the two elder Keatings had left so obligingly. And that also explained why Kay had been so pleased with the arrangement to meet Eros in the garden. But there was a lot still unexplained.

The corpulent captor obligingly elaborated on these missing details.

"We was detailed—by a person or persons unknown—to wait for youse the first chance we got," the fat captor continued, "and heist the wad of greenbacks you'd won at the tables. We was further told to bring youse directly out here the first chance we got."

"But," protested Eros, returning to his first queries, "what in the world use am I now that my money's gone?"

"That wasn't all the dough youse had," the fat captor reminded him. "There was quite a wad piled away in the bank this afternoon, or I should say yesterday afternoon."

EROS frowned at this. "Why, ah, yes," he said naively. "I do remember that Roger banked about a hundred and seventy-five, no, on second thought, he banked two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars for me yesterday afternoon."

"Which," said the thin, gray, little man, "with the roulette winnings tagged in, amounts to damned near a half a million bucks!" He whistled to punctuate his estimate.

"That's a lotta moola," agreed the fat fellow.

Eros gulped. There was entirely too much greed in evidence around Earth.

Much too much greed, if these gentlemen were standard examples of the breed. He made a mental note to speak to Jove about the situation when he returned to Olympus.

"That is neither here nor there," Eros said stiffly. "The—"

"Neither here nor there," the fat fellow broke in mockingly. "A mere matter of close to half a million ironmen and this guy says it's neither here nor there!" He broke into coarse guffaws.

Light dawned on Eros' face. "You mean," he demanded, "that you people are thinking of holding me here for, for ransom?" His voice rose indignantly on the last word.

The corpulent captor grinned at his thin, gray companion. The little man grinned back.

"You catch on pretty quick, Heartworth," the fat one said.

"You're crazy!" Eros snapped. "I've had about enough of this, this, highway robbery. Let me out of here! Un-loose these bonds!"

The thin little gray man giggled. "He's a card, ain't he?"

"The Keatings will track you down!" Eros thundered.

The fat chap guffawed uproariously.

"It's the blasted principle of the thing," Eros thundered, red-faced, "not the dirty money! You won't get a cent from me!"

"Why not?" the fat fellow asked blandly, tossing his match to the floor.

"I won't pay it. I won't authorize anyone to withdraw it," Eros snapped.

The thin, gray little man giggled again. "That's a scream. He won't pay it!"

"If you wanta stay alive you'll pay it," the fat man said softly.

Eros purpled. This was too much. Who did they think he was? What did they think he— Suddenly this train of thought was jarred quite sickeningly.

He was a god. He couldn't die. At least he never *had* died. But he'd never been to Earth before. Maybe gods were subjected to the same mortality rate as humans when they took Earth tours. Eros gulped uncertainly, frantically searching his memory in an effort to recall if, on any past occasions under circumstances such as this, gods had died on Earth. For the life of him he couldn't remember.

"Well?" said the fat man ominously, "changed your tune?"

Eros felt shaky, but his voice was dogged. "No."

"That's too bad," the thin man giggled.

"Yeah, too bad," the fat one agreed regretfully.

"Listen," Eros said desperately. "This is all a lot of nonsense. You're being much too greedy. You've got a nice share of cash. Why don't you let it go at that?"

"You're a diamond big shot," the fat one said. "You'll have more moola where that came from. You won't lose your shirt over a measly four hundred gees." He smiled ingratiatingly. "Come on now, Heartworth, play ball and we'll have you back in Reno safe and sound in no time."

Eros did a little considering all around. This was a mess. If he gave the rest of his expense money to these thugs he'd be washed up insofar as his continued stay on Earth was concerned. He could drop Jove a line explaining what had happened and ask him for more. But that would be sticking his chin out. He'd never hear the last of it from the boys in the office when he got back to Olympus. On Earth less than twenty-four hours and he'd been taken for every last nickel. Eros had pride and a great sense of godly dignity. He couldn't face that.

But if he paid them, and didn't ask

for more from Jove, he'd be in even a deeper hole. He'd be stranded on Earth without a penny to continue his love promotion campaigns which—he remembered incidentally—were just getting under way in good style. He felt confident that Kay Keating was by now happily married to Vaprenzi, and that in no time at all the news would flood the nation and thousands upon thousands of young damsels who'd been patterning their lives after the glamorous existence of the famed Kay Keating would stop scoffing at love and start getting wed.

The fat captor coughed. "Well?" he inquired ominously.

This brought Eros back to his immediate problem. If he didn't pay up, these two gentlemen, he felt certain, would have no hesitation about killing him.

"Look," Eros said. "Can't I have a little time to think it over?"

The two thugs exchanged dubious glances. The fat one looked back at Eros.

"How much time?" he asked.

"Just, just an hour," Eros asked desperately.

The fat one jerked a thumb at Eros and looked at his thin companion. "Tie him up again," he instructed, "and stuff a gag in his mouth. We'll run into Reno and grab a shot, I need a couple. When we come back, he'll either be willing or headed for a hearse."

CHAPTER VIII

God on the Spot

ONCE again Eros lay sprawled on the floor, feet retied and a gag stuffed into his mouth. This time, however, there wasn't the softening comfort of rich rugs beneath his aching body. The hard dusty boards on which he lay were cold and unyielding.

To say that Eros was as mentally miserable as he was physically would be sheer understatement. His mind was a torrent of shame and anguish. And grope as he might for some solution to his dilemma, he was still in a fog as the time when his captors would return drew inexorably closer.

So involved was Eros in the tangle of his own problem, that he failed to hear the first of the caravan of automobiles that passed along the highway somewhere within a stone's throw of the shack.

However, after five minutes of the motorcade's passing, Eros heard the loud sounds of a steam calliope chortling a merrily unrecognizable tune.

For an instant his heart pounded faster, and he listened eagerly to the sounds of the truck and automobile motors that passed. Then he realized, despairingly, that whatever procession was moving down the highway would undoubtedly be unaware that the lone desert shack they passed contained a bound and gagged young god with a serious problem on his hands.

Nevertheless, out of sheer desperation, Eros threshed about the floor in his bonds, kicking this way and that in an effort, futile though it was, to free himself in time to yelp for help.

The calliope grew fainter and fainter, finally, as did the sound of the caravan's motors, the hope in Eros flickered once and went out completely. Now he realized, for the first time, that he could have summoned them to his aid.

It would have been childishly simple, he saw too late, to have tipped over the table in the center of the room which held the kerosene lamp. The kerosene lamp, on crashing to the floor, would have ignited the tinder-like flooring of the shack and in mere moments the place would have been ablaze.

But the motorcade was past, now, and

on reconsidering the scheme born too late, Eros decided that it was probably just as well he hadn't tried anything as spectacular as all that. After all, he would have remained bound and gagged, and possibly the shack might have burned down before his rescuers got to him.

It was while gloomily deciding on which was better—death by fire or death by bullet—that Eros heard the sound of the automobile off in the distance. An automobile coming down the same highway on which the motorcade had passed.

Again, Eros had a flicker of new-born hope. And again it was rapidly extinguished. This car would pass the shack just as quickly as the motorcade had. Unless he tipped over the lamp.

Eros took a deep breath. He wondered just exactly how far this shack was from the highway. He wondered, too, how quickly the flames would spread about the shack to be noticed from the highway. If he tipped it now, while the car was still approaching, there might be time for it to ignite.

BUT if the car passed, and the lamp were tipped, and Eros remained gagged and bound on the floor. The young god pushed this thought as rapidly from his mind as it had entered. It didn't bolster courage.

Eros edged over to the table. From his position on the floor he looked up once in speculation at the lamp. Then he set his jaw and rolled wildly into the legs of the table.

The table rocked back and forth from the force of Eros' body. The lamp toppled, stayed on the table and then fell forward to the floor. Eros heard the crash of its glass chimney, felt the splatter of kerosene on his face, and waited breathlessly for the blaze.

There was none.

The wick had gone out, for there was nothing but blackness in the shack. The fire hadn't started.

Eros groaned aloud, but it didn't get past his gag.

The sound of the passing automobile's motor came loudly to his ears. Then, suddenly, he heard the screech of none too gently applied brakes.

The car out on the highway was stopping!

Wildly, Eros' heart began to thump.

And then another thought occurred to him. It might be the fat and the thin thugs return. He held his breath. Faintly he heard a car door slam. Then, even more faintly, he heard feet stamping across the rocky terrain. The footsteps were coming toward the cabin!

Minutes turned into small eternities as Eros waited and the footsteps grew louder. Eros could hear a deep voice grumbling to itself now.

Then someone was pounding on the door of the shack.

Eros rolled himself desperately about the floor in an effort to inch over to the door. It was locked, and if the person outside grew aware of that he might move off.

Eros stopped his rolling to pound his feet on the floor of the cabin. But the person outside was pounding much too loudly on the door to make Eros' feeble efforts at return signals audible.

Still twisting himself along like a huge lizard, Eros inched toward the door. The pounding suddenly stopped and a heavy voice cursed.

THEN the person outside was turning the doorknob in an effort to force entry. Eros could hear it rattling. Suddenly a heavy shoulder was thumped into the door and it gave in creakingly, almost snapping the lock shaft through the jamb.

Eros was less than three feet from

the door now, still desperately inching toward it, when the shoulder of the person outside smashed into it again—this time with incredible force.

The door flew every which way in splinters, careening open behind the tremendous assault of the shoulder as it did so. A huge figure, outlined blackly in the night, almost stumbled over Eros as it tripped into the shack!

And then, still cursing loudly, the huge figure struck a match. Eros blinked in the sudden glare of unexpected light.

"Well I'll be damned," said a voice in heavy astonishment. "Well I'll be double damned!"

Eros, who had a wild, impossible glimmer of recognition in connection with the voice, suddenly felt overwhelmed by the same sentiments of astonishment.

The huge figure picked up the kerosene lamp, placed it back on the table, and lighted the soggy wick. The room was suddenly whitely illuminated. The huge figure became clearly visible.

"Eros!" thundered the large intruder wonderingly, "What in the blazes are you doing here?"

Eros tried to answer. His gag quite naturally prevented him from making anything but gurgling noises against it. The mammoth newcomer stepped across the room and swiftly removed the gag from Eros' mouth. Then he dexterously untied the young god's arms, and released his feet by the simple method of snapping the ropes in his huge paws.

Dazedly, Eros climbed to his feet. He was still staring in fascination at the burly figure of his rescuer. The man—he looked more like a creature than a man—was approximately six feet ten inches tall. He wore an expensive camel's hair topcoat and a pearl gray fedora of soft and expensive felt.

Peeking out from under the collar of his massive sports coat was the top of a turtle neck sweater.

The fellow's face was big, wide, and good natured. His ears were slightly cauliflowered, and his big nose somewhat dented. He gave Eros a flashing grin.

"Eros," he repeated, "what in the blazes are you doing here?"

Eros was finally able to speak. "Hercules," he sighed gratefully, "you have no idea how glad I am to see you now!"

CHAPTER IX

Love in Bloom

HERCULES shoved Eros playfully, almost spinning the other young god across the room.

"What's wrong, kid?" Hercules demanded. "Tell me all!"

And Eros told Hercules everything, omitting no details. When he was finished he added several questions to his statements. Questions that sought an explanation of his fellow god's timely appearance at the scene of his abduction.

Hercules grinned. "Didn't you know I was down here for the summer?" he asked. "Didn't you know that Jove gives me a vacation every twenty years or so, and that this year was my vacation year?"

Eros thought a minute. "I forgot it completely," he said. "I thought I was the only one out on a pass."

"Naw," Hercules replied. "I'm with the carnival again this year. It's wunnerful fun, kid."

Eros grinned, recalling that Hercules' earthly vacations invariably consisted of being handed the privilege to tour with a small carnival. Jove granted the muscular god that present inasmuch as Hercules constantly com-

plained that his muscular feats on Olympus were invariably taken for granted and that he should be allowed to soak in the appreciation of earth dwellers now and then as a sop to his vanity. That was why he invariably joined a carnival on his earthly visits. As a strong man, he could get his fill of attention from the earth dwellers and return to Olympus, where he had very little to do but promote health movements, with his ego bolstered enough to last a couple of decades or so.

And the calliope he had heard many minutes ago, passing along the highway, had undoubtedly belonged to Hercules's carnival troupe. Hercules confirmed as much in his next words.

"I was driving like hell, trying to catch up with my show before we got to Reno," Hercules explained, "when my motor just couldn't stand the heat no longer. I stopped at the first shack I came to, which was this, in order to try to get some water."

"Thank heavens," Eros breathed.

Hercules' brows knitted in a frown as he recalled his fellow god's plight. His huge fists knotted angrily, and his good humored face grew wrathful.

"You been taking quite a pushing around, kid," he said angrily. "I don't like it. If these Earth punks think they can get away with shoving a god around, they're crazy."

"Those," Eros said grinningly, "were my sentiments exactly." He paused. "But I couldn't very well tell them I'm a god. And there wasn't much I could do in the face of a gun. Incidentally, Herk, do we gods retain our immortality here on Earth?"

Hercules blinked. "First visit here, ain't it, kid?"

Eros nodded.

"Then you better get this through your noggin, Eros," Hercules answered.

"We ain't immune to death when we're down here. None of us are, except maybe Jove. I don't even know about him. But just remember that in the future, the next time you're looking for trouble."

Eros felt suddenly woozy. It was a bit of a shock to learn so suddenly that you aren't immune to death. Especially after many centuries of such immunity on Olympus.

"Where are these bums that took you here?" Hercules demanded. His eyes flashed around the room.

"They've gone," Eros explained. "But they ought to be due back here pretty darned quickly. Listen, Herk, you won't tell any of the boys in the office about my getting into this jam, will you?"

HERCULES looked noncommittal. His eyes indicated that he considered this situation as ripe for the telling when he got back to Olympus after his vacation.

Eros gulped nervously. Rescue wouldn't mean a thing if this got back to the gods in the office. And then a faint odor came to him.

"Hercules," Eros said suddenly, "I think you'll forget this when you get back to Olympus. I think you'll forget it because I detect the faintest trace of alcohol on your manly young breath!"

Hercules suddenly crimsoned. "Look," he said swiftly. "I won't say a word about this, so 'elp me, Eros. I won't tell a soul!"

Eros grinned in relief. Another problem was eliminated. Hercules would never spill anything about this now. For if he did, Eros could inform Jove that the God of Strength and Health was doing a bit of rumpotting on the sly during his earthly vacation. Jove was very unsympathetic with Hercules whenever he caught him tippling.

"No," Eros agreed curtly. "I don't think you will."

Hercules was prowling about the shack now, noticing the shattered glass chimney of the kerosene lamp, the spilled liquid on the floor. Eros explained what he'd done.

Hercules whistled. "And all the time you didn't really know that you could damned easily die down here."

"I wasn't certain," Eros admitted. "I had to take a chance nevertheless."

Suddenly their conversation was interrupted by the sound of an automobile drawing up near the shack. Eros looked startled. His companion listened grimly.

Hercules jerked his thumb in the direction of the sounds. "Think these'll be the mugs?" he asked.

"Haven't any doubt about it," Eros said. "But they'll have seen your car out on the highway. Watch for something slick. They'll be expecting trouble." He spoke the last sentence in a hoarse whisper, for footsteps were sounding now, coming closer to the shack.

"Go over on the floor," Hercules hissed, "and lie behind the table with just your feet in sight. Wrap a little rope around them like they were when I came in."

Eros moved swiftly and silently, doing as Hercules ordered. Silently, too, the giant god took a place to the side of the door. The sound of the footsteps outside paused. Voices were heard arguing in low suspicious tones.

"Listen in there!" a voice called out. "We got the shack covered with a couple rods. Any wrong moves will be the last!"

Hercules and Eros looked at one another in silence.

"The door's been smashed," said a voice Eros recognized as belonging to the thin, gray little man.

"Yeah." It was the fat hoodlum who answered him. "But that car is out on the highway and nobody ain't in it. Whoever nosed around is probably still there."

Footsteps sounded tentatively on the steps of the shack. A shot was fired through the torn door—apparently just for good measure.

"There's more pellets in this rod!" a voice called out. "Be nice and you won't get 'em in your carcass."

Then a fat, fedora covered head peeped in through the shattered doorway. And Hercules went into action, clamping a headlock around it with one massive arm.

THERE was a scream of pain from the fat hoodlum, and his gun began to go off all over the place. An instant later and he dropped the smoking weapon as Eros leaped to his feet and dashed out the doorway just in time to see the thin gray little thug dashing fearfully toward a limousine.

Eros was as swift as Hercules was tough. He overtook the little gangster just as that worthy was climbing in behind the wheel of the limousine. He fired three shots, point blank, at Eros when he saw him. But Eros had dropped flat to the ground an instant before the first, and was up on his feet and running again after the last one. The thin little thug didn't have a chance. It was concentrate on getting the limousine started, or waste time firing at Eros. He made his mistake in choosing the first expedient.

Eros practically pulled the little thug out of the window of the limousine. And when he'd jolted the gray gunman to the ground, he grabbed his weapon away from him.

When Eros led the little thug back into the shack, Hercules was pounding methodically on the back of the fat

hoodlum's neck with one massive paw while methodically demanding information.

"Who do you work for?" Hercules kept repeating. "Who do you work for?"

The fat gunman was moaning piteously as each of Hercules' blows descended on the back of his almost broken neck with the force of railroad ties.

Hercules looked up. "I'm questioning," he announced.

"Okay, okay," the fat thug suddenly screamed. "Fergawdsakes don't chop my damned head off with that palm of yours!"

Hercules stopped thumping and listened attentively.

"Vaprenzi, he's our boss!" the fat hoodlum squealed.

Eros released the quavering little lump that had been the thin gray gunman. He blinked in astonishment at the other thug's words.

"Vaprenzi!" Eros gasped. His face turned deathly white.

Hercules looked sharply at him. "What's the trouble? Didn't you think he did it?"

Eros shook his head. "Good heavens, no," Eros babbled. "Why, that means that he's absolutely no good. He's literally a crook. I just thought he was a trifle dishonest and in a somewhat shady racket. I thought that his marriage to Kay Keating would turn him into a nice guy. Love conquers all, and all that sort of thing."

"Those damned slogans of yours will be the death of me yet," Hercules winced. "Sometimes I actually think you believe them yourself."

Eros gave him an indignant glance, disregarding his insult as he went on. "This is awful. It throws all my plans into a cocked hat. You see what it'll do? Thousands and thousands of

girls and young women, in high schools, in colleges, in factories, in shops, all follow with avid interest the goings-on of Kay Keating, America's glamour deb. If she'd had a normal marriage they'd all have followed suit. It would have been the biggest boon to my department since Adam fell for Eve."

"But," protested Hercules bewilderedly, "she's married anyway, and that's something."

"Something!" Eros exploded despairingly. "I'll say it's something. It's horrible, that's what it is. Don't you see? She married a crook, which means it'll last for a month at the most. A divorce on the part of Kay Keating would have every still young, and every would-be still young housewife in the country trying to imitate her!" Eros' voice had risen to an hysterical wail.

Hercules shook his head. "Yeah," he said softly. "That's as bad as you say it is."

"We have to do something," Eros wailed, "but quick!"

HERCULES dragged the fat gunman over to where his small companion cringed against the wall. Thoughtfully, almost automatically, he banged both their heads together with a sickening *clack*. They both slumped to the floor, out cold.

"Yeah," said Hercules solemnly, dusting off his hands and not bothering to look back at his victims. "Yeah, we gotta do something all right, all right."

Eros looked at the two gunman. "They'll stay here for a while," he decided. "Besides, they won't make any more trouble."

Hercules read his thoughts and was moving down the steps before Eros got to the doorway of the shack. "We'll borrow their jalopy," Hercules said over his shoulder. "Mine still needs water

for the motor."

They were inside the big limousine, then, Hercules behind the wheel. He turned to Eros. "Where do we go to start doing something?" he asked.

Eros thought a moment. "If two people are going to elope from Reno," he asked, "where is the most logical, the quickest place for them to go?"

Hercules thought a moment. "That's easy," he said. "I know the town."

"How far is it away?" Eros asked desperately.

Hercules turned the car toward the highway, gunning the motor. He thought an instant. "Five minutes, the way I'll make it," he grunted. "It's back in the direction I came from."

Hercules was guilty of exaggeration, Eros realized in the next few minutes, as the gigantic god whipped the limousine up into a frenzied rate of speed. Guilty of exaggerating the time it would take to arrive at their destination. On the steeper grades and more dangerous curves, Hercules slowed down to eighty-five or ninety.

"On Earth we can die even as mortals," Eros reminded him on at least two occasions.

But finally the lights of a sleepy little village were blinking in the distance. And then, before another minute had passed, Hercules was slowing the car to about seventy miles an hour as they reached the outskirts of the town.

On every side of the roadways Eros saw signs flashing past which read, "BEST WEDDINGS IN TOWN, REASONABLE," or, "JUSTICE VARIWANTS TO MARRY YOU," and so on *ad infinitum*. This town was in strange contrast, Eros thought approvingly, to the not so distant Reno.

"Regular marrying mill, here," Hercules commented. "And there's only one hotel. We'll head right for that."

"It's our best chance," Eros said.

A minute later they stopped with a screech of brakes before a large frame, old-fashioned hostelry. The sign on the front read "LOVER'S NEST HOTEL."

They woke a desk clerk in the lobby who looked at them startledly and blinked.

"Look," Eros demanded immediately. "I don't want any time wasted. "Is Miss Kay Keating staying at this hotel tonight?"

The clerk blinked owlshly.

Hercules shoved in front of him. "Speak up," he growled.

The clerk gulped and nodded his head. "If you mean the heiress, we're not allowed to give any such information, but she's here—sir."

"What room?" Hercules growled menacingly.

The clerk gulped again. "Really, sir. I mean, after all—"

"What room?" Eros demanded.

"The bridal suite, third floor," croaked the clerk almost tearfully. "But I beg you gentlemen, please, not to—"

HERCULES was already dashing up the dusty stairs, scorning the ancient elevator which was empty and apparently operated by the desk clerk. Eros followed swiftly behind them.

"This must be it," Hercules hissed hoarsely on the third floor corridor as he stood before the only room entrance that had double doors.

Eros nodded. Hercules put his shoulder to the door.

"Knock, you big lummo," Eros whispered. "You can't break down every door in the state."

Hercules knocked.

There was the sound of footsteps from inside. They could hear a radio playing faintly. Eros wondered precisely what he thought he was going to

do when he confronted Vaprenzi. He decided to act on instinct. It was all he could think of.

"Who's there?" asked a voice.

"Might be the bellboy," said a feminine voice, and Eros recognized it as belonging to Kay Keating. "Let him in, honey."

The door swung open.

Eros gasped. Hercules made a preparatory growling noise in his throat.

Roger, the Keating butler, stood facing them. Kay Keating stood behind him. Both of them looked puzzledly at Eros and Hercules.

"Why, Mr. Heartworth," Roger said, amazed.

"Eros!" Kay Keating screeched excitedly.

Eros could only blink.

"He's come to be the very first to wish us happiness and good luck, Roger," Kay Keating was exclaiming delightedly. "Isn't that sweet of him!"

"Yes," said Roger doubtfully. "Yes, I suppose it is."

At last Eros could form words. He spoke to Kay. "You, you married Roger?" he gasped.

"Yes, isn't it romantic?" Kay squealed. "He's been in love with me all along and had never dared speak his mind. Difference in station and all that sort of thing. It wasn't until you ran away from us in the garden, and Roger started to follow you, and I started to follow also, that I realized I loved Roger. Everything seemed to go up in a big blaze, like lightning or something, and all at once I knew. I tripped on him, and he picked me up. We looked at each other, and it was LOVE AT LAST!"

"Remarkable," Eros gulped. "Really remarkable." He was thinking swiftly, desperately, putting the pieces together. The heart rays had started working after Kay tried to follow Roger

and himself from the garden. They'd started working when Roger lifted Kay to her feet after she tripped on him. That explained why she was here, married to Roger instead of Vaprenzi.

Eros felt a vast overwhelming surge of wild relief. This was magnificent. This was more than he had ever hoped for. Here was Kay Keating setting an example for all the high school, college, shop and factory girls in the nation to follow. Here was Kay Keating showing that Love Was Not A Matter Of Money. Here was Kay Keating showing LOVE CONQUERING ALL.

Eros beamed. "Bless you, my children," he said. "Bless you both."

"Thank you," Roger said.

"Good night," Eros said happily. "Good night and luck to you both."

Kay Keating shrilled a farewell after him, and Roger said something lamely, and they shut the door.

In the lobby, passing the clerk's desk, Eros told the scared and shocked guardian of the ledger, "Thanks, old man. Just wanted to pay our respects to the happy couple."

They went out and got into the car.

"Look," said Hercules bewilderedly. "I take it that wasn't Vaprenzi at all."

Eros smiled, and explained. When he had finished, Hercules shook his head admiringly. "You sure have luck, Eros," he said.

Eros nodded. Then a sudden worried look crossed his face. "You don't think she'll fall out of love, do you? It would have a terrible effect on all the swell propaganda it's produced."

"Naw," Hercules answered. "All they need is a family, now, and they'll stay hitched."

Eros nodded, satisfied. "Remind me," he said, "to drop a note to the Goddess of Fertility after we get back to Reno and pick up the money Vaprenzi stole."

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Concluded from page 7)

The Japs will establish bridgeheads on the Australian continent itself. Port Moresby will fall. New Guinea will be overrun. But definitely this will all be a feint. The real danger will be to India. And if it falls, all of Africa, and southern Russia will be lost. The greatest danger is not the fall of Australia, but its isolation by reason of severing of lines of communication from both east and west. However, MacArthur will see this danger, and his defense of Australia will not be a "defense" but an offense which may create enough diversion to forestall complete success of the Jap drive through India.

NEXT month we plan to run a sensational article by Julius Schwartz, called "Can We Foretell the Future?" Don't miss it, because the principles contained in it are the same that we are using in these predictions. You can do it yourself, and next month Mr. Schwartz will tell you how.

WHILE we're talking of the future, the next cover painting will be by J. Allen St. John, painted without a story available. The cover was then given to Don Wilcox, who wrote a short novel around it. We feel that Don has written his most fascinating and unusual fantasy in this one. And we do know that St. John has painted his finest cover in many a moon. Originally the cover was inspired by the legend of Jupiter and Leda. Jupiter, you may remember, fell in love with an Earth girl named Leda, but he couldn't seem to manage a date. So finally, in desperation, he gave her wings, and she flew up to the home of the gods to keep her rendezvous with him. As we remember, it didn't pan out so well, and a lot of sad things happened. Of course Leda was the woman who paid and paid. However, in Don's story, the man has the wings, and things turn out quite differently. You'll enjoy this one.

BY THE way, have you seen our new companion magazine "Mammoth Detective" yet? If you haven't, you'd better hike over to the newsstand and get a copy while there are some left. Julian Krupa is among its illustrators, and since he's joined the marines, here are a few "lasts" you can add to your art collection of your favorite artist. But beyond that, readers are telling us we've scored again, and there's real entertainment between its pages.

THE glad news comes from Nelson S. Bond that a new serial is under construction. It's just a hint of many hours of fine reading in a few months. Bond has made a hit with every long

story he's ever written. And although we've seen only the first two chapters, that's enough. We can definitely say—here's one we can hardly wait to finish reading!

YOU old-time readers of fantasy and science fiction had better read the following sentences carefully. Our companion magazine, *Amazing Stories*, features in its July issue, on sale May 8, one of the most famous and well-liked characters ever to hit the fantasy public's fancy. All we'll have to do is mention the name Hawk Carse, and follow it with the name Anthony Gilmore, and we need say no more.

Don't you dare miss that issue! You'll meet Kui Sui, the cleverest scoundrel in all the universe, and all the old characters who made Anthony Gilmore a name to conjure with. Now, after ten long years, we've secured this author for you, and he promises to give us a whole series of stories about that great man of space, Hawk Carse.

OUR next issue features a new novel by William P. McGivern called "Safari To The Lost Ages." For you readers who like time-travel yarns, mark this one down in your notebook for attention. It's a truly fascinating story with some new angles on time travel. Also it's one of the most gripping yarns we've read recently. Action plus!

HAVE you noticed the recent illustrations by Magarian? Good, aren't they? We're very much pleased by the work Magarian is doing, and there'll be more—much more!

PERHAPS the most popular feature of both our magazines is the cartoon policy. But we've come to the conclusion that science and fantasy cartoons are about the hardest thing to dig out that we've ever tried to unearth. Accordingly we are instituting a new policy. We will gladly tear out one of our hairs for each acceptable idea the readers send in (plus paying you our regular rates). If we ultimately became bald, it will be worth it! What's the matter with cartoonists? Have they no imagination? Come on, you readers. If they can't figure out ideas, let's step into the breach and supply them with enough to keep a steady flow of them coming up.

RECENTLY we forecast a new and super novel by David V. Reed. To date, we have been patiently waiting for a finished draft. And to date Mr. Reed has been stalling us along. We hereby vote him the most lazy and unreliable writer on our staff—even if he is one of the best! Come on, Dave, you have no right to keep the readers waiting. And especially your editor, who wants to finish reading the last half of the story. We read the first half when we were in New York around New Year, and it fascinated us. From New Year to now is too long!

Rap



"Your theory had better be true, Professor, or you die!

The SUN DOOM

by STANTON A. COBLENTZ

Professor Kraft's theory was sensational. It could only be a theory. But this mad dictator demanded that it become a fact!

JOHANN EMANUEL KRAFT, the world-famous astro-physicist, stood peering out into the darkness through the three-inch slit of his cell. His long gray beard was ragged and dirty; his hands, with their filth-encrusted fingers, were weazened and claw-like; his grimy tatters of clothes, seamed and fissured in a hundred places, were all that was left of the sleek suit in which he had come to the Concentration Camp thirteen months before.

With a sigh, he settled down on his straw pallet in the dimness just beyond the door; and wondered for the thousandth time what nasty trick of fate had thrown him behind the bars. His interests had been wholly with the celestial bodies; he had cared nothing for politics; and even the rise to power of that most evil of rulers, Narlith, the "bloody Chancellor," had not seemed to affect him, although it had filled the land with fire and terror. And then one day a company of the dictator's Gray Troopers had called for him; and he had been brought here without trial, without explanation, and without the ability to communicate with his wife and three little ones.

Thoughtfully the prisoner rubbed

one scarred hand over a cheek disfigured with new-made wounds. It was not so much for his own sake that he rued his captivity as for Elsa and her priceless three. And for his work also he mourned—had he not made discoveries that would have been world-shaking, revolutionary? As time on time before, he clenched his fists and swore a bitter oath that, if ever the chance came, he would make Narlith pay dearly for his crimes. But, of course, the chance never would come, for who ever returned from the steel portals of Gratznau?

"Prisoner 1198, this way!"

He was startled by the snapping command of the jailor; startled still more when the heavy door clanged open and he beheld two guards looming in the thick twilight of the corridor.

Cold fear crept over him. Often, from adjoining cells, he had heard protesting inmates dragged. He had listened to their cries gradually choked and fading out as they were jostled away; then, after a matter of minutes, he had heard shots ringing out from the courtyard. Constantly, in his own thoughts, he had steeled himself for just such a summons; but, now that it had come, he found himself still un-

prepared.

"This way! Quick, you hound! We haven't all day to waste on vermin!"

A heavy boot assisted him along the corridor.

But after all, he asked himself, should he not be glad of the turn of events? One swift merciful shot—was it not to be preferred to the unending foulness of the cell?

And so, though his heart fluttered wildly, he did his best to check the trembling of his legs. A minute later, they had come out into the sunlight—a November sunlight so bright that he reeled and had to shade his eyes; for not in more than a year had he known anything but shadows.

From beneath his almost closed lids, he could not see the expected firing squad; nor did he at first observe the airplane that lay in waiting in the vast courtyard. He had been shoved through the doorway before he became aware of its existence; and, once within, he felt blindfolding hands reaching around his head. Then he heard swift orders snapped out; and, after an interval, listened to the droning of motors, and felt the plane jerking along the field and into the air.

FOR a long while, it seemed—actually, for over three hours—the flight continued. He would have been astonished could he have gazed below, and seen the armies deploying with great ugly columns of tanks, and the blackened countrysides with their smoking pyres where great cities had been. But, fortunately, he was spared all knowledge of this, while occupying himself by wondering futilely, what was happening to him? Was he being borne to a fate worse than death? Or, on the other hand, could it be that he was being rescued, and that Narlith had been overthrown? But no! For, in that

case, would he have been cuffed and blindfolded?

It was with relief that he finally felt the plane being jolted to rest. Then, when the bandages had been removed from his eyes and he had gradually adjusted himself to the light, he found that he was in a mountain valley, beneath towering snow-peaks. All about him, surrounding the landing field, rose the dark spires of a pine forest—a forest into which he was borne by automobile along a winding slushy road.

A few minutes later, they halted before the ancient timbered walls of a nobleman's hunting lodge; and were hurried inside this castle-like edifice. In the huge central room, before the blazing fire that shed an uncanny illumination across walls adorned with antlers and wolf-heads, Kraft was to receive the surprise of his life.

Among the half dozen hard-faced, grim-looking men who stood about the fireplace, there was one whom he recognized only too well. True, he had never seen the man before; but had any mortal's features ever been photographed so often as that small, spiteful, acidulated countenance, with the comic-opera flat black hair and wispy moustache, and the dull eyes that now and then took fire with a mad-dog glitter?

The great astro-physicist sagged beneath the impact of that shock. He stood face to face with his chief enemy, Ferdinand Narlith, the Supreme Juke of the powerful nation of Elmania!

A SHARP poke in the ribs, from one of the guards, brought him to a realization of the proprieties of the situation. "Say, Hail Narlith!" the attendant whispered into his ear.

"Hail, Narlith!" the victim repeated, feebly.

The Juke glared at him. Kraft no-

ticed that his face was much more lined than in the photographs; that there were blue hollows beneath his eyes. "I have the honor of addressing Johann Emanuel Kraft?" he rumbled.

"That is my name." But the prisoner could not bring to his lips the terms of respect which, he knew, courtesy demanded.

"Say, Excellency!" prompted the guard.

"Excellency!" mumbled Kraft, weakly.

But Narlith was evidently preoccupied—so much so that he did not appear to notice a rudeness that, under other circumstances, might have cost the offender his neck.

"I understand, sir," went on the ruler, while tapping nervously at his chest, "that you are the author of the so-called thermomolecular solar hypothesis?"

The scientist stared at the dictator, in a daze. Among Narlith's many pursuits, interest in astro-physical theories had never played a prominent part!

"I believe you once wrote the following," declared the Juke, snapping up a printed sheet handed him by an attendant. And he read:

"There is reason to suppose that the internal equilibrium of the sun is maintained by a very exact balance of forces. On the one hand, the terrific pressure of gravity tends to draw the globe's entire content downward and inward. On the other hand, the tendency of atoms to disintegrate and fly apart, under extreme conditions of heat and chemical activity, counteracts the effect of gravity. The possibilities are explosive. In fact, we see the same potentialities constantly in the flaring up of *novae* or new stars, probably representing suns that have blown up.

"If the solar gravity were relaxed by even a small fraction of one per cent,

or if the force of the dissociating atoms were accelerated in the slightest appreciable degree, the age-old balance of our own sun would be destroyed, and the long-pinioned energies would vomit forth in such an eruption that life on all the planets, including the earth, would almost instantly be annihilated."

In unrelieved amazement, Kraft heard these words which he had contributed to a scientific journal shortly before his incarceration.

"Do you still believe these statements?" demanded Narlith.

"I see no reason not to."

The sovereign read on:

"Moreover, it would be possible, by earthly means, to upset the ancient equilibrium. I myself have invented a ray—named the Austra-beam, after a scientific colleague—which accelerates the process of atomic disintegration even at the sun's distance of ninety-three million miles. Applied consistently and strongly enough, this ray would possibly—indeed, I would say, positively—upset the old coordination of forces, and cause an atomic upheaval accompanied by such blasts of heat that life throughout the Solar System would become impossible."

The Juke paused. "Those are also your words?"

"I cannot deny them. But, if you will pardon me, I fail to understand—"

"You still believe in this theory?"

"It is more than a theory."

Narlith chuckled. His face, in the glow of the fire, had taken on an almost fiendish expression. Near him his attendants remained statue-still, their features grim, almost saturnine. "Perhaps you know, sir, your views were the reason we had to—well, lock you up for your own protection?"

KRAFT had always suspected that Narlith was crazy. But now he

knew.

"Yes, for your own protection," continued the Juke, "and in order to make sure that our enemies would not capture your secret."

"But my God, sir," broke out the scientist, even though he knew how foolish it was to argue with a lunatic, "what under heaven do you suppose our enemies would do with my secret?"

Again the dictator chuckled — chuckled slyly, evilly, with a slimy smirk. "Naturally, they would do just as I will."

"I simply don't follow you."

"Did you not say you could cause the sun to erupt and destroy all life on earth?"

"I did. But, of course—" Kraft paused, and stared at his master, dumbfounded. An idea so wild, so monstrous, so diabolical had come into his head that he reeled, and almost fell. But as he stared into the maniacally gleaming eyes of the Juke, he received confirmation of his worst surmises.

"Let me explain," went on Narlith. "Not that I usually explain anything to anybody—folks should be guided by their intuitions, the way I am. But you may be able to work better if you understand all. I have a most important duty for you to perform, Mr. Professor!"

Kraft did not like the slurring accent with which the dictator referred to his former occupation. But still less did he like the wild-beast glitter in the ruler's eyes.

"Doubtless you know nothing of war developments during the last year?"

"How should I know? Prison walls have no tongues."

"Then you haven't heard how those bullies and traitors of Muskovians counter-attacked and drove us out after we won half their country? It was against all the rules. Worst of all, they

and their murderous allies the Anglams have invaded our land, without any provocation except that we tried to invade them first. They don't appreciate the rights of the Master-Race. In fact, they have so little sense of fair play that they have surrounded and wiped out our best armies—the inhuman devils! Our brave boys still resist, but it can't last much longer. Those foul-hearted fiends have laid siege to our Capital. When they conquer it, they will attempt to spy out my hiding-place, and to capture me—me, the Juke, the world's most eminent leader!"

DURING this recital, Kraft had tried his best to appear distressed, but he could not quite keep back his exaltation that at last the dictator was meeting his match.

The Juke had begun to rage excitedly about the room. "But they will never take me alive!" he hissed, his lips curling like an enraged dog's. "Never! If I have to die, they will die with me! Yes, they and the whole world! The forests will go up in cinders! The very continents will crack and melt! Nothing will be left—nothing but flame, flame, flame! No one will ever live to say the proud head of the Juke has been humbled!"

His voice had risen to a scream; his hands waved and shook like a barnstorming actor's in a scene of high melodrama.

"That is why I have called on you—to help me, Mr. Professor! I have fitted up a laboratory where you may work! You must make all speed—such speed as no man ever used before! You must throw forth your ray, and blow up the sun—the sun, and the whole earth with it! We will all die together in one glorious conflagration! Then, and and then only, will the Juke be avenged!"

The ruler threw back his head, and

laughed—laughed long and horribly. Meanwhile, in Kraft's appalled mind, a rapid decision was forming. Sooner than perform the unthinkable deed that Narlith asked, he would endure any torture, any suffering.

"How long will it take you?" demanded the Juke, in a bellow.

"I am sorry. I have to refuse."

Terrible to see was the wrath of the ruler. He stormed about the room in a tantrum; foam gathered on his lips; his arms shook uncontrollably; and, for an instant, he seemed on the point of grasping Kraft by the neck and trying to throttle him.

But almost as swiftly as the tempest arose, it died down. Narlith became composed again, with a composure that was almost more fearful than his rage.

"Very well," he acknowledged, with a faint rumbling in his voice and a glare in his eyes, "you are a free man. Every man in Elmania is free. Make your own choice. We will send you back to Gratznau to think it over. When your body has been beaten by rubber clubs and steel rods, and stung by drugs worse than serpents' bites, possibly you will change your mind."

A guard had stepped forward and clapped heavy hands upon the victim's shoulders. The rattle of handcuffs startled the air.

But Kraft merely smiled grimly. He had known what was coming, and was ready to face it.

"One thing more!" snarled Narlith. In the quietness of his manner there was something so insinuatingly unpleasant that the prisoner trembled, knowing that his enemy's trump card was yet to be played.

"I understand, Mr. Professor, that you have a wife. Also two young sons and a daughter. I suppose you would like them to remain alive and well?"

The victim felt something within him

crumbling. He staggered, and leaned against an oaken bench for support.

"I take it that they would not enjoy the fire-and-sulphur cure?"

Too well Kraft knew what this meant. He had heard the fire-and-sulphur cure mentioned in horrified whispers as the most ingenious and terrible torture ever invented—something that no human body and mind could survive.

Beneath his own anguish, Kraft felt sure, he would not crack. But that his Elsa, his little Pauline, his tiny Fred and Carl should be racked by such barbarities—what father with a heart in his breast could endure the thought? It seemed to him that it was not his own voice but some stunned being outside of himself that spoke as, tottering deliriously down upon the bench, he heard the words, "I—I—only spare them, and I will do all you ask!"

CLAD in the new work suit that had replaced his prison rags, Kraft was busy in the laboratory adjoining the hunting lodge.

Great masses of electrical equipment lay heaped about him. Motors buzzed; little wheels clicked and clattered. Vari-colored lenses gleamed on a table at his side, amid cylinders like enlarged radio tubes. But the central apparatus was a black contrivance shaped like a great telescope; more than a score of feet long by a yard in width, it shot upward through a slit in the ceiling. At its lower end was a concentration of wires connecting with a clockwork device, a little beneath an eyepiece like that of a telescope.

The scientist sighed as he worked; and the sweat rolled down his brow. All his movements were slow and deliberate, those of a man to whom time is nothing. There were long rest periods between each two actions; and had it not been for the guards, one of whom

now and then poked a bayonet provokingly in his direction, those rest periods would have been even longer.

After a time, the door swung open. An armed escort thundered through; then, saluting, made way for the glowering figure of Narlith.

Even as he entered, it was evident that he was in a black mood. He glared accusingly at Kraft. "What progress today?" he screeched almost before he was in the room.

"I am working with all speed, Excellency," stated the prisoner, who, with an effort, had schooled himself to use the customary term of address. "But there are technical difficulties—"

"Technical difficulties? By my bootstrap, you cannot put me off with lies! Here it is more than a month already, and we are getting nowhere!"

"Just a few days more, Excellency!"

"A few days more? Are you crazy? We have not all the time in creation!"

The Juke's nostrils expanded like those of an enraged bull. His eyes shot out twisted gleams that accentuated his appearance of madness. A froth came to his lips, and drooled down his chin.

"By Thor! Do you not understand?" he shouted, banging his fist repeatedly upon the table, until several of the lenses were jarred off and clattered in fragments to the floor. "Those curs—the Muskovians and Anglams, they are already in the Capital! The lice look for me everywhere! If they find my hiding-place—"

Narlith paused, and made an eloquent slashing gesture with one hand.

"We have not a day to lose! No, not an hour if we are to carry out our plans before too late!"

Kraft shrank to the further side of the table, and leaned against the great black tube for support. He was both encouraged and terrified. That the Muskovians and Anglams were in the

Capital—that was the best news in many a day! Yet what could be more appalling than that Narlith had escaped their clutches? Now it would be impossible for Kraft to carry on his policy of deliberate small delays, by which thus far he had put off the execution of the Juke's terrible scheme.

"I give you one more day!" shrieked the ruler, shaking with emotion. "Just one more day! Mark this well! If you cannot succeed in that time, by my helmet! I will take no further chance of waiting to be captured by those villainous Anglams. I will seek refuge elsewhere, and it will be the fire-and-sulphur cure for you, my friend, and all your family—yes, and for your old father and mother, too! We will wipe out the tribe of you!"

"But, Excellency—"

"Silence! I take no back-talk! By tomorrow at this time, unless my intuitions fail me, you will have done what I ask!"

THE unfortunate man opened his mouth in a further attempt at protest. But the cold point of a bayonet warningly pricked the skin above his ribs.

"Yes, you will do what I ask!" rushed on the Juke, flinging back his head in a maniacal burst of laughter. "And then—brimstone and fire! The earth will make a beautiful torch! Observers on other stars will smile to watch it! 'How lovely!' they will say. If they are wise, they will know that it is I—I, Narlith, the earth's greatest leader, giving an exhibition for the cosmos as I bow my way off the stage!"

His laughter still rang out, louder and eerier than ever. Desperate, the victim thrust himself forward once more. "But, Excellency—"

This time the sabre-thrust was more than a prick. Groaning, Kraft fell back.

But in his ears dinned the words of the enemy:

"Twenty-four hours you have! It is enough! Work night and day, my friend! Night and day! After that, you will never have to work again!"

There came one last frenzied peal of laughter; then a steel door clattered to a close; and the tramping of many feet gradually died away.

STAUNCHING the flow of blood above his ribs, the stunned scientist turned back to the laboratory machinery. Only too well he knew that he could indeed accomplish Narlith's aim within twenty-four hours; that, in fact, he could have accomplished it already. Did the Juke, by some psychic intuition, realize this? Or was it that he had been driven frantic by his own despair? In any case, Kraft told himself, what was done to him would not matter in the long run; even what was done to those he loved would not matter—although he still could not bear to think of their coming to harm. Yet what man, however bitter the cost of refusal, had the right to destroy the earth? Oh, why had he been idiotic enough to reveal his discovery?

But there was no help for that now. Was there not, in any case, some way to trick the Juke—some way to pretend compliance with his demands? For several hours, while Kraft labored mechanically, his brow was wrinkled with thought. But it was long before the perplexity, the despair registered by his features gave place to a faint, grim smile.

Any watcher would have known, from his expression, that he was as a man clutching at a straw. But shortly after nightfall a quickening, an intensification of his efforts might have been noted. A continuous, vigorous whirring might have been heard from the wires

connecting with the great telescope-like tube. Sparks might have been seen flashing from the connections. And out-of-doors, where the muzzle of the tube projected above the roof like the snout of a huge howitzer, a vague crimson glow might have been observed. But that was all. There would have been nothing to show why his whole frame shook with nervous tenseness; why his lips quivered as he placed himself at the eyepiece of the instrument or examined the clockwork device; nor why his countenance, from time to time, still took on that faint, grim smile.

All through the night he worked. His manner was jerky, excited, hurried; he was continually making observations, continually adjusting the instruments. The guards, reporting to Narlith, bore the message, "He seems to be carrying out your orders, Excellency!"

Only at dawn did he cease his activities, and, throwing himself down upon a couch, try to snatch a few hours of sleep. . . . In this effort he was unsuccessful; long before noon he was up again, ranging impatiently about the room, and glancing continually at his watch, although Narlith was not due until afternoon. Why was it that, with eagerness in his bloodshot eyes, he would stare so often out of the window, down the forest road whitened with the snow that had just begun to fall? Why would he peer into the heavens, as if he expected their wide vacancies to open and a prodigy to spring forth? Why had he become so absent-minded that he did not notice the food an attendant had placed at his side?

The hours wore away . . . until exactly twenty-four had passed since the Juke's visit. Kraft once more consulted his watch; and, even as he did so, he uttered a muffled groan; and his thin, pale face, with its haunted expression, appeared even thinner and paler than

usual.

"Hail Narlith! Hail Narlith! His Excellency approaches!"

So silently had the party come that Kraft had not heard the crunching of automobile tires against the snowy sod. Now, automatically, he bowed; or, rather, it seemed to him that something within him crumbled, causing him to collapse to the floor.

Yet, for the last time, he glanced wistfully toward the window, with eyes that seemed to entreat for something fervently desired.

The door burst open. The Juke's personal guard stamped in with a martial thump, thump, thump. Then the pale face of Narlith himself appeared. He did not waste time on formalities. But, coming straight to the astrophysicist, he demanded:

"Well, my friend, have you done it?"

THE captive coughed, and cleared his throat. His lips were dry; his throat seemed about to crack. Somehow, all he could force out was an incoherent gurgling.

"Do you hear me?" snorted the Juke. "I want to know, have you done it?"

Another long silence. Then, in a voice that did not seem to be his own, Kraft dragged out the words:

"I am doing it, Excellency."

"Doing it? I want to know, is it done? Are you ready to annihilate the sun and earth?"

"Nearly ready, Excellency. There are still some minor tests to make. If you will give me time—two or three hours—perhaps even one—"

"By the blood of my enemies! Have I not already given you time enough? No, not another hour! Not another minute!"

"But, Excellency, it is necessary—"

"Nothing is necessary but what I order! I see it in your eyes, you filthy

coward and traitor, you are only playing for time! You *can* carry out my commands—and, by Thor, you must and will!"

Kraft bowed his head. But his teeth were gritted.

The dictator snapped out his watch. Turning to the Captain of the Guard, he said, "It is now five minutes before the hour. We will give him till the hand is on the hour. If then he has not made up his mind, you will order the fire-and-sulphur cure for his family. As for himself—the fire-and-sulphur cure is too merciful!"

The threatened man made no reply. But despairingly he lifted up his eyes, as if to plead with an unresponsive Providence. His lips moved faintly, as if in prayer. And the moments ticked by in silence.

Five minutes are not long, as the clock counts time. But to the sufferer, as on the one hand he pictured the world engulfed in flames, and, on the other, saw his loved ones writhing in agony, that brief period embraced tortured eternities. It seemed long afterwards when he heard the Juke's words, harsh and decisive ringing in his tortured thoughts.

"Time up!"

He wished to avoid his enemy's gaze, but that malevolently scowling face was turned upon him with a tigerish intensity.

"Well, what is your decision, Mr. Professor?"

"There is nothing to decide. I need more time."

"Seize him, men!"

The arms of the guards closed about him; he heard a rattling of steel, and felt the biting metal cut into his wrists; while rudely a bandage was forced over his eyes.

"Away with him, to the lower dungeons of Grulin!"

THE victim may have winced, as he heard mention of this most ill-famed of torture chambers, but he gave no hint of his feelings as the guards jerked and pushed him toward the door.

The portals swung open, and a breath of snow-laden air blew in. But why was it that the guards suddenly halted? Why did they stand stock-still, as if petrified? Why did little astonished gasps escape their lips? Why that sudden, sharp cry from Narlith?

In the tenseness of that moment, the prisoner felt himself unexpectedly released. And despite the fetters on his hands, he was able, by a jerking arm-motion, to knock the bandage off his eyes.

As he did so, he too let out a gasp. But it was a gasp not of terror, but of stunning, incredulous joy. Could he be dreaming, or was it true that he was staring at lines of helmeted men? Men who, ranged many layers deep, had been creeping up at the forest edge? Was that the actual gleam of bayonets in the blue-gray dusk of the woods? And did he see, waved on high above the assaulting ranks, the red and golden emblem of the Anglams?

Yes! It was real, it was not a dream! The helmeted ones had swept forward; shots had rung out; Narlith's guards, attempting to flee, had fallen beneath the surrounding columns. And the Juke himself, shouting oaths and curses and screeching like a wildcat, had been caught in two stout pairs of arms, and tied with ropes; after which he broke down, and wept like a woman. No mild St. Helena was in store for him!

"Who was it sent out the alarm?" demanded Colonel Edgemont, of the invaders, as he glanced inquiringly at Kraft. "Who flashed those messages to our astronomers?"

Then it was that, in exultation, the astro-physicist realized that his scheme

had worked—had worked far better than he had dared to expect. It had been merely on a wild hope that he had fastened the Austra-beam on a certain spot in the constellation of Cassiopeia, in which he knew that a periodic comet was due to appear, so making it certain that astronomical cameras would be photographing the region. He had thought it possible that the Austra-beam, though invisible to the human eye, could be picked up by the camera's sensitive lens, after the manner of many remote stars and nebulae. And so, aided by the clockwork mechanism, he had focused the beams all through the night on the chosen spot. He had woven them into the pattern of a gigantic "S. O. S." And he had shaped arrow-like beams, pointing down from those letters toward his prison.

"It took all day to find you," stated the Colonel, after Kraft had admitted sending out the alarm. "Astronomers in seven countries reported photographing the S. O. S. Their calculations indicated its point of origin within twenty miles. We guessed its military nature—and knew it was important. But no one suspected what a prize awaited us."

Narlith snarled like a captive wild-beast; while two soldiers bound his wrists with the handcuffs just removed from his intended victim.

"You will receive the International Gold Medal of Valor for the capture of World Enemy Number 1," the Colonel promised. "You will be renowned the world over—"

But Kraft scarcely heard him. He was rejoicing that Elsa and his dear ones need no longer fear the fire-and-sulphur cure. And he was glowing in the knowledge that science—the impractical science of astronomy!—had vanquished brute force and saved the earth from the most Satanic peril in all.



Mr Hibbard's **MAGIC HAT**

"C'mere, dang ya!" snarled
Hibbard, in pursuit of the hat

Mr. Hibbard, bum, became quite a different man when he wore this new hat. It seemed to have a magic quality that gave him new powers!

by
JOHN YORK CABOT

THERE were some people who called Herbert Hibbard a bum, and it is just quite possible that they were right. Certain it was, that Mr. Hibbard's fondness for hard toil and honest employment could not compare to love of leisure and bottled delights.

And even in Herbert Hibbard's neighborhood, which was most certainly a squalid and poverty ridden section of town, he was not considered a successful, or even respectable, man.

Mr. Hibbard lived in a small, poorly heated flat with a large, overworked wife. And aside from the wife and the flat—the rent of which was constantly in arrears—Herbert Hibbard's worldly possessions consisted of an unquenchable thirst and three children.

It might have been that Mr. Hibbard was not ambitious, or it might have been that he had no dreams. The social workers who occasionally came prying around Herbert Hibbard's section of town were always at a loss to explain the reasons for his peculiar position in the social scheme of things. Unable to find any place for him on their long lists and charts and graphs, they generally gave up in defeat and made a check mark beside the heading of "Habitually drunk."

Which was not at all the truth. Herbert Hibbard was a thirsty man, indeed. But he never had quite enough nickels and dimes to stay habitually intoxicated, and very often would go weeks without taking a drink. On what poor Mrs. Hibbard referred to as,



"Herbie's bad weeks," he would, of course, be gloriously drunk.

But drunk or sober, Herbert Hibbard was always utterly happy. Which in itself was enough to give him a permanently peculiar position in the social scheme of things.

And on that bright, May afternoon when Mr. Hibbard leaned comfortably against the wall outside Joe's Tavern, placidly baking in the spring sunshine, he was just as happy as he had ever been in all his blissful life.

Unperturbed by the fact that he was standing *outside* of Joe's Tavern because Joe Himself would no longer allow him *inside* until he paid up an eighty cent bar bill, Herbert Hibbard gazed fondly at the ragged little urchins playing tin can hockey on the dirty tenement street.

It was an unusually windy day. One of those stiff, spring winds common to the season, that sent dirt and dust and yesterday's newspapers swirling up and down the avenue in constant miniature cyclones. Mr. Hibbard, who had tilted his battered derby forward over his eyes to keep out the sun, suddenly found his old and trusted headgear swept up and off his head by a particularly strong gust.

WITHOUT foolish haste, Mr. Hibbard reached up, touched his bald head, realized his derby was gone, and then looked calmly down the street to see it pinwheeling along at a merry rate almost a block away by that time.

Not being a man of quick and impetuous decision, Herbert Hibbard watched his derby roll all the way to the corner intersection before he decided to go after it.

He started down the street unhurriedly, keeping his eye firmly fastened on the fugitive headpiece as it hesitated, in a counter gust of wind, on

the edge of the intersection curb.

Herbert Hibbard hadn't covered another five yards before the derby decided to go directly along as before and skewed out into the center of the intersection.

And it was five seconds later when a long, black limousine, chauffeur driven, rolled across the intersection and directly over Herbert Hibbard's headpiece.

Even though still fifty feet away from the scene of the tragic accident, Mr. Hibbard heard the *squash* and saw the resultant mess of his derby seconds after the limousine's tires crushed mercilessly over it.

But—probably because he had started in that direction and saw no reason now for stopping—Herbert Hibbard continued toward the intersection, noting that the luxurious limousine which had destroyed his headpiece had come to a halt.

And when Mr. Hibbard reached the intersection, the chauffeur was already getting out of the front seat to come around and ascertain what he had hit.

Mr. Hibbard arrived beside the forlorn remnants of the derby seconds before the chauffeur had stooped to pick it up. The uniformed gentry spoke harshly:

"That your hat, buddy?"

It was characteristic of Herbert Hibbard that he had already adjusted himself to the change in the situation. He straightened up, holding the crushed remains tenderly in his hands as a nature lover might hold a fallen bird.

"That *was* my hat," Mr. Hibbard corrected him with some dignity.

The chauffeur, his sadism tickled to the quick by the sad appearance of the derby, laughed unpleasantly.

It was then that the Man In The Striped Pants stepped out of the rear

of the limousine to see what was going on. Actually, he was wearing considerably more than striped trousers. There was a double breasted black coat, an ascot tie, gates-ajar collar, patent leather shoes and gray spats. He also wore gray gloves, carried a cane and, coincidentally enough, sported an expensive black derby hat.

The Man In The Striped Pants took in the situation with a glance, then he bowed apologetically to Herbert Hibbard.

"I'm frightfully sorry, old boy," he declared. "My car seems to have demolished your hat utterly."

"S'all right," said Herbert cheerfully. "Don't see how it could have been avoided." He stared, fascinated by those striped trousers.

"But it isn't all right," protested the Man In The Striped Pants firmly. "I have ruined your headpiece. Naturally I will make repayment." He fished into his back pocket.

Herbert Hibbard caught the implication of the gesture. He shook his head negatively.

"It wasn't a new hat," said Mr. Hibbard, "even when I first got it. And I've had it close to ten years."

THE Man In The Striped Pants seemed surprised. His eyebrows notched up in wonder. Then, suddenly, he grinned warmly.

"You are unusual indeed, sir. An honest man." He paused. "We seem to be about the same size, generally. It wouldn't surprise me if this," he paused to remove his own derby, "would fit you."

As a look of protest crossed Herbert Hibbard's features, The Man In The Striped Pants said quickly: "This is not a new hat either. So it will be quite an even exchange."

Herbert Hibbard eyed the extended

derby doubtfully. "It looks new to me," he said.

"Well," the other admitted, "it is new as far as I am concerned, but as soon as it passes from my hands to yours it will be second hand."

Mr. Hibbard considered this gravely an instant. Then he smiled.

"That sounds right," he said. He took the proffered derby, gazing in awe at the bright and glittering newness of it. He had never seen anything that looked quite so expensively luxurious.

The Man In The Striped Pants said: "Try it on. See if it fits."

Mr. Hibbard placed the derby cautiously on his bald head. He smiled tentatively at the Man In The Striped Pants, who grinned back, indicating that it looked well.

"There you are," he told Herbert Hibbard. "It fits perfectly. I hope you enjoy it as much as I have. Good day, and good luck."

And then, before he knew it, the Man In The Striped Pants was back in the car, and the limousine was roaring away, leaving Mr. Hibbard standing proudly in the center of tooting traffic in his new derby hat.

Stepping over to the curb, Herbert Hibbard shifted his new hat around his head experimentally. It did fit perfectly at that. More perfectly, in fact, than his old one.

He cocked it jauntily a little over his right eye as he started back up the block. There was class about this derby, and no question about it.

In a store window, Mr. Hibbard took a sidelong peek at his reflection. Undeniably, his new possession made him look almost prosperous.

And then he realized that, even though he'd cocked it over his right eye, the derby had now slipped back to a decorous, church-ish, even keel.

Mr. Hibbard frowned faintly, cock-

ing it back over his right eye.

But in the next window that he passed, Herbert Hibbard saw that the headpiece had again assumed a dignified, solid set on his bald pate.

He paused, removing the derby to look for a concealed spring inside of it. He found no spring, but his eyes did see the edge of a ten dollar bill protruding from the inner sweat band.

Whistling in surprise, Herbert Hibbard extracted the ten dollar bill from the hat. Then he turned and looked back at the intersection; but of course the limousine had long since gone.

He scratched his bald head reflectively. Mr. Hibbard was not a stupid man, and so of course was aware that people—even rich people who wear funny striped pants—are not in the habit of carrying cash around in their hats.

And so Herbert Hibbard arrived at the logical conclusion that the bill was placed there deliberately by the hat's former owner, in the knowledge that it would be discovered by Herbert.

MR. HIBBARD tried to remember how long it had been since he had seen so much money in one hunk. Then he gave it up and smiled happily, pocketing the bill and popping the derby back jauntily on his head and over his right eye.

He had really reason to peek slyly at his reflection in the next store window he passed. For not only did he now *look* prosperous, but he *was* prosperous.

Even though the derby had again rebelled against the cocking over the right eye and had asserted itself with balanced dignity on the middle of his head.

Mr. Hibbard sighed. "All right," he murmured, "if that's the way you want to ride, go ahead."

The derby seemed to nestle closer to his skull, after that. And when Herbert strode in through the doors of Joe's Tavern a few minutes later, it still rode in balanced splendor.

Joe Himself was behind the bar, and when he saw Mr. Hibbard in the new hat, a look of surprised speculation entered his eyes. Surprised speculation and a faintly grudging respect. He didn't even yell his usual stay-out-until-yuh-can-pay-me routine.

The idlers in the bar were also shocked into a slightly awed silence. A silence that reached its dramatic peak when Herbert Hibbard reached into his pocket and casually flipped a ten dollar bill across the surface of the bar.

"There Joe," said Mr. Hibbard with casual indifference, "take the eighty cents I owe you outta that."

In silent awe, Joe rang up eighty cents and fumbled in the cash drawer until he had assembled Herbert Hibbard's change. And when he passed the bills and silver back over the bar to Mr. Hibbard, he said respectfully.

"What'll yuh have, Herb? On the house, acourse."

Herbert Hibbard opened his mouth to reply, and caught a reflection of himself in the greasy mirror back of the bar. The new derby was too much above these definitely sordid surroundings. He looked far too dignified to be ordering cheap whiskey in a cheap bar. In spite of his thirst, he closed his mouth.

"I'll take a rain check on that, Joe," Herbert heard his own voice replying. "But nothing now."

And with that he pocketed his change and strode casually from the shocked silence of the barroom. His derby hat rode like a crown atop his skull. . .

CURIOSLY enough, people's minds are such that they meet with bland

indifference even the most superb accomplishments of those they have long known to be standardly capable. Yet, should a long acknowledged idiot add two and two and make four, or a lowly knave give up petty larceny for Lent, the idiot is suddenly raised to the status of a genius and the knave canonized a saint.

So it was with Herbert Hibbard.

Mr. Hibbard, whose garments had always caused even the old clothes brokers to move to the other side of the street when they sighted him, had been seen by the residents of his neighborhood in an incredibly expensive new derby hat.

Also, Herbert Hibbard, who avoided his creditors as cunningly as a fly avoids a swatter, had of his own volition walked into Joe's Tavern and casually wiped out a debt.

Lastly, the same Mr. Hibbard, who had only to prick any one of his veins to tap a supply of straight alcohol, had passed up the offer of a *free* drink and strolled out of the bar with clear eyes and a dry gullet.

Gossip being what it is, and neighborhoods like Herbert Hibbard's being what they are, it took a scant fifteen minute for these startling bits of information to fly throughout his square block.

And these circumstances, which would have merited no notice had they been observed of an ordinary, respectable citizen started the previously mentioned curious reaction in the minds of Mr. Hibbard's neighbors.

Herbert Hibbard was not an idiot, so they didn't call him a genius. Neither was he a knave, and so, consequently, placed on a pedestal. But being a no good, an aimless idler, an unproductive member of society, the effect of Mr. Hibbard's transition on his neighbors, through the magical power of their

tongues, was to raise him in their astonished eyes to the status of exemplary citizen.

The fact that he had apparently reformed over night, only served to heighten the respect in which they held him.

At four o'clock that May afternoon Herbert Hibbard had been a bum. At four thirty on the same afternoon, through the strange power of a derby hat and the not so strange power of a ten dollar bill, he was an esteemed man.

And at five o'clock, when Mr. Hibbard, who had been but faintly aware of this reversal of popular opinion, arrived at his dingy flat, he was very much amazed to find his large wife, tears of joy in her eyes, waiting for him at the door with open arms. . .

MRS. HIBBARD'S first words were even more bewildering to Herbert. For even as she wrapped her steamy red arms around him, she sobbed joyously:

"Oh, Herbert—they told me!"

"Did they, now?" Mr. Hibbard asked, cautiously noncommittal. He wondered what in the hell accounted for *this* outburst.

Mrs. Hibbard released him and stepped back, eyes aglow with watery admiration.

"You look so fine!" she exclaimed.

Herbert Hibbard smiled in sudden realization. He cocked the splendid derby hat over his right eye, and stepping back permitted his wife to view the wonder of it all.

"Like it?" Mr. Hibbard asked self-consciously.

"You look so, so," Mrs. Hibbard fought to find the word, "so dignified!" she concluded ecstatically.

Accepting the compliment, Herbert Hibbard turned to view his reflection

in the cracked hall mirror. And then he frowned in slight irritation. Once again the rebellious derby had settled back with smug respectability to a sedate, dead center position.

It was then that Mr. Hibbard caught the pungent odor of roasting duck coming from the dingy kitchen in the rear of the flat. Roast duck—his favorite dish.

Herbert Hibbard wondered how his wife had managed to afford the delicacy. It was, after all, little enough that she made taking in washing. Perhaps, he thought pleasantly, one of the kids had landed a newspaper route.

Mrs. Hibbard had seen the quiver in her husband's nostrils. And now she beamed.

"I went out and got it special," she explained, "as soon as I heard. We'll be able to afford things like that more often, with the extra money coming in now." She sighed. "I'm so proud, Herbert. You with a fine job!"

And suddenly the horrible truth crashed in on Herbert Hibbard. It left him quite definitely, breathlessly stunned.

IT WAS all too tragically apparent.

The sight of his new derby hat, the fact that he'd paid a bar bill with a ten dollar note, and the damning evidence that he'd strolled from a saloon perfectly sober, had started an incredibly vicious rumor, namely, that Herbert Hibbard had got himself a job and sworn off liquor!

And somehow this malicious gossip had carried to Mrs. Hibbard!

Herbert Hibbard opened his mouth to protest, to deny this infamous misconception before it went any further. However, two things prevented this.

One was the overwhelming sense of respectability his new hat filled him with. A respectable man couldn't con-

fess to being unemployed. Not a man in possession of a hat such as this.

The second was the look in Mrs. Hibbard's watery eyes. Always Herbert Hibbard had been able to look into the weary orbs of his spouse and find there affection and patient tenderness. But as far back as he could remember, this was the first time he had ever seen pride, and its accompanying emotion, respect, in her gaze. And in spite of himself, he couldn't destroy her delusion.

So Mr. Hibbard sighed, and removed his new derby and walked into the dining room. Trouble, for the first time in countless happy years, now rested heavily on his furrowed brow. . .

A wise man once declared that fate is never willing to let well enough alone. And fate, which had this day given Herbert Hibbard an aura of respectability and an overload of trouble, could no more retire from the scene than a drunk can leave a bar. Fate was busily having a hell of a time for itself.

It sent the reporter from the *Daily Banner* into Herbert Hibbard's neighborhood. And the neighbors sent the reporter to the Hibbard doorstep.

The reporter was a smiling chap, and quite pleasantly he explained the purpose of his call to Mr. Hibbard who met him at the door.

"You've heard of the *Daily Banner's* 'Citizen of the Day' contest, of course," said the reporter. And then, in case Herbert Hibbard hadn't, he went on to explain.

"Each day of the week for the next two weeks, the *Banner* is scouring the metropolis for some man who, although not prominent in the newspaper sense of the word, is an important figure in the tiny community he lives in."

Wisely, Mr. Hibbard continued to listen and say nothing.

"We picked this neighborhood by chance, and canvassed the block, punching doorbells and asking everyone we talked to who, in their present opinion was an outstanding person in the block. Almost unanimously, Mr. Hibbard, they named you," the reporter concluded smilingly.

Mr. Hibbard's wife had come up behind him during the bulk of the explanation, and her eyes were again aglow with watery pride. Herbert Hibbard, however, shuffled his feet uncomfortably.

"Aren't you pleased, Mr. Hibbard?" asked the reporter. Then he added, "There's a hundred dollar prize attached to your being selected, you know."

Behind her husband, Mrs. Hibbard gasped.

Another man came climbing up the stairs behind the reporter at that moment, and the reporter, glancing back, explained.

"My photographer," he said. "We'll want Mr. Hibbard's picture for tomorrow morning's edition."

"Ohhhhh, Herbert!" Mrs. Hibbard squealed.

MOMENTS later, Herbert Hibbard, derby hat resplendent on his bald head, arms folded grimly across his chest, posed for the photographer in the living room.

"Uncross your arms, please," the photographer asked.

Mr. Hibbard uncrossed his arms, and instinctively reached up to cock his derby over his right eye. But he had no more completed the gesture, than the hat rebelliously shot back to its even keel of dignity.

Mr. Hibbard frowned in stern dissatisfaction at this renewal of the rebel streak in his derby. And at that instant the flash bulb popped white.

"Thank you, Mr. Hibbard," said the cameraman, already repacking his equipment.

"What do you do, Mr. Hibbard?" asked the reporter, notes and pencil ready.

Herbert Hibbard was not a liar by nature. He peeked out of the corner of his eye and saw his wife still present, ears avid for details. He cleared his throat.

"I ah, ahhh," desperately he racked his brain, "am a watcher," he said swiftly.

"A watchman?" the reporter repeated.

"You might call it that," said Herbert Hibbard evasively. In his mind he was telling himself that he did watch things, after all, even if they might only be in the passing panorama of the life that passed Joe's Tavern.

And then the reporter was asking Mrs. Hibbard questions, such as how long had they been married, how long had they lived here, how many children did they have, and the like.

And finally, as he was leaving, the reporter scratched Mr. Hibbard's name on a hundred dollar check and presented it to him.

Herbert took the check with a smile of thanks and an inward feeling of misgivings. Without a qualm he turned it over to Mrs. Hibbard, for didn't he have nine dollars and twenty cents in his pocket? And wasn't that all the money a man would need for quite a spell?

Ecstatically, Mrs. Hibbard disappeared into the kitchen. Mr. Hibbard heard her shouting the glad tidings to the neighbors from the window a few minutes later.

Sighing a grave and troubled sigh, Herbert Hibbard sat down in a leaky overstuffed horsehair chair. Then he recalled he still wore the derby.

Removing it, Mr. Hibbard regarded its splendor and dignity with a worried frown and growing distrust. . .

HIS wife woke him at six the next morning. This was in itself a catastrophe, for previously Mr. Hibbard had always snoozed as long as it pleased his fancy.

"I wasn't sure what time you'd have to leave for work, Herbert," Mrs. Hibbard explained. "I was so excited I forgot to ask."

Jaw set, Herbert Hibbard made no reply.

"Aren't you going to work today?" Mrs. Hibbard asked anxiously. "Doesn't the job start today?"

"No," answered Herbert Hibbard with utter truth. "No, the job doesn't start today."

Mrs. Hibbard backed respectfully and apologetically out of the room. "If you'd only have told me," she declared, "I wouldn't have woke you. I didn't know you wasn't supposed to start until tomorrow."

Burying his head under the sheets, Mr. Hibbard wondered how much longer people were going to put words in his mouth he never said. . .

IT WAS ten o'clock when Herbert Hibbard finally woke and breakfasted. His wife had, by that time, secured a copy of the *Daily Banner*, and while he ate, read the feature story beneath his picture aloud.

Mr. Hibbard only looked once at the picture. It showed him frowning righteously, and the splendid derby set in the exact center of his head served only to make him look thoroughly, solidly respectable.

At ten thirty Herbert Hibbard was striding down his block in the bright sunshine of the May morn. Striding, mind you, where once he used to amble

unhurriedly. The derby, of course, after defying his efforts to cock it rakishly, sat loftily and levelly on the middle of his bald head.

But bright though the morning was, there was no sunlight in Mr. Hibbard's once unfettered soul. Responsibility, like a leaden weight, rode heavily beside the awe inspiring hat.

People who once passed him with a casual, friendly wave, now nodded respectfully, almost distantly, in their efforts to acknowledge his new stature.

Even the little kids, who always laughed and chattered and tugged at his tattered coat, crossed the street as he approached, watching him from the other side with the suspicion and cautious deference they generally held for Kennedy, the beat copper.

And inside of half a block, the weight and worry of the world was on Herbert Hibbard's shoulders. He frowned for the same reason that he walked as if he were going some where. The damned hat seemed to demand it.

No longer did Mr. Hibbard glance proudly at his reflection in the store windows that he passed.

He was aware that, as a man whose picture was being viewed this morning by close to a million people, he was definitely in the public eye and that his behavior should indicate as much. And even had he been able to forget the picture, the presence of the luxurious derby on his bald head would have been enough to sober him to the realization of the respect that was his due.

Much against his better judgment, Herbert Hibbard passed by Joe's Tavern at a swift pace, even though he was once again allowed inside.

And it was a block later that Mr. Hibbard encountered Mike Fagin.

Mike Fagin was a small man in a seedy suit who, at the moment, was smoking a big cigar. Fagin's smile was

swift, his voice too shrilly cordial. Of course he was the organization political precinct captain.

"Hello, Herbie old mug!" Fagin chattered. "How's the wife and kids? Like a cigar?"

Mr. Hibbard looked at him with faint surprise. Fagin's attitude toward him seemed unchanged. And then he realized that Fagin had not even glanced at the splendid derby. Fagin's eyes never went above a man's chin, for years ago he had found it much easier to talk politics to voters if he didn't have to look them in the eye.

Maybe Fagin hadn't noticed the hat, Herbert Hibbard decided, but surely he must have seen—

"Did you see this morning's *Daily Banner*?" Mr. Hibbard asked, putting his thoughts into words.

"Never read the rag," said Fagin. The *Daily Banner*, as one of the city's most honest and crusading newspapers was ever seeking to throw Fagin's political bosses out on their pants. Therefore, for his bread and butter, Fagin had long ago boycotted that sheet.

Mr. Hibbard seemed to feel his derby pressing inward, as if in an effort to force him to walk on past this objectionable person.

Fagin was still holding forth a cigar, smiling falsely.

Herbert Hibbard reached out to take the cigar, when the hat seemed suddenly much too tight, hurting him sharply. He drew back his hand as if he'd been burned. The hat felt comfortable again.

"Doncha feel like a smoke?" Fagin asked.

Mr. Hibbard shook his head. "Not now," he lied.

"We're having a free blowout at Joe's tonight, just for the bunch in our precinct," said Fagin. "Be sure to drop in, woncha?"

Cigars, cordiality, and free drinks came from Mike Fagin only once a year, Herbert Hibbard knew, and that was always a few days before elections.

"I'll try to make it," Mr. Hibbard lied the second time.

"See yuh there," said Fagin, slapping him resoundingly and disrespectfully on the back. Then he moved off.

Mr. Hibbard sighed as he walked on. Obviously Fagin had not noticed the hat or seen the picture in the paper. He'd probably been so busy buying votes for the elections that he hadn't heard the lies that had grown around Herbert Hibbard.

THEN Mr. Hibbard was aware of something in his right hand. Several somethings, in fact, which Fagin had placed there in saying goodbye. Herbert Hibbard opened his palm.

He looked down at two huge political campaign buttons. Each had the picture of one of Fagin's nefarious sponsors. There was the usual "Vote For" plus the names of the candidates.

Mr. Hibbard sighed, thinking of the days when he'd been a free soul, worn such buttons, sopped up Fagin's liquor, and then satisfied his inner sense of decency by voting for whomever he damn pleased. It had always pleased him that no one could buy the things he believed in. And his minor tricking of Fagin had always seemed symbolically important.

But those free days were gone, Herbert Hibbard realized again. Now he was somebody. He had dignity. He had responsibilities. He had a hat. He had worries.

"Oh hell!" Herbert Hibbard said in sudden savage revolt. And then a thought struck him and he grinned.

With deliberate antagonism, he placed both big political buttons on the band of his hat, conspicuously, as he

used to do with his old and undignified derby.

"There," said Mr. Hibbard. "That'll hold you."

There was no breeze in the air. It was a warm, humid day. And yet, suddenly, as if caught by a swift gust of wind, Mr. Hibbard's hat flew from his head and started rolling down the street!

Herbert Hibbard realized he had gone too far.

"Hey!" he shouted in sudden alarm, starting out after the swiftly rolling derby. "Hey, I'm sorry!"

But Mr. Hibbard's hat kept rolling swiftly along, taking a sudden sharp turn at the first corner it came to. Breathlessly, Herbert Hibbard quickened his pursuit.

The few passing pedestrians who paused to watch him chase after the indignantly fleeing headpiece, gaped in astonishment as they realized that there was no wind to carry the hat along at that pace whatsoever.

Turning at the corner, Herbert Hibbard's wild gaze saw his expensive hat wheeling sharply to roll down an alley. And when he came to the alley, the derby had just cleared the fence of a dirty back yard.

And then Mr. Hibbard was unable to find the exact back yard into which the hat had leaped. He searched all the back yards of the alley frantically for the next half hour, but to no avail.

His wonderful derby, in rage and humiliation, had left him!

Herbert Hibbard, during the ensuing five hours in which he wandered dejectedly, forlornly, about the streets of a nearby neighborhood, was undergoing the second major transition in his previously tranquil existence.

For there had been a fascinating attraction in the mind of Mr. Hibbard toward his but recently acquired derby.

In the brief hours in which he had owned and worn the headpiece, painful though the results of the wearing had been, Herbert Hibbard had become almost fatally attached to it.

Mr. Hibbard had felt, somehow, that the hat and what it brought for him was not for him. Nonetheless, like the cinema hero who is fatally ensnared by the luscious but evil siren, Herbert Hibbard had hated to lose the beautiful cause of his troubles.

But unlike the hero, Mr. Hibbard didn't blow out his brains in the last reel. He just walked, mentally stifling the pangs of loss, telling himself, with absolute candor, that already he was beginning to feel like his old and happy-but-unrespected self again.

And when he returned to his own neighborhood minus the splendid headpiece, he was treated, much to his delight, as he had been always treated in the pre-hat era. He went directly to Joe's Tavern.

NO one at the bar looked up when Herbert Hibbard entered the saloon. There was a considerable crowd there, and Joe himself was behind the bar. In the center of festivities was Mike Fagin, his shrill laughter cutting through the smoke like a knife.

It was Joe himself who first noticed Mr. Hibbard.

"Hey, there's Herbie," he called.

Mr. Hibbard smiled amiably and moved over to the bar to get in on some free liquor.

It was then that Joe himself brought the splendid derby hat out from behind the bar.

"Here, Herbie," he said. "I found this in an alley on my way over, and I said to myself I'll bet this is Hibbard's hat. Is it?"

Joe handed the hat across the bar to Herbert Hibbard.

Mr. Hibbard looked at the hat. The political buttons were gone from the band, but there were tiny pinholes to mark where they'd been. The smooth nap was roughed all over, and quite instinctively, Herbert began to brush it back carefully in place. One side of the brim was slightly dented. It smelled smokey—no doubt from the hours it had been behind the bar. There were several whisky and gin stains on the crown. On the front brim there was a slight burn, as if someone had flipped a match away that had fallen there before going completely out.

Herbert Hibbard quietly, and with the dignity he felt compelled to assert, did what little he could for the damaged derby. Then he placed it carefully on the exact center of his head.

"What'll you have, Herbie?" Fagin called.

Mr. Hibbard was about to shake his

head negatively, about to turn and stride resolutely from the saloon in his battered but still obviously expensive derby, when quite of its own volition, his hat slid rakishly forward over his right eye.

Startled, Mr. Hibbard placed the derby on an even keel, and again it slipped to a rakish angle over his right eye.

Mr. Hibbard took a quick glance at his reflection in the greasy mirror behind the bar. He grinned, and suddenly had the very definite impression that the hat was grinning also.

A hat, reflected Herbert Hibbard, can learn an awful lot in a short time.

"What'll you have?" Fagin repeated.

Mr. Hibbard grinned out at him from under the rakish slant of his expensive though battered hat.

"The usual, Mike, of course," said Herbert Hibbard with all his old time good cheer. . . .

The Agar Situation

By JACK CALDWELL

AMERICA has been cut off from a material which the average person never sees or hears about, but which indirectly plays one of the most important roles in the care of his health and well-being. Up to this time Japan has had a world monopoly on this very valuable commodity called agar.

This substance is a gelatin-like material made from seaweeds. It is indispensable as a culture medium in all bacteriological laboratories, hospitals, medical schools and research institutions employed with phases of pure and applied microbiology, such as problems in food, soil, dairy products, etc.

Although agar itself is indigestible it is the best substance known to hold in readily available form such popular germ foods as beef extract, glucose, boiled potato and blood.

Agar comes in a dried state—a light, grayish, stringy solid. It can take up many times its volume of water to form an amber, translucent mass that exactly resembles the common gelatin dessert we are all familiar with. In fact, sweetened and flavored agar has been used in some cases as a dessert material and also in medicines where smooth-

ness and bulk are needed, but its most important use is for the laboratories.

The Department of Commerce records show that America used to buy between 600,000 and 700,000 pounds of this dried substance every year. In recent years the price was \$1.50 a pound, but prior to that this product sold for as little as 25c a pound.

America being completely deprived of Japanese agar is put in an embarrassing, but not serious position.

The species of red seaweed from which agar is made grows in many parts of the world and is especially abundant in the warmer coasts of the United States. The manufacturing process is well known and not difficult. The prime factor in the Japanese monopoly of agar has been the great number of hand laborers required in its harvesting production. Japan has enjoyed the privilege of this monopoly because labor is "dirt" cheap there.

There is no real reason why America cannot supply this very valuable, but obscure plant material for her own needs.

THE BATTLE OF

Disaster awaited the Tommies as they charged the Nazis on this beachhead on the Egyptian coast—then an incredible confusion began . . .

DAWN was spreading a hazy light over the oppressively humid Egyptian plateau when the young German officer received the message.

He was seated before a radio transmitter with earphones strapped over his closely cropped blonde hair, in a hot airless tent which had been set up at the rear of the small German encampment.

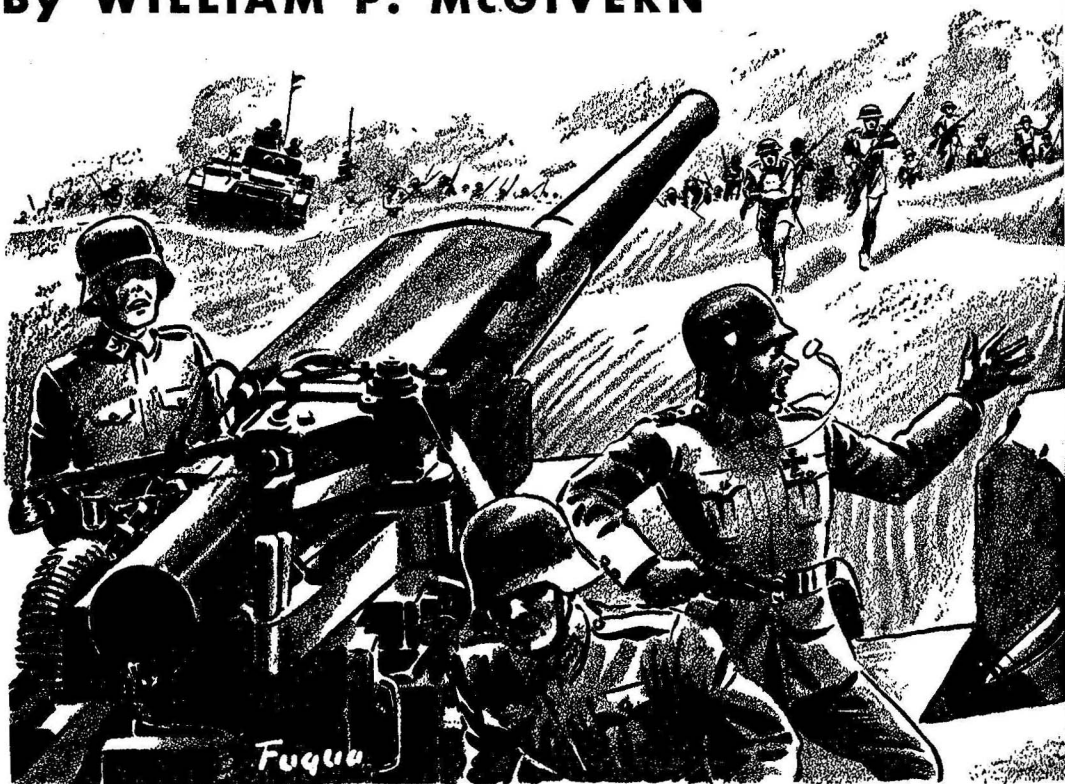
He read the message carefully a second time, frowning in concentration.

Then he removed the headphones and stood up. He beckoned to another young officer who was dozing on a cot in the corner.

"Relieve me for a few moments. I must deliver this message to Captain Hohffer immediately."

Picking up his sharply peaked hat he strode from the tent. He had only to pass the mess kitchen and a line of supply trucks before reaching the large tent marked with the insignia of the swastika.

By WILLIAM P. McGIVERN



MANETONG ♦ ♦ ♦

The Captain's orderly saluted him, presented arms.

"A message for Captain Hohffer," the wireless operator snapped. "It is important."

The orderly lowered his gun and drew aside the flap of the tent. The wireless operator saluted and entered the tent. Captain Hohffer was seated at a large table in the center of the tent frowning absorbedly at maps and

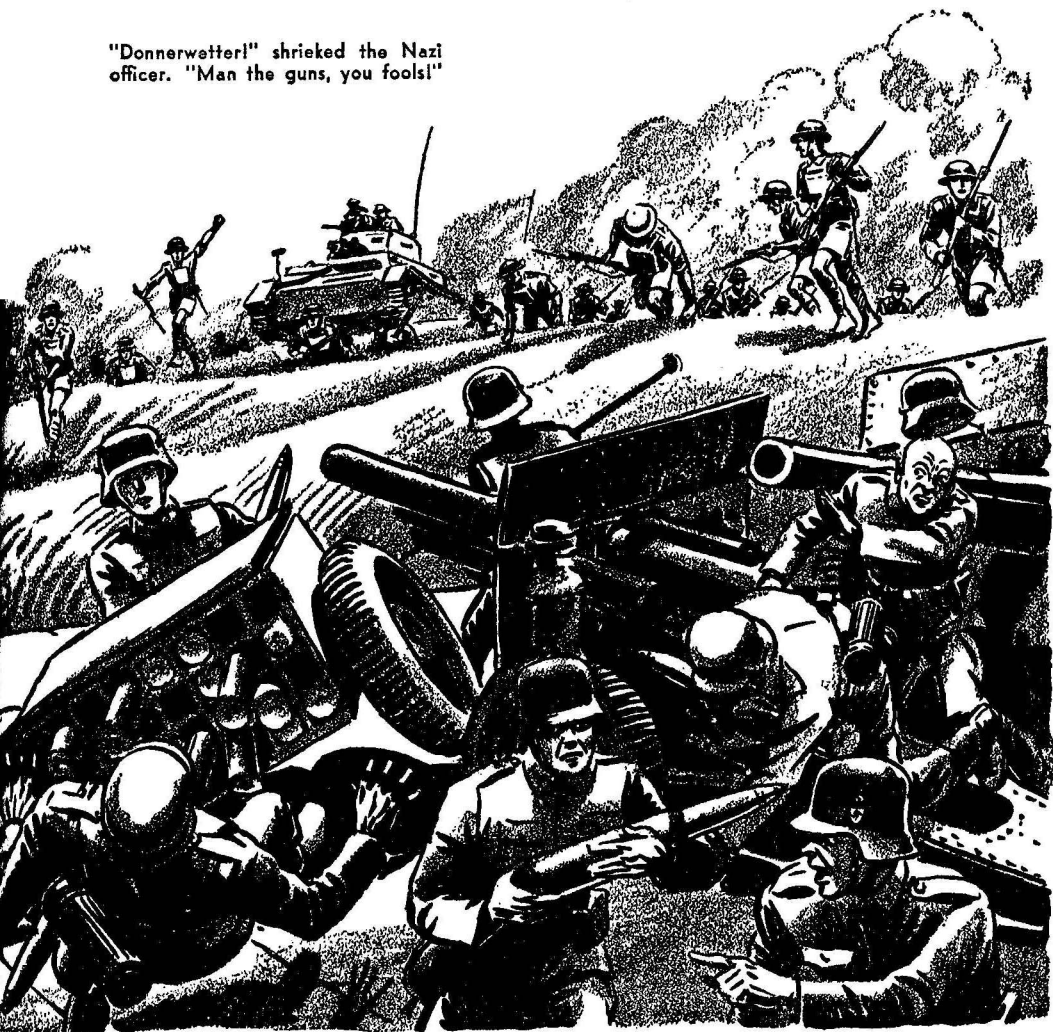
charts. A kerosene lamp smoked on the table and provided a yellow flickering illumination.

The captain was a tall, spare man with a prominent, bony nose and glacial, blue eyes. His uniform tunic was open at the throat and a cigarette was burning low in his fingers.

He looked up sharply as the radio operator saluted.

"Yes?"

"Donnerwetter!" shrieked the Nazi officer. "Man the guns, you fools!"



"Message for the Captain," the young officer said stiffly. "It's from Intelligence Headquarters. I thought I should bring it right over, sir."

THE captain took the message and scanned it rapidly. When he finished reading a tight smile spread his lips. His cold blue eyes glinted with amusement.

"You did right, Herr Lieutenant," he said. "These orders are extremely important. We break camp immediately. That is all."

When the wireless operator had departed the Captain called his orderly.

"Summon Lieutenant Mueller and Oberlieutenant Schmidt here at once," he said crisply.

When the two officers entered his tent a few moments later the captain permitted himself the luxury of a smile.

"For several weeks," he said, "we have been waiting here for orders. Now the orders have arrived, and most pleasant orders they are. Intelligence has learned that a column of British troops is escorting a caravan of wounded natives and colonials back to Cairo. This column will pass within about five miles of our present position. They will be forced to cross the Nile tributary at that point. Their approach to the bridge is over a wide plateau known as the Manetong area. There is no cover on this stretch. Our artillery will be set up on the opposite side of the river. From that point we'll be able to command the bridgehead and the Manetong plateau. When the British column reaches that our artillery will blow them to dust."

"What is the strength of the British force?" Lieutenant Mueller asked. There was a hint of cautious nervousness in his voice.

Captain Hohffer smiled.

"Insignificant in comparison to

ours," he replied. "You know our policy is to strike only when the numerical advantage is greatly in our favor. The British will not have a chance, of that you may be sure."

THE long winding British truck column proceeded slowly through the barren foot hills that led to the Manetong plateau. The column consisted of twenty eight creaking trucks loaded to capacity with soldiers, most of them wounded. Their uniforms were dusty and tattered from the ravages of the screeching, blasting sandstorms that howled incessantly over the plateaus of Libya and Egypt.

In a small rattling car at the head of the slowly crawling procession rode Major Archibald Douglass, a stocky, red-faced man of fifty, the commander of the small force. The interior of the car was like an oven. Perspiration rolled steadily from the major's forehead, cutting muddy furrows through the yellow caked dust on his face.

For the dozenth time he mopped his flowing face and cursed the heat and the dust in fluent language. The driver, a gaunt Australian with a dirty bandage over his head, grinned in frank admiration at the major's eloquence.

"The heat is annoying, sir," he said.

The major snorted, "That's a bit of understatement, corporal. This heat is hellish. The only advantage to this climate is that the Jerries die like flies in this heat. Can't stand it at all."

"Good thing," the Australian corporal muttered.

For a few minutes they bounced along in a hot, oppressive silence. The road was only a rutted pathway a few feet wide, and its uneven shoulders rocked the car with monotonous regularity.

The major's keen narrowed eyes swept carefully over the horizon.

"Too bad for us today if we bump into a tank corps of Jerries," he said quietly. "Intelligence decided they couldn't spare a tank escort for us. Hope they know what they're doing."

The Australian driver nodded grimly.

"We'd be nice pickings for the Jerries. They'd have a good time with a truck caravan of wounded soldiers. Just their blasted style."

"Well," the major said philosophically, "I see no point in worrying about it. If we get past the Manetong plateau we'll be out of danger. Once beyond that open stretch and over the bridge I don't think the Jerries will bother us."

FOR another few moments they drove in silence. Then the major tilted his head and a faint frown creased his forehead. He glanced at the driver and then peered into the white glaring sky.

After a long anxious scrutiny he cleared his throat.

"I say, corporal," he said, "do you hear anything?"

The corporal was staring fixedly at the rutted road but the knuckles of his big hands had whitened on the wheel.

He nodded slowly.

"Sounds like a blooming buzzing fly."

"Or a wasp," the major said softly.

He shaded his eyes with both hands and swept a long glance over the cloudless glaring sky.

"Must be pretty high," he said, after a moment.

The driver swallowed the dust in his throat.

"Do we keep going, sir?" he asked.

The major glanced at him and smiled slightly.

"Of course. These wounded men need attention and hospital care. Naturally we will continue on. But keep your eyes sharp, corporal."

As the small car jolted along, the major unslung his field glasses and carefully wiped the film of dust from their lenses.

"I'll do the same," he said as they drove on in silence. . . .

Captain Hohffer was waiting impatiently as the young flyer clambered from the cockpit of his ship and dropped to the dry, hard ground.

"Well?" he snapped. "Have you located the British column?"

"Yes, Sir," the lieutenant answered, saluting. "They are about six hours from the bridgehead. They are travelling very slowly."

"Good, good," Captain Hohffer said, smiling. "Those six hours will give us ample time to prepare a pleasant reception for them."

Turning he swept keen experienced eyes over the scene of preparation that surrounded him. He was standing on a wide knoll that overlooked the sluggishly moving Nile tributary and the Manetong plateau. It was over this broad exposed plateau that the British column must travel.

Captain Hohffer smiled mirthlessly and swung about to face the opposite side of the knoll where his men were setting up their artillery. As his careful eye checked off each group of men and each maneuvering truck and tank, he nodded slowly in a pleased manner.

EVERYTHING was progressing satisfactorily. When the stupid British arrived they would be ready for them. His artillery would smash the British column in one decisive blast. Then the mopping up process would be only a formality.

The entire success of the attack depended on the unexpected devastation of the artillery barrage. For that reason Captain Hohffer was enraged at the

information brought to him by Lieutenant Mueller a few moments later.

"I regret to report," Lieutenant Mueller said nervously, "that my men have met great difficulty in establishing artillery positions as you ordered. The ground is too soft to support the weight of the guns."

Captain Hohffer reddened in anger.

"Fool!" he said furiously. "I will not listen to excuses. Everything is hinged on the artillery barrage. It *must* be as I have ordered."

Lieutenant Mueller mopped his brow anxiously.

"My men have discovered a brick foundation in the form of a square at the base of the knoll. If we could mount our guns there and—"

"Impossible!" Captain Hohffer stormed. "Their fire would not clear the top of the knoll. Are you so stupid, lieutenant, that you cannot realize that?"

"We could build a platform on the brick foundation," the lieutenant suggested desperately. "That was what I had in mind, Captain. If our guns were mounted on a structure thirty or forty feet high their fire would easily clear the top of the knoll. The brick foundation is deep and solid. It would easily support the jarring of the guns."

Captain Hohffer was silent a moment, frowning thoughtfully. Then he said:

"How do you propose to raise the guns to the top of this structure?"

"We have hoist equipment," Lieutenant Mueller answered. "It would only be an hour's work to raise the guns in place after the platform is completed."

"And how long will that take?"

Lieutenant Mueller made a swift mental calculation.

"If we use every available man in its construction," he answered with assurance, "I can promise the Captain

that the work will be completed in three hours."

Captain Hohffer glanced at his watch.

"Possibly your proposal will be feasible," he said. "Show me this foundation now. I will decide." . . .

AT THE entrance of the Manetong plateau the British column halted. Major Archibald Douglass crawled stiffly from his car and walked back along the line of trucks.

The infantry escort was lying on the hot hard ground resting gratefully. It was almost three in the afternoon—the hottest hour of the day—and they had been marching steadily since dawn.

The major nodded to them as he walked by and they grinned back.

In the west the sun was dropping slowly, a blazingly intense ball of molten brass in a white sky. The major cast a careful glance over that deceptively peaceful sky.

He hadn't heard any more planes and that only increased his caution. A funny feeling persisted in him that they were heading for danger. He shook the feeling away with an irritable shrug and began his inspection of the truckloads of wounded men.

The heat and the flies and the pain of festering wounds drove many of the wounded men into feverish hysteria; others it killed outright. But a large number of the wounded, the major saw, were conscious, enduring every second of their agony, features drawn into meaningless masks, eyes distended in torment.

Hard bitter lines etched themselves into the major's face as he walked on, surveying truck after truck full of pain-crazed men.

There was nothing he could do for them but get them to hospitals as quickly as possible. Nothing on earth

was going to prevent him from doing that, he decided.

This thought, with its touch of melodrama, almost made him blush. The major was not a heroic figure, given to stage speeches about Empire and Courage.

He was simply a man who did his job.

As he neared the end of the line of trucks a faint voice hailed him.

Glancing toward the sound of the voice the major saw an aged, patriarchal Hebrew lying in a special litter in the last truck. The man's brown, deeply seamed face was covered with a flowing white beard and his wise solemn eyes were filmed with a fog of pain.

HIS name, the major remembered, was Mosoch. The venerable patriarch was another victim of German barbarism. Both of his legs had been broken and he had been shot through the shoulder.

But he still lived. He had been invaluable to the major on the desert trek. Knowing Egypt like a wise father knows his child, he had counselled and advised the major in many ways.

Smiling, the major stepped to the side of the truck.

"It won't be long now," he said cheerfully. "You'll be in a hospital bed this time tomorrow."

"I will be where He wills it," the old man answered, nodding slowly. His thin, veined hands gripped the frayed, leather bound book that lay next to him, and his deep eyes looked upward.

"That which has been written," he said, "is as inevitable as the dropping of a stone or the flowing of a river."

Awkwardly the major patted the old man's shoulder.

The Hebrew turned his eyes to him.

"I must warn you," he said softly. "We are traveling toward the place

which He declared accursed. Wicked Sennaar, blasted symbol of man's evil, lies ahead of us. We must not go on. Our feet must not tread the ground that has felt the wrath of God. Disaster falls swift on the evil ones who violate the commands of the God of Jehovah. So much has been written."

The old man's voice trailed off weakly. His eyes turned to the heavens. His cracked, dust-caked lips moved painfully as his fingers caressed the book at his side.

The major turned slowly from the truck and started back to his car. The men climbed to their feet and swung their rifles to their backs as he passed.

They knew from the set of his jaw that they were going on. . . .

In a few minutes the line of trucks was crawling wearily onto the broad lap of the Manetong plateau—heading for the narrow bridge that spanned the sluggish Nile tributary.

Beyond that bridge was a low wide knoll spreading peacefully along the Nile stream—and hiding what lay behind it. . . .

CAPTAIN HOHFFER stood beside the towering firing structure which his men had erected at the base of the knoll. The foundation of the platform was made of huge slab bricks, held together by ancient, crusted slime.

With excellent efficiency his men had built a platform of steel and timber that reached forty feet in the air.

On the broad top of the firing structure heavy guns had been mounted, their ugly snouts covering the Manetong plateau.

Captain Hohffer felt a gloating anticipation mounting in his breast. Everything had been planned to the last detail. Every man was at his post, awaiting the signal.

With calm deliberation the captain

drew his revolver from its belt holster.

He glanced at his watch.

The British were now almost at the bridge.

When he fired his gun the heavy artillery on top of the firing structure would blaze away. That one devastating barrage would completely wipe out the column of trucks.

The British would not have a chance. They would never realize what hit them.

Captain Hohffer smiled and raised his gun in the air. This would be a great personal triumph. He might receive the Iron Cross. Who could tell?

He would give his men an extra rest period when this was over. Building that structure hadn't been an easy task. Even with every man it had been exhausting work. The men were very tired. Even now, awaiting the bark of his gun, they were sluggish and listless.

Yes, he would give them an extra rest period—after the thunderous barrage of his heavy artillery had destroyed the British column.

Glancing again at his watch, his finger tightened on the trigger of the gun. He was chuckling when he fired the single clear signal shot. . . .

THE major, riding in the head car of the small truck column, heard the shot and his blood ran cold.

The truck column was only twenty yards from the bridge, and he realized with sickening clarity, that somehow he had led his men into a trap.

At his command the tall Australian driver slammed on the brakes and the major scrambled out of the car. With a quick glance he swept the terrain. Not a spot of cover in miles!

The shot had been fired from behind the knoll that loomed beyond the narrow river.

Silence followed that first shot, but

it was broken again by another revolver shot. Two more scattered revolver shots followed in quick succession and again there was silence.

The major stared bewilderedly at the knoll. If this was a trap it was a peculiar one. But he didn't waste any more time pondering the peculiarity of the situation.

There was only one course of action to follow.

"Fix bayonets!" he bawled down the line at his men. "Follow me."

Jerking the revolver from his holster he sprang onto the bridge and charged across to the opposite shore.

At his heels was his Australian driver, and behind him thundered the rest of his men, seventy-three strong.

The rise that led to the top of the knoll was a gradual slope a hundred yards in length. Up this the major's troops charged, bayonets fixed.

They had no conception of what lay beyond the rim of the knoll. They could hear nothing, or see nothing that would give them an indication of what they were attacking.

The major reached the top of the knoll first. The scene that met his eyes almost stopped his heart.

A complete German attacking force was spread at the base of the knoll. A huge structure supporting a dozen pieces of heavy artillery had been erected, and dozens of tanks flanked it on either side in attacking formation.

Hundreds of German soldiers manned the equipment. At first glance the major knew that he and his men had blundered into a trap from which there was no escaping. But as his eyes swung over the scene his fear for his men was replaced by sheer incredulous amazement.

For the hundreds of German soldiers were not preparing to open fire or unleash a savage tank attack. They were

milling about in confusion, as if they had forgotten their orders, or were completely demoralized by some major catastrophe.

THE major was almost too stunned to take advantage of the situation. But as his men crowded up the slope at his heels, he snapped to a full appreciation of his advantage.

"Charge!" he yelled. "Give 'em hell!"

At the base of the slope, beside the towering artillery structure, the major met a maniacal German officer. He was the only man who offered any resistance.

He was screaming, "The fools! The fools! They won't listen to me. They've gone mad. They don't understand—"

When this officer saw the charging British soldiers he fired wildly at them, but his aim was erratic. The major dropped him for good with one careful shot.

After that it only took a short time to round up the Germans, disarm them and confiscate their equipment. . . .

"Damndest thing I've ever seen," the Australian driver said to the major, "This whole bunch of kraut heads act like they've gone sun daffy."

The major didn't answer. Queer, disturbing thoughts were plucking at his brain, but he was too busy superintending the job of taking over the German camp, to worry about anything else.

Those of the wounded that could be moved were shifted to the faster German trucks, and sped on to Cairo. A number of soldiers were left to guard the prisoners, captured tanks, and artillery.

It was a long tiring job to organize and manage, but through it all the major's attention wandered time and again to a number of things beyond his understanding.

Had all the Germans been suddenly sun-struck? That question popped into his mind a dozen times during the long hot afternoon, as he watched the dazed, glassy-eyed, stumbling prisoners being herded into trucks.

And their vague, senseless mumbings, incoherent and meaningless—

Finally the long tiresome job was done. The prisoners were under guard, his own men were fed and quartered for the night, and the major could relax.

That is, after he wrote his nightly report, he could relax.

In an improvised tent he stared for a long moment at the sheet of paper on the table, before tearing it up and throwing it disgustedly into a corner.

Lighting a cigarette he strolled out of the tent. Night, black and swift, had descended. The bowl of the dark sky was studded with myriad pin points of silver.

Looming above in the blackness was the bulky outline of the firing tower the Germans had constructed to elevate their artillery.

The major walked slowly along the row of trucks that held those unfortunates who couldn't be moved. He would start them on their way as soon as possible. Some strange attraction drew him to the end of the line, where a white cloaked figure with a flowing beard lay in uncomplaining agony, mumbling his ageless prayers.

MOSOCH, the Hebrew, was lying patiently in his litter, and he looked up when the major approached.

One glance into those sunken, filmy eyes was enough to reveal that the angel of death was laying his soothing hand on that noble, suffering brow.

"My time is come," Mosoch said feebly, "it has been written. On this place where the wrath of the God of

(Continued on page 228)

The INCREDIBLE



Joe Corby hurled the chair against the window and it smashed into fragments—but the glass remained whole, untouched!

MR. KISMET

By DAVID
WRIGHT
O'BRIEN



THE flag had been in Joe Corby's window for more than five months, and the sign had been there only a week. The flag was a small, simple affair on which there was a service star, indicating that Joe's oldest son, Ralph, was serving in the fighting ranks of his country as a soldier. The sign was a small white placard which said:

"ROOM FOR RENT"

Signs such as the one above were not uncommon those days in the small American village of Barkerville. Even though Barkerville was a quiet little town consisting mostly of homes and a business district proudly referred to as "downtown," and even though most of its citizens were working for good money in the munitions plant which had risen on the outskirts of the village since the war, homes of patriotic fellows like Joe Corby were all feeling the pinch of the national emergency.

As Joe Corby said to Helen, his wife, when they decided to rent Ralph's unused room, "We'll be able to use the extra income, honey. Lord knows, even though my weekly check is near twice what it used to be, you can't keep buying defense bonds and giving to the Red Cross and other necessary outfits with-

*Mr. Kismet was a kindly, likeable fellow,
and he knew things ordinary people didn't know.
He did favors—but he also did terrible things!*

out tightening your belt a little and getting along as best you can."

Barkersville, for its size, had bought more defense bonds and had a larger Red Cross chest than any other such hamlet in the United States. Its citizens were very proud of that record and very determined to keep it up.

And so when Joe Corby came home at six o'clock that night from his bench in the munitions factory, turned up the white flagstoned walk that led to his modest frame home, and saw the "Room For Rent" sign gone, he was pleased.

His wife, Helen, met him at the door and said: "The room is rented, Joe. Isn't that grand?"

And at dinner, between efforts to silence little Jimmy, aged ten, Helen told her husband all about their new boarder.

"His name is Mr. Kismet," Helen said. "He seems like such a nice mannered man. Soft spoken, courteous. I'd say he's middle aged. Any rate, his hair is graying. He's tall, sort of, dresses very quietly, and has a nice, honest face."

"What does he do?" Joe Corby asked.

Helen shook her head. "I don't know. But I suspect he's here for kind of a vacation, to rest and relax. He said he didn't know how long he'd be staying."

"No time to rest," Joe Corby observed. "There's no rest for our Ralph and the boys on the fighting front. There shouldn't be for those of us on the home front."

"Now, Joe," Helen observed, "there's no sense in judging a man we don't know anything about. Maybe he's been working hard and has to have this vacation to keep from a breakdown."

"You're right," Joe admitted. "Maybe he has been."

"When can I join the army like

Ralph, Pop?" little Jimmy chimed in, taking up his favorite theme.

"I hope it's over by the time you're old enough, son," Helen said quietly. There was mist in her eyes and Joe Corby didn't say anything because he knew she was thinking of Ralph. . . .

DINNER was over and it was a little after eight when Mr. Kismet, the new boarder, arrived with his luggage. Helen went to the door, and when she had introduced him to Joe, Mr. Kismet took his grips up to Ralph's old room while Jimmy, chatteringly friendly, followed him upstairs.

When Mr. Kismet came down into the living room, Joe had a better chance to observe him and make up his mind about him.

Like Helen had said, Mr. Kismet was a tall, soft spoken, courteous fellow with graying hair and an honest, friendly face. The clothes he wore were neat and unpretentious.

"I like your little town a great deal, Mr. Corby," the new boarder observed when he and Joe got to talking.

"We're all kind of proud of Barkersville," Joe admitted. "Of course there are a lot of new people moved here since the munitions plant was started. But I imagine lots of them will want to stay here after it's all over."

Mr. Kismet nodded soberly. "Ah, yes," he said, "after it's all over." There was the faintest weariness in his voice.

Joe Corby noticed this, and remembered what Helen had supposed about how Mr. Kismet might be here for a needed rest.

"It's a tough haul for all of us," Joe said. "The end doesn't seem in sight yet. Our military reverses aren't quite at an end, I guess. But we're building, and we're getting tougher, and when we really have the power to slug out at

those international rats—”

Mr. Kismet nodded, as Joe let the implication trail. “I hope you’re right,” he said.

“Hope?” Joe snorted. “I know I’m right. No fight is ever over till the last round. No ball game is finished until that ninth inning comes up. Have you ever seen Minnesota come out in the second half of a football game on the short end of a score? Have you ever seen ’em unleash hell almighty until their opponents wished they’d never seen a goal post? That’s the American way, Mr. Kismet. When we won’t be beaten, we can’t be beaten!”

Mr. Kismet considered this. But his reply seemed to Joe to have no connection.

“If the future could be foreseen by man, I wonder what effect it would have on his determination?” Mr. Kismet said.

Joe shrugged. “Who knows. But there’s no man living who can tell me something is bound to be.”

“A commendable spirit,” Mr. Kismet declared. There was something about his cool, gray eyes, Joe thought suddenly, that seemed to look right into a person.

Helen came back into the room. “It’s nine, Joe,” she said. “You’ll be getting up early tomorrow morning, you know. Five o’clock.”

Mr. Kismet looked surprised.

“Some days,” Helen explained, “Mr. Corby works a double shift at the plant. Then he has to get up at the break of dawn.”

Joe Corby rose. He shook hands with Mr. Kismet.

“Goodnight,” Joe said. “It will be nice having you with us. Helen is a peach of a cook. You’ll find that out starting tomorrow morning. Make yourself at home as far as anything you want to read or use is concerned.”

“Thank you,” Mr. Kismet said. “Thank you very much.”

His handshake was firm, solid. His cool gray eyes were clean. Joe decided that he liked the new boarder very well. . . .

THREE days passed, during which time Mr. Kismet became more and more an accepted part of the household. His genuine friendliness and quiet honesty increased Joe Corby’s liking for him, and his sincerely laudatory comments about Helen’s cooking—especially her apple pie—completely won her over.

Even little Jimmy, who had taken instantly to the new boarder, now looked on Mr. Kismet as a real pal and buddy. When Jimmy came home from school he generally found Mr. Kismet sitting in the sunlight on the front porch, whittling a top for him, or knotting a fishing line.

The Corby’s neighbors all observed what a nice man Mr. Kismet was, and on the several occasions when he strolled “downtown” the clerks in the stores were won by his friendly chats.

But on the evening of the fourth day, Helen Corby met her husband at the door with a worried frown.

“What’s wrong?” Joe Corby asked.

“I, I want to talk to you, Joe,” Helen said. “Come into the kitchen.”

“Where’s Mr. Kismet?” Joe wondered.

“Out in the back yard, with Jimmy,” Helen said. “I want to talk to you about Mr. Kismet.”

Frowning, Joe followed Helen into the kitchen.

“What’s up? What’s he done? What’s happened?” Joe demanded.

Helen shook her head bewilderedly. “He hasn’t done anything, Joe, and nothing has happened. But this morning,” she hesitated, “this morning I ran

into something that's been puzzling me all day. I can't quite make it out."

"Good Lord," Joe said, "get on with it."

"It's Mr. Kismet's bed," Helen declared.

"His bed?"

"Yes," said Joe's wife. "I went up to Ral—, to Mr. Kismet's room this morning to change the sheets on his bed. It's the first time I've been in there, other than to tidy up, since he's been with us. Well, Joe, Mr. Kismet's bed hasn't been slept in since he's been here!"

Joe considered this. Then he said: "You must be mistaken, Helen. We've always seen him go into his bedroom every night. Our bedroom is right next to his. We'd hear him if he got up and went out. It's two floors down to the lawn from his window. He'd bang himself up pretty if he tried to sneak out at night that way."

"But I'm not mistaken, Joe," Helen Corby declared. "His bed has not been slept in since he's been here. He told me he'd make his own bed every morning, and so I didn't have occasion to notice it until this morning. The sheets, pillow cases, and all were just as smooth and fresh as when I put them on the day he got here."

Joe Corby considered this more thoughtfully.

"I'll ask him about it at dinner, Helen," he said.

Helen shook her head. "I wouldn't right away, Joe. I, I mean he is such a nice man, and there might be some reasonable explanation."

"I like him too," Joe admitted. "But damnit, Helen. We've got a right to an explanation of something as strange as that."

Helen looked worried.

"Wait, just one more day, Joe," she begged. "I'll look again, tomorrow

morning. And if it's the same story, you can demand an explanation tomorrow night."

Joe frowned. "I ought to ask him right now. I ought to go out into the back yard and ask him, but," he paused, "we'll let it ride just one more day. I'll fix the doors and the windows tonight so we'll be able to tell if he sneaks out."

Helen went to the back door and called.

"Dinner ready," she said.

Jimmy and Mr. Kismet came into the kitchen together. They'd been playing baseball, and both had dirt on their shoes. Jimmy was laughing, and so was Mr. Kismet. It was the first time that Joe had ever seen Mr. Kismet do more than smile.

"Wipe your feet, both of you," Helen commanded. "Then get upstairs and wash."

Mr. Kismet and Jimmy were upstairs when Helen turned to Joe.

"One thing he's done, Joe," she said, "has been to take the place of Ralph a bit for Jimmy. I think it would break Jimmy's heart if his pal, Mr. Kismet were to leave."

Joe nodded soberly, thoughtfully.

"Nevertheless, I'll fix those doors and window's tonight. I'm not working double shift tomorrow, so I'll only get up at eight. I'll look at the doors and windows then," he promised.

AND at exactly a quarter past eight on the following morning, Joe Corby came into the kitchen where Helen was cooking breakfast amid the savory odors of bacon and eggs and burbling coffee. The expression on Joe's face was puzzledly troubled.

"Mr. Kismet didn't leave the house last night," Joe said immediately. "I'm certain of that."

Helen smiled in sudden relief.

"That's good to hear, Joe. I could hardly sleep last night worrying about it. That means, then, that there is probably a logical explanation for those sheets being unmussed."

"I checked the doors and windows," Joe said, as if still arguing with himself. "I put a tiny pit of wax in the cracks of every one of them. The wax would have been knocked loose had they been opened."

Helen smiled again, reassuringly. "Now, Joe," she ordered, "don't fret yourself. Just like I said, it probably means there's a logical explanation for it all."

"But he could have been out those other nights," Joe said. "And if he didn't sleep here, where did he sleep?"

"We don't know that he didn't sleep here, Joe," Helen declared. "I wouldn't worry about it any more."

Joe frowned. "Well, you take a look in his room again today, just for good measure."

Jimmy came down for breakfast then, followed, five minutes later, by Mr. Kismet. Throughout the meal Helen kept up a pleasant chatter of conversation, as if her rekindled warmth toward Mr. Kismet would salve the mental injustice she'd decided she had had toward him. Jimmy, of course, was equally valuable.

Joe Corby was glad of this. For even though he still couldn't help liking the boarder, his suspicions were not completely allayed, and he was forced to hide them in silence and a concentrated attack on his bacon and eggs.

Joe finished eating before the rest. He pushed back his chair and rose.

"Have to get started," he said. "Don't want to be late."

"What time are you due at the plant, Mr. Corby?" Mr. Kismet asked courteously.

"Nine o'clock," said Joe. Then, to Helen: "What time is it now?"

Helen started to rise. "I'll look," she said.

Mr. Kismet raised his hand in protest. "No need," he said. "My watch says it's only eight thirty."

"Bus goes by to the plant at twenty to nine," Joe said. "I'll have time for a cigarette." He walked into the living room.

"I've your lunch ready," Helen called after him. "I'll pack it in your lunchbox in just a minute, Joe."

"Were you ever in the army, Mr. Kismet?" asked Jimmy, with typical ten year old irrelevancy.

Mr. Kismet smiled. "Not exactly, Jimmy. I've seen lots of armies, though. All over the world."

"Really?" said Jimmy, pop-eyed. "Tell me, huh?"

"You wouldn't have time to listen," Mr. Kismet said. "You've got to start for school pretty quickly."

"Some other time, Jimmy," Helen broke in. "Sometime when you and Mr. Kismet have more time."

"Awwwww," Jimmy said, returning to his orange juice.

SEVERAL minutes later, Helen rose and went into the kitchen. Rattling Joe's lunchbox, and noisily rinsing his thermos in the sink, she busily assembled and packed his noonday meal. In the dining room, Mr. Kismet was still leisurely finishing his breakfast. Jimmy had finally left the table and was dashing frantically about the living room in search of his books.

Joe Corby heard Helen's sudden cry of alarm even in the living room.

"Good heavens!" Helen wailed. "It's a quarter to nine, Joe!"

Shocked, red-faced, Joe Corby stormed into the kitchen to glare at the clock above the stove.

"I've missed the twenty to nine bus!" he roared. "This will be the first time I've ever been late on the job!"

From the dining room Mr. Kismet, who had finished his breakfast and was now rising, observed softly, "If it's the first time there's no harm, is there Mr. Corby? When's the next bus?"

"Not until five to nine," Joe Corby said angrily.

"Being fifteen minutes late won't be so bad," Mr. Kismet ventured.

Joe Corby suddenly swung on his new boarder. The steam he let forth was outlet for the suspicions he'd nourished, rather than for any antagonism.

"Fifteen minutes in a munitions factory means just so many less shell caps run through my production line today. It could mean fifteen boys dead, or one torpedo delayed and unfired. Or hasty and faulty workmanship that might jam ten machine guns. Fifteen minutes lost from my bench could lose a battle on the fighting front!" Joe Corby was blazing mad.

Mr. Kismet was courteously apologetic. "I'm sorry, Mr. Corby. I was certain that my watch was correct when I told you it was only eight thirty, five minutes ago. It's usually incredibly accurate. I can't understand how it lost five minutes."

Joe Corby flushed. "Forget it," he snapped.

"Joel!" Helen's tone was reprimanding.

But Joe Corby made no further apology. He swept up his lunchbox, grabbed up his coat, and stormed out of the house to make certain he caught the next bus. He was still fuming as he paid his fare.

Four minutes later, when the bus in which Joe was riding turned off the Old Shale road onto highway fourteen—along which the plant was situated—his anger drained from him like water

from a sieve. For there in a ditch by the highway, crumpled by an equally horribly mangled freight truck, lay the smouldering remains of the twenty to nine bus he had missed!

One of the state troopers, who was directing traffic around the blocked off scene of the wreckage, paused long enough to stick his head in the window of Joe's bus and make a brief explanation to the driver.

"Truck went out of control," said the Trooper. "Hit the bus head-on. Twenty men, the bus driver and all his passengers, were either killed instantly or burned to death inside. Truck driver got it, too."

Joe's bus circled the blocked section of the highway and continued on toward the plant. Joe was sick and shaken for the rest of the day. . . .

AT DINNER that night, Helen could talk only of the dreadful catastrophe that would have ended her husband's life had not Mr. Kismet's watch been five minutes slow.

"I needn't tell you," Joe said to Mr. Kismet, "that I owe you much more than the rotten show of temper I made this morning."

Mr. Kismet gracefully brushed the incident aside with a smile.

"It's just the old fable of misfortune sometime being a blessing in disguise, Mr. Corby. I've seen it happen many, many times."

"It was a miracle," said Helen for at least the tenth time. "A positive miracle; don't you think so, Mr. Kismet?"

"It proves," said Mr. Kismet, "that life is founded on trivial circumstances, and that the things people label as mere details are the very essence of life itself."

Neither Joe nor Helen realized at the time that Mr. Kismet hadn't answered

her question. The rest of the dinner passed swiftly, with conversation concerning the friends and relatives of the men who had died in the wreck. Joe knew many of them, from association at the plant, and talked rapidly about them, as if to bury his own shock as quickly as he could.

At eight thirty, knowing that he would be long in getting to sleep, Joe Corby excused himself and went upstairs to bed. Mr. Kismet announced that he was going for a walk, and departed asking Helen to wake him at seven o'clock, which was the hour Joe was rising the following day.

In the emotional turbulence of the day, both Joe and Helen had completely forgotten the mystery of Mr. Kismet's sleeping habits.

THE following morning, Joe Corby was first to the breakfast table, and in the kitchen Helen was busy whipping a batch of batter for the wheatcakes she was preparing.

Upstairs, Jimmy was still asleep, with another hour of dreaming left before rising for school. Helen had knocked on Mr. Kismet's door before coming downstairs, and he had answered that he was awake and would be down very shortly.

Joe's nervous state, though greatly diminished, still held from the near tragedy of the previous day. In the kitchen, Helen could hear his impatient fingertip tattoo drumming on the breakfast table, and a worried frown creased her forehead as she prayed mentally that his state of agitation would not be great enough to cause him to make a slip that might injure him at the bench that day.

A little later Helen heard Mr. Kismet's light tread as the boarder descended the stairs from the second floor. But she was not prepared for

Joe's exclamation of surprise when Mr. Kismet came to the table.

"Well," she heard Joe's voice raised in genuine astonishment, "this is a surprise, Mr. Kismet!"

"I thought it would be, Mr. Corby," Mr. Kismet's voice replied.

Helen left her skillet long enough to step to the door that joined the kitchen and the dining room. Her eyes widened as she saw the boarder sitting down for breakfast. He was dressed in a faded pair of clean, well worn blue denim overalls—the kind Joe wore to his job at the plant!

Unconscious of the fact that she was staring rudely, jaw agape, Helen stood there in the doorway staring at Mr. Kismet. He looked up, saw her, and nodded somberly.

"I have taken a job in the same munitions plant as your husband, Mrs. Corby," the boarder declared gravely. His expression seemed, for the first time since she had known him, to be deeply troubled.

"That's fine," Helen stammered in sincere confusion. "I mean, I really think it's wonderful that you'll be employed at the same plant as Joe. That means you'll be staying on here, doesn't it?"

"That's swell, Mr. Kismet," Joe added. "What branch will you be in?"

"Your department, Joe," Mr. Kismet said, using Joe's front name for the first time.

Joe smiled his surprise. "Then you're one of the three new men that're coming into my line today, eh?"

"That's right, Joe," Kismet declared unsmilingly.

"That's really great," Joe declared enthusiastically. "Don't you think so?" He had suddenly noticed the gravity of Mr. Kismet's expression, the solemnity of his tone.

Mr. Kismet didn't reply directly to

this. Instead he cleared his throat and said unexpectedly:

"I'd like to ask you a favor this morning, Joe."

Joe Corby smiled affably. "Go ahead, shoot."

Mr. Kismet looked first at Helen, then at Joe, and finally said earnestly, "Yesterday's near death seems to have made your nerves pretty ragged, Joe. I could hear you tossing all last night. You've been putting in a lot of time on double shifts, working extra overtime hours. Your body is tired, and you've just had a jarring mental shock after yesterday's bus wreck."

"I, I don't get it," Joe interrupted.

"You have a job that is slightly dangerous in the plant, Joe. A job that would end in disaster if you became too weary, too mentally fatigued and ragged, and bungled any of the dangerous parts of it."

"I'll be all right," Joe said with sudden defensiveness.

"I wish you'd do me a favor, and I'm sure your wife would like it too, by taking the day off. Just this day, Joe." Mr. Kismet said hastily. "Sit in the sun. Snooze, or walk down to the village square and take it easy. You'd be doing yourself and your work a favor."

Joe Corby was bewilderedly indignant. "I couldn't do that," he snapped. "Sure I'm tired, but so are most of the rest of the men in the plant. We're tired plenty, every day. But it doesn't bother us. We're tired for as just a reason as man has ever been tired in the history of the world. But we don't let it interfere with the job we've got to do. Take a day off? I'd sooner cut my arm off!"

Helen swiftly interceded. "Maybe there's some truth in what Mr. Kismet says, Joe," she said.

Mr. Kismet gave her a grateful

glance. "I know I'm a stranger, Joe, and that what you do is none of my business, but I wish you'd heed what I say."

JOE CORBY rose and slammed his fist on the table. "Of course I will not!" he said loudly. "And if you can't understand why I won't quit, you aren't an American, Mr. Kismet!"

Mr. Kismet's face was still grave, and his quiet voice even more somber than before.

"Of course I'm not an American, Joe. I'm not really any nationality. And since I can't make you see reason, I'll have to refuse to permit you to go to the plant today."

The boarder's words, quietly spoken, had the explosive effect of a bombshell on Joe and Helen Corby. They both stared at him in horror, as if he had suddenly lost his mind. It was Joe who regained his voice first.

"You aren't an American?" he belted. "And you think you are going to keep me from my job?"

There was pain in Mr. Kismet's gray eyes, regret on his honest features.

"You are right on both counts, Joe," he said softly.

Joe Corby started toward Mr. Kismet. Joe's fists were balled tight in rage, his eyes blazing.

"You lousy fifth-columnist," Joe spat, "you crept into our home and even into the heart of our kid, and now you think you're going to sabotage the plant!"

"Correct again, Joe," said Mr. Kismet, "except for certain minor alterations. I am not a fifth-columnist, and neither am I going personally to sabotage the plant, although a certain trivial action I will perform will lead to its destruction today."

"Damn your stinking hide!" Joe Corby grated. He started a round-

house punch in the direction of his boarder's chin.

But the punch never landed on Mr. Kismet's chin. It was halted some two feet from it, as Joe Corby cried out in alarm while an unseen force stopped his arm in mid arc.

Sudden sweat beaded Joe Corby's features.

"You can't hurt me, Joe," Mr. Kismet said softly.

"Who are you?" Joe whispered shakely.

"The name I gave Helen," Mr. Kismet paused to glance at the terror stricken Mrs. Corby, "should be sufficient. However, aside from Kismet, I sometimes am called Fate, Chance, Fortune, or, if you like, Destiny."

"Kismet," Joe said half aloud. "My God, I never connected it!"

"I am really none of those," Mr. Kismet said softly. "I am just a servant of those forces, Fate, Destiny. But it has long been my job to serve Destiny wherever I am sent. There are others like myself, in various other parts of the world."

"But why are you here?" Joe said shakenly.

"Barkerville has the munitions plant," Mr. Kismet replied. "In the planning of Destiny, today's explosion of the Barkerville plant will set off a series of circumstances in your nation which will lead to the collapse of the United States of America. The destruction of the plant will so spark internal dissension, that an inexorable chain of events will follow. A chain of events that will lead to a staggering defeat on your nation's home front, which, in turn, will mean the rout of your great armies on the fighting front, and the end of your country in the annals of history."

"You're crazy," Joe Corby said quietly.

"What happened yesterday morning, Joe?" Mr. Kismet asked.

Joe paled. "You mean—"

"I mean the incident of the mistake I made in giving you the incorrect time. A mistake which prevented your taking the twenty to nine bus, and thus saved your life," Mr. Kismet said.

"You, you knew?" It was Helen who spoke now. Her eyes were wide in a terror of wonder.

"Yes," said Mr. Kismet softly. "I was aware that Joe's catching his regular bus would have meant his death."

"But why," Joe Corby began.

"Fate had not ordained that you die that way," Mr. Kismet answered simply. "It was my duty to see that you were delayed."

Joe Corby licked lips that were suddenly dry.

"It would never have occurred to you mortals that Fate lays plans," Mr. Kismet was speaking slowly, quietly. "When you hear of a friend who is saved from a falling building brick, merely because a stranger stopped him on the street long enough to ask him for a match, you call it good fortune, coincidence. It doesn't occur to you that the stranger wanting the match is a servant of Destiny, like myself, carrying out the plans of Fate."

"There are others like you?" Helen asked in a choked half whisper.

MR. KISMET nodded. "We work among you mortals, looking, acting, seeming the same as you, pausing only long enough to carry out our missions, whatever they may be, as they are ordained. The street corner boot-black who stops you on the sidewalk long enough to shine your shoes and leave the lace of one trailing—a tiny factor that will result in a headlong fall into the path of a truck—may very well be one of us."

Joe's fear was leaving him, anger flushing his previously blanched cheeks.

"You may be what you say you are," he grated, "and you may be able to do the things you say you can—but no matter what you do this morning at the plant, you won't change the destiny of the United States of America!"

Mr. Kismet nodded. "You are quite right, Joe. I won't change it. We never *change* things. We merely see to it that the plans of Destiny do not fail. In our plans, your nation is destined for disaster, defeat, and oblivion. What I do today will set forth the chain of circumstances that will insure that disaster and final oblivion."

"What do you have against us?" Helen cried suddenly, the words torn from her lips in desperation.

Mr. Kismet shook his head. "As far as Joe and you are concerned, Helen, I have nothing but fondness. That is why, for the first time in many years, I permitted myself to be swayed in a minor mission. That is why, in other words, I begged Joe to stay at home today. That is why, in spite of himself, I will not let him go to the plant. For you see, in the scheme of Fate, Joe would be killed in the plant explosion today!"

"If I am slated to die in that blast today," Joe Corby said with sudden, choking fierceness, "let me go there. Let me die for my country, side by side with the boys at my bench!"

Mr. Kismet shook his head. "No, Joe. I permitted myself to have too much fondness for Jimmy. I don't want him fatherless. You will stay here."

"But, the, the chain of circumstances you spoke of," Helen declared raggedly, "cannot reach the foundation of our government through a destructive explosion in a munitions factory. It would be inconceivable!"

"There is an old proverb," Mr. Kismet said quietly, "that goes something like this. *'For want of the nail, the shoe was lost; for want of the shoe the horse was lost; for want of the horse, the rider was lost; for want of the rider, the battle was lost.'* That, Helen, is a thumbnail description of the workings of Fate. In my trivial action today, I will, so to speak, 'lose the nail'. The rest will follow inevitably."

"You lousy dog!" Joe Corby spat.

Mr. Kismet sighed. There was a sharper etching of the pain in his honest face.

"I had feared you would react this way," he said wearily. "That is why I tried a ruse to keep you from the factory. That is why I so dreaded that you should both learn the truth. I knew you would be unable to understand. And yet, I wanted you never to know, always to remember me kindly."

Joe Corby suddenly rose and dashed for the living room. Mr. Kismet didn't move, as the sounds of Joe's effort to open the front door came to them. Then they heard him tugging at the windows, cursing wildly under his breath.

Joe stormed back into the living room, picking up a small chair. Viciously he hurled it at the largest living room window pane. The chair struck the window, fell to the floor, shattered. The window pane remained, miraculously, unbroken.

MR. KISMET said wearily. "It is no use, Joe. I could have told you that you will not be permitted to leave your house until I have accomplished my mission."

"Damn you!" Joe Corby croaked. He stumbled toward the hall telephone. The sound of his feverishly unsuccessful efforts to reach the operator came to the dining room. Then Joe Corby

reappeared. His face was flushed, beaded with sweat. His eyes were wild.

"You can't do this!" he said hoarsely. "You can't do this!" He pressed his fists to his forehead, and then, unexpectedly, his arms dropped limply to his sides.

"It's not for me, Mr. Kismet," Joe said softly. "It's not for Jimmy, or for Helen that I beg you. It's for democracy, for decency, for the millions of kids like our Ralph. Kids out there in the mud and malaria and slime of the jungles; kids freezing to death behind an anti-aircraft gun on the ice-caked deck of an Arctic patrol boat. Kids fighting and dying and bleaching their bones on the scorched sands of the Sahara.

"Kids who were just like little Jimmy less than ten years back. Kids who believed that the other guys oughtta have a chance to smell the same fresh free air—the chance to lie on their backs in the same rolling green meadows while the clean, free, blue sky, white clouds and honest sun beams down on 'em. Kids offering their arms and their legs and their futures on an altar of blood, so that the cancer of tyranny can never eat into the land they love.

"They're kids who'd gladly die before they'd relinquish their god-given right to speak as they please, to love as they please, and to laugh as they please. They're kids with pride, and guts, and a to-hell-with-you grin for that thing you call Destiny. The only destiny they know is the destiny that gives a man two hands and a brain and a fighting chance to pound the scheme of things into the shape he wants it.

"They're the same kind of kids that lined up hungry and ragged and cold at Valley Forge, while the blood from their feet changed the white snow to red, and the fires in their souls changed dark

pages of history to a blazing new light. They said to hell with Destiny's plans, and they licked you then, Mr. Kismet. They beat you bad!

"They're the same sort of kids who hacked their way in prairie schooners through heat and thirst and redman's terror to the West; kids who fought beside the Crockets and the Boones and the Custers."

Joe Corby walked slowly over to his proudest possession, a replica of the Constitution, framed and hanging beside the entrance from the kitchen to the dining room.

"They fought to make those wonderful words," Joe pointed, "something more than brave phrases. They licked the thing you call Destiny at every turn. They were fighting for something more than a vast, fertile land divided into forty-eight sections. They weren't fighting for something geographical. Just like these kids today aren't dying for a map. They're dying for something you can't buy or sell, or touch or weigh. They're fighting for something called the United States. It's not something lying between the Atlantic and the Pacific; it's something lying between the heart and soul of every decent man who ever loved liberty. You can't destroy it. Destiny can't destroy it!"

Joe Corby was flushed, breathless. His eyes were filled with wordless pleading. He looked at Helen, who was staring with hopeful supplication at Mr. Kismet.

The silence hung like heavy smoke for fully a minute. And when Mr. Kismet finally answered, his voice was weary, kindly, but determined.

"You can't be expected to understand, Joe. My mission must be performed. At nine twenty-one this morning, on the inside of the plant, I will set the wheels of Fate into action

through my apparently trivial gesture. You see, Fate is like that. Nine twenty-one. Even the fraction of the hour at which I go through with my trifling action is important." Mr. Kismet rose. "I shall have to leave for the plant now," he said.

JOE CORBY shuffled listlessly, defeatedly, into the living room. Helen was wordless, moist eyed.

"I'll need a lunch pail," said Mr. Kismet. "Helen, I'll have to ask you to pack me Joe's. I don't want to create suspicion passing through the gates."

Helen nodded dully, turned and entered the kitchen. Mr. Kismet sighed and walked slowly into the living room. Joe sat in his favorite armchair, his head buried in his hands. He didn't look up as Mr. Kismet took a seat on the sofa.

From the kitchen came the noises of Helen's packing of the lunchbox. Perhaps five minutes passed, during which time Mr. Kismet stared at the forlorn spectacle of Joe Corby. Several times Mr. Kismet opened his mouth to speak, then thinking better of it, shut his jaws hard once more.

Finally Helen came into the living room, bearing Joe's lunchbox. She handed it to Mr. Kismet.

"Thank you, Helen," Mr. Kismet said, rising. He turned to face Joe. "I guess this is farewell. I hope that sometime, someday, we'll meet again under circumstances which Fate has more pleasantly preordained. Don't think too ill of me, if you can help it."

Mr. Kismet started toward the door. With his hand on the knob he paused.

"It would be foolish to try to get out of the house or use the telephone until after nine twenty-one. Then, of course, you'll find yourself able to do so." He hesitated. "Goodbye, Helen," Mr. Kismet said.

"Goodbye, Mr. Kismet," Helen answered.

"Goodbye, Joe," Mr. Kismet raised his voice.

Joe Corby didn't take his head from his hands. Neither did he answer. Mr. Kismet sighed deeply.

"Say goodbye to Jimmy for me," Mr. Kismet asked Helen. Then he opened the door and was gone.

Helen walked slowly back from the door into the living room. Joe had his head still buried in his hands. Eyes misty, Helen put her hand on Joe's head, roughing his hair gently.

"Joe," Helen said with soft weariness. "He's gone, Joe. He's gone, and it's going to be all right, Joe. Mr. Kismet will never get into the munitions plant."

Those were the only words that could have brought Joe's head up from his hands. And now he stared at his wife with pleading incredulity.

"Helen," he said hoarsely, rising to his feet and taking her arms roughly in his grasp. "Helen," he repeated, "don't kid me. For the love of God, don't lie to me!"

"I'm not, Joe," Helen said. "They'll stop him the instant they inspect his lunchbox. The idea came to me all at once, and I couldn't tell you."

"How, Helen? How?" Joe demanded almost hysterically. "We've nothing you could have planted in the box. No guns, or papers."

"I covered the bottom of the lunchbox with your replica of the Constitution, Joe, where it'll get greasy and defamed," Helen said. "Then I wrapped four pork chop sandwiches and a piece of apple pie in Jimmy's small American flag that he kept tucked away in a kitchen drawer. Wait until they inspect Mr. Kismet's lunchbox and discover that! They'll do more than stop him, Joe," she promised.

And then Joe Corby was hugging his wife harder than in Lord knows how long, and his cheeks were wet with tears as he babbled again and again: "Even Destiny can't lick the Constitution and the Stars and Stripes!"

"Not when they're combined with apple pie and pork chop sandwiches,"

Helen agreed smilingly . . .

THE news item Joe Corby read on the bus taking him to work at the munitions plant the following morning, was buried in the lower right hand corner of the second page of the *Barkerville Bugle*:

STRANGE TRICK ALLOWS SPY TO ESCAPE POLICE

March 30, 1942—(UPS)—Barkerville, Ky.—Attempts to sabotage the Barkerville Arms & Munitions Factory almost succeeded here yesterday when a spy attempted to enter the plant disguised as a workman. The fifth columnist was seized last night, but through a mysterious prank of circumstances succeeded in escaping the police who were removing him to the County Jail, fifty miles from here.

The car in which the spy and Wardens J. L. Pane and P. W. Conside were riding, hit a fully loaded automobile carrier truck going in the opposite direction on route 41, two miles south of Debensville. Three cars were knocked from the carrier vehicle, and the coupe in which the fifth columnist and officers rode was overturned. Quite miraculously, no one was seriously injured. But in the confusion that followed the wreck, the prisoner slipped away unnoticed.

Police in fifteen counties and the FBI have put out a drag net to catch the criminal. All roads and intersections are being patrolled twenty-four hours a day and local citizens have been notified to be on the look-out for a middle-aged, gray-haired, tall man. His manner is very courteous and his features are said to be "kindly."

When asked about their prisoner's escape, both wardens seemed slightly stunned and could only say, "He just vanished into thin air, that's all."

A SPECIAL MESSAGE

*Although what we, the editors, have to say here may have nothing to do with Mr. Kismet, there is an interesting parallel we would like to bring to your attention.

Some centuries ago there was a "Mr. Kismet" who was a real personage. He was so real that we are inclined to feel a little bit disturbed by this story—because it *may not be fiction!* True, we've presented it as such, but really, author David Wright O'Brien was extremely agitated and anxi-

ous that we publish this story, for a reason he would not divulge. This other "Kismet" wrote a strange series of books, one of which was called "The Centuries", and which has caused so much wonder and comment in these modern days. This ancient Mr. Kismet also knew things he shouldn't know—of the future—and *they are coming true!* His name is one you all will recognize: Michel de Nostradamus.

Has Nostradamus visited us again?—Ed.



Pfeiffer played on, and the
rats danced from their holes

*H*e was the hottest music man in town.
He could really cook with gas! Even the rats
came out and danced. But then the Gestapo
found Pfeiffer; came to exact their revenge!

The Pied Piper Fights the Gestapo

by **ROBERT BLOCH**

WHEN I walked into Jack's Shack I saw Lefty Feep sitting at his usual booth. With the suit he was wearing, it was impossible not to see him. Even a blind man would have found Feep at once—if he couldn't see the suit, its color was so loud he'd hear it.

Feep was waving his arms at Jack as I approached. He turned and gave me a nod of recognition, then continued to place his order.

"Make please with the cheese," he demanded. "But snappy."

"You want some snappy cheese?" Jack inquired.

"I do not care what kind of teeth the cheese is using," Feep asserted. "Just so there is plenty of it. Let it be long and strong. Let it be mean and green. Let it be old with mould. But bring me

lots of plenty in a fast hurry."

Jack scribbled his order and shuffled away. Lefty Feep turned and I saw his beady eyes were unstrung.

"Cheese," he whispered reverently. "Limburger with real limbs! Thick brick! I love it. Swiss is bliss. Cheddar is better. Camembert is the nerts!"

I stared.

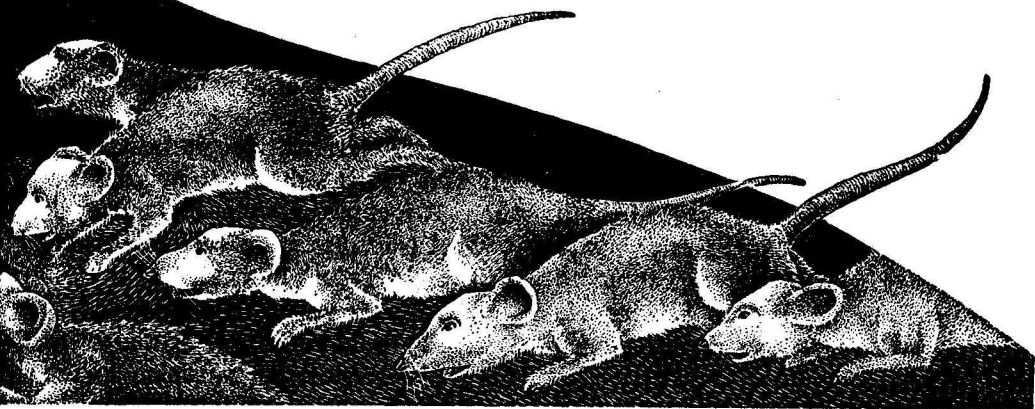
"What's the matter?" I asked. "You sound like a cross between Ogden Nash and Mickey Mouse. Since when did you develop such a passion for cheese?"

"It is not all for me," Feep explained. "I take some of it to a friend of mine."

"Are you hanging around with a bunch of rats?"

Feep shook his head. "I do not see Gorilla Gabface for weeks," he declared.

"Then what in the world—" I began,



but didn't finish. For Jack returned, bearing an enormous platter loaded with concentrated nose-torture.

"Ah!" sniffed my companion. "The breeze of cheese! What a stiff whiff!"

The whiff was almost too stiff for me. But Feep inhaled ecstatically.

"It brings memories," he exclaimed.

"It brings suffocation," I corrected.

Feep picked up a hunk of Roquefort and began to nibble eagerly. All over the cafe, patrons were hastily retreating to tables near the open door. Feep smiled as he saw them go.

"We are alone," he grinned. "Maybe now I can tell you the reason I am so partial to this cow-candy."

"Go ahead," I urged. "But your reason must smell better than your cheese. And if there are as many holes in your story as there are in your limburger—"

Feep waved his Parmesan at me indignantly. Then he bent forward.

"Hold your nose," he muttered. "And I will give you a blow by blow description which I guarantee is not to be sneezed at."

* * *

IT all starts two months ago when I suffer an accident one night. It seems I get my fingers stuck around the handle of a slot machine at a very embarrassing moment—in fact it is the moment when a couple of bloodhounds break down the door of the joint. They invite everybody to play cops and robbers with them and take a little ride in the city taxi downstairs.

Which we do. Of course, when the patrol wagon arrives down at night court, I am bailed out at once. I think nothing of it and am just getting ready to go, when a little guy rushes up to me and grabs my hand. I recognize him at once for a personality named Boogie Mann.

"I am so grateful to you," he shouts.

"How can I ever thank you?"

"What did I do?" I ask, lightly, but politely.

"I hear you give your seat in the patrol wagon to an old tomato who is standing there," he says.

"That's right. So what?"

"She is my mother," says Boogie Mann, and tears of gratitude come into his eyes.

"You are a gentleman and a scholar," he tells me. "Giving a seat in the paddy wagon to my dear old mother."

"It is nothing," I assure him. "She looks like she is too high to stand up anyway."

We walk out of the court together, and all the time this Boogie Mann is thanking me I am looking him up and down. You see, I never have much to do with such a personality before, because this article happens to be a swing band fan—what they call a "hep-cat." And I personally have nothing at all to do with swing, not being a hangman. So here and to fore, I steer clear of Boogie Mann and his unusual brand of swing-talk and his dizzy enthusiasm for juke symphonies.

When we get outside, Boogie grabs my shoulder by the padding and hangs on.

"Feep," he says, "I must reward you for what you do tonight. I am going to let you in on a big deal."

"The last time I am let in on a big deal," I answer, "I am holding a full house and the other guy turns up four kings."

"This is terrific," Boogie insists. "I will give you the chance to make a fortune. A fortune. Do you like money?"

Well, this question is easy to answer. I do, and then ask him one.

"What's the angle?" I inquire.

"How would you like to be the agent for the hottest swing musician in the world?" he asks.

"Who is it—Nero and his fiddle?" I crack. But he doesn't bend.

"No, this is the genuine jive," he tells me. "A hep Joe from Buffalo. A walkie-talkie from Milwaukee. Strictly a mutt from Connecticut."

"Who is he, where is he, and how come I get a chance to be ten per center for such a wonder man?"

"THAT is easy," Boogie tells me.

"He is a refugee and nobody discovers him yet. He is playing in a little joint called the Barrel House way down the street, and nobody suspects that he plays the warmest licorice-stick in the world."

"Licorice-stick?"

"Clarinet, of course."

"A refugee, huh?"

"That is right," says Boogie. "The whole band is made up of refugees. Hot Mickey is the leader."

"Hot Mickey?"

"Sure. The outfit bills as *Hot Mickey and His Five Finns*."

"Do tell."

"They are not Finns, though—most of them are German refugees. But they ride with a solid slide. They groove. They send."

"But can they play?"

"Play?" yells Boogie. "Wait until you hear the way they dig it out of the dugout! The fella on the slush pump is terrific, the guy who handles the gut-bucket can really slap doghouse, and they've got an alligator who really can keep the plumbing humming."

I ask for an explanation, and I find out that Boogie refers to a trombone player, a jerk with a bass viol, and a saxophone snorter.

By this time Boogie is so excited he is dragging me down the street.

"No contract," he yells. "You can get this guy for next to nothing. Take him uptown. I guarantee once you get

him in for an audition, any band in the country will offer him half a G a week to start. He's playing for peanuts here—it's the chance of a lifetime! Wait until you see what he does to a crowd. Here we are—just step into the silo."

"What silo?"

"The place where they keep the corn. The dance-hall."

Sure enough. We are standing in front of a little rat-race track called the Barrel House. Before I can make up my mind, he drags me inside.

It is nothing but a made-over barn, with a bar and a lot of tables where the stables used to be. A gang of jitterbugs are shagging all over the floor, and up on the platform sits this Hot Mickey and his refugees. They look like refugees from a bath-tub to me.

In fact I never see such a mangy collection of human beings outside of a Turkish Bath on the day after New Year's Eve. They look like they are dying, and they sound like it, too.

Because they are playing a brand of noise I never hear in all my life, and I once work in a steel foundry for a year. But these cookies are hammering and yammering on horns and trumpets and drums, and they are blasting so loud you would think somebody was building a subway.

BUT the crowd loves it. The place is packed, and everybody is prancing around with their fingers in the air, and sometimes their skirts. I do not need to take a second squint to see that there really are a lot of finks who go for this kind of bazoo.

Boogie drags me over to a table and leans.

"Listen," he chirps, beaming all over. "Come on and listen," he urges, making me take my fingers out of my ears. "Hear that baby pounding the tusks."

"What?"

"Punching ivory," says Boogie.

"Huh?"

"Playing the piano."

"Oh."

"Scar me, Daddy, eight to the mar," he yells, or something like it. "Feep, I want you should pipe that clarinet."

Me, I do not know a clarinet from a ocarina; in fact, where music is concerned I can not tell a bass from a hole in a piccolo. But I look for the guy who is playing most loud and proud, and I spot who he refers to.

He is a tall, thin drip tooting on a tall, thin horn. He stands up when he plays, and the rest of the band follows. When I try hard I can hear his clarinet honking way up above the other noise, and it has plenty of rhythm.

In fact, the whole crowd hears it, because they do not wish to stop dancing at all. Whenever a number finishes, they clap their pinkies together so hard and long that the band must keep right on playing.

"See?" whispers Boogie. "What did I tell you? He's a natural. He's hep to the step." Boogie jerks his finger at the mob. "Look—even the bartenders have to dance."

This is a fact. I notice them myself. Also I find my own feet jumping up and down a little. It is really rhythm.

"Pipe that!" grunts Boogie, all of a sudden. He points to the floor. I see a little mouse run out of its hole in the woodwork and scamper up and down in time with the music.

"It takes a real hep-cat to catch mice," Boogie tells me. "Now come on up to the stand and tell this guy you want to be his agent. Tell him you'll line up an audition with a big-time band for him. Take it easy, because he is plenty timid and he doesn't know the score yet, being new in this country."

So when the number is over and the

crowd finally finishes clapping and sits down, we slide over to the stand. First Boogie introduces me to the leader.

"Come on, ick, meet the stick," he says. "This is Hot Mickey. Mickey, my pal here would like to talk to your clarinet player."

"Huh," grunts the fat leader. "Is he safe?"

"Strictly a square from Delaware," Boogie tells him. He drags me over to the skinny clarinet man. "They're all nervous about meeting strangers," he whispers. "Afraid of spies on their trail, or something. These refugees have a pretty tough time getting out of Europe. So take it easy."

THEN he pushes me up on the platform and grabs the skinny man by the arm.

"Herr Pfeiffer," he says, "I want you should meet your new agent, Lefty Feep."

The skinny guy looks up. He has big, deep eyes, with a light in them like burning reefers. It is a very powerful stare, and when we shake hands I find out he has a very powerful grip.

"Agent?" he says. "I do not need an agent. I have here a good job, I am in this fine orchestra playing, so why in the world should I an agent want?"

This double-talk turns out to be a kind of German accent, but I just pass it off and do what Boogie tells me.

"How would you like to earn big money in a real band?" I brace him. "I can get you a job where you'll be famous overnight."

Pfeiffer shakes his head very fast.

"I do not wish to famous become," he says. "I have on my trail enemies, and I do not wish publoosity." He shakes his long curly hair again.

Then Boogie and I really go to work on him. It takes an hour between dances, but to make a long story, he

finally agrees to show up tomorrow, on his night off, for an audition.

So Boogie and I leave, very happy, while he is playing the last number for the evening. When we go out the door, the crowd is making like crazy all over the floor.

"He's a sensation," Boogie yells. "Broadway will love him! Think of the radio—movies—ouch!"

The last word comes from him when he nearly trips going out the door. He stumbles over a gang of mice that are waltzing around in the hall.

"We can at least sell him to Walt Disney," I decide.

BUT it is not Walt Disney I sell Pfeiffer to the next day. Boogie and I go down and arrange an audition with none other than Lou Martini and his Cocktail Cavaliers. They are playing in a big hotel, in what they call the Tiger Room.

Boogie handles all the details. I learn that the way a player auditions is to show up for a regular dance performance and sit in with the rest of the orchestra, to see if his noise fits in with the blasting. And Boogie gives this Lou Martini a terrific buildup about how good Pfeiffer is. From the way he describes his tooting you'd think Pfeiffer was the angel Gabriel instead of a broken-down refugee. But Martini says all right, he'll give him a chance, let him come around tonight with his clarinet for the dinner dance hour. Only Martini warns us that Pfeiffer better be good, because the Tiger Room only caters to the cream of society, and bad music will make them curdle.

So out we go, very steamed up, and I take Pfeiffer up to my place and tell him the good news. Pfeiffer doesn't seem any too pleased—in fact, you would think he had a date to be hung in the Tiger Room. Those big eyes of

his get misty and he runs his skinny fingers through the mop on his head.

"*Ach*, this playing I do not like the idea of, Mr. Feep," he grunts. "My music is safer to play a stable in, but on a dance floor not."

"You're terrific," Boogie tells him. "You know all the numbers Martini uses anyway. Besides, you have your own style, and all you do is hot licks, not score-work."

"Perhaps the licks too hot will be for this band," Pfeiffer mourns.

"The crowd will go wild over you," Boogie promises.

"That is what I am afraid of," says Pfeiffer. "Besides, there are on my trail now certain men I do not wish to find me."

"What's the matter, you owe money on that clarinet?" Boogie asks him.

"*Nein*. The instrument, I make it myself a long time ago," Pfeiffer says. "And it is not a clarinet."

"I wonder about that," Boogie tells him. "It does not resemble an American instrument at all, but it sounds like one."

Pfeiffer smiles.

"I can make it sound like many things," he answers. "But I do not make it sound tonight. Positive!"

Well, I see a great opportunity slipping away, so I stick in my oar.

"You have to play, Pfeiffer," I argue. "It's the chance of a lifetime. A young punk like you ought to have a big future."

"You are wrong," he says. "I am not so young and not so punk, and I have a great past. But if the men on my trail up to me catch, I will have no future left at all."

"How will they know?" I tell him. "All you do is sit in on a few numbers with a big band. Nobody will even notice you."

I'm wrong. I find it out that night.

WE finally argue Pfeiffer into keeping his date, and at eight in the evening we breeze into the Tiger Room and take him up to Lou Martini, who gives him a seat with the band.

Then Boogie and I sit down at a table and order a couple hamburgers while we wait for the dancing to start. I gander around and I am impressed. The Tiger Room is strictly uptown—some of the customers have as many as six chins, and most of the guys are wearing tuxedos nearly as good as the waiters have. There are a lot of old society tomatoes and a whole gang of debutramps. I begin to worry a little about whether this Pfeiffer is as good as we think he is—because from the looks of this mob they don't go for anything but the best. If they dance, they got to have at least St. Vitus leading the orchestra.

And there is skinny Pfeiffer up on the platform with his battered old clarinet, wearing the kind of a suit they put on window dummies when they want to burn them. His big round eyes are rolling, and he looks frightened and nervous. He keeps staring out at the tables like he was afraid of seeing a ghost, or his mother-in-law.

Then I see they are ready to start. Just before Martini goes out to lead the band, he stops over at our table and throws down a sheaf of papers.

"This is our stock contract," he tells me. "If your man is any good tonight, we'll sign it."

Then he blows, and Boogie and I sit there, biting our nails without ketchup when we see Martini raise his stick.

The music begins. Couples get up from all the tables and begin to break down their arches. They jiggle along, and I look at Pfeiffer and see he is playing kind of soft behind the band. So far, so good.

There is another number, and this

one is a little on the torrid side, so I know pretty soon Pfeiffer will have a chance to let out some blasts on his kazoo. Sure enough, comes the second chorus and Pfeiffer begins to let go with those high notes. They shriek out plenty loud, and the rest of the band lets him carry the tune. He has to carry it, the way he is mangling same, but everybody seems to like it. The dancers wiggle a little harder, and when it is over they all push their paws together. Pfeiffer is plenty red in the face, but Martini calls for another number and off they go.

This time he must pick out a special, because it is almost all clarinet. There are some drums, but what you hear is that awful squeaking. It runs up and down my spine like I have frogs down my neck. But these hepcats are crazy for it. They begin to truck all over the place, and Pfeiffer stands up and blows away.

"Look at that man send!" Boogie shouts.

But I am not looking at that man. I am looking at something else.

WE are sitting at a table near the wall, and I happen to glance down when I see it. There is something crawling out of the woodwork, and I recognize it right away. It is a mouse. A big, black mouse. And behind it is another mouse. And another.

I turn away, not believing my peepers, and then I see something else running between two tables. Grey mice. Three or four of them, scampering out onto the dance floor. I turn to the bandstand and I see a couple more, jitterbugging out from underneath.

"Jumping jive!" yells Boogie. "Look twice at the mice!"

And all at once the floor seems to be full of them. They are running and squeaking between the dancers. Some

of the society tomatoes notice them for the first time and begin to let out little squeaks themselves, pointing down at their feet.

Martini turns around to see what the matter is and he is so astonished he nearly drops his stick. Then he waves at Pfeiffer. But Pfeiffer doesn't pay any attention. He is blowing his clarinet, and like Boogie says, he is out of this world. His eyes are shut, his face is red, and all he can do is squeal out that high note of his.

And the mice run out, dozens of them, from all over the place. Some of the men are trying to kick them, and a couple of the jitter girls climb up on chairs and go right on dancing while they scream to take them away. A waiter is crossing the floor, running very fast, and he trips over a brown rat.

Everybody is squawking and running at once. By this time mice are climbing up on the tables and grabbing at food, and I see one fat bozo going crazy with the giggles because a mouse crawls into his tuxedo and tickles him.

Boogie runs up to the bandstand and helps Martini grab the clarinet away from Pfeiffer. Meanwhile I am very interested watching a young tomato at the next table who seems to get a mouse caught in her bustle. She is doing a very torrid rumba even after the music stops.

So the next thing I know is when Martini grabs me by the collar and pushes me out of my chair. He has Pfeiffer's neck in his other hand, and he is sort of kicking Boogie along with his feet in a mild sort of way. Also he is saying things that I do not wish to repeat.

"But what about our contract?" I ask, as he moves us along to the door. "What about our contract?"

"Take a look," Martini gurgles, between curses.

I look back at the table and all I see is a pile of mice scampering around a few strips of paper. They eat our contract for us! And something tells me Martini is not going to make out another one. In fact he confirms this suspicion when he throws us down the stairs of the Tiger Room.

"Get out and stay out," he shouts. "You rats will bring a bunch of mice into my place!"

"Aw, shut your trap!" yells Boogie, which is not the right thing to say, because Martini turns very red and throws a small chair after us.

It happens to hit me on the head, so the last words I hear come from Martini when he yells after us:

"I'll teach you—trying to put the Pied Piper in my orchestra!"

WHEN I come to, I am sitting in the alley, and somebody is pouring water over my noggin as if I was some kind of potted plant. I look up and see Pfeiffer.

"Where is Boogie?" I ask, strictly from confusion.

"I do not know, Herr Feep. He says he wants to make a grab far."

"Grab far? You mean, a get-away?"

"Yes. *Ach*, he runs very fast, that Herr Boogie."

I stand up, and when I do I remember everything. I stare a long stare at this skinny guy with the wild mop of hair, the big bulging eyes, and the funny clarinet.

"What is this Martini yells about you being the Pied Piper?" I get out, finally.

Pfeiffer's eyes turn down and he does a slow shrug. Then he sighs.

"I might as well confess," he whispers. "It is true. That is why tonight I do not wish the music to make. Because when I play little mice and rats come out. In the stable where it is

dark, the customers do not notice take, but when I play upstairs right away they smell a mouse. It is just what I am afraid of."

I listen, but all the while I am wrecking my brains to remember what I hear about this Pied Piper. I catch the gossip when I am a brat in school, I guess. Some burg over in Germany gets filled with rats—even before the Nazis arrive. And instead of calling the exterminator, they hire this guy with the pipe to swing out a few tunes. He plays and the rodents follow him and get drowned. Then he comes back and turns in a bill, but the rats are gone and they try to stall him off on a cash settlement. So he plays again and all their moppets run after his music like jitter-bugs and dance away forever.

I ask him about this story, and Pfeiffer shakes his head.

"It is a lie," he hollers, waving his arms. "It is a dirty black lie; propaganda. It is true I go to Brunswick, to Hamelin where the rat-plague is. It is bad, that plague. Across the Volga the rats swim, from Asia they come. Brown rats. To Prussia they march, like an army on its stomach traveling. Because they eat everything. Food, merchandise, poultry, flowers, seeds. At buildings they gnaw, at the pipes and walls and the foundations even. Fires they start by gnawing matches. Floods they commence by gnawing dams. In Hamelin there are more rats than people.

"And in Hamelin they hire me the rats to kill. I have my pipe and my music which I learn from traveling in India where they charm serpents. So for the rats a concert I arrange and they follow me to the river and drown dead. This is true.

"But it is a lie that I take away children! It is a lie made up to spoil my business. Now they only mouse-traps

use and I am—how you call it?—a bum. It gets so bad I must a job in an orchestra take, playing my pipe like a clarinet. Still the music I make enchants the rats, so I get from many theatres and cafes on my behind thrown out.

"Then come the Nazis, and because of what I do I must from Germany run like a rat myself. What happens after that you know."

PFEIFFER shakes his head. I pat him on the shoulder.

"Why don't you spill this before?" I tell him. "You got a fortune in that pipe of yours and you don't know it! Why you could set yourself up as a rat-remover and put the exterminator companies out of business!"

"*Nein*. You forget—they are still on my trail, those Nazis, because of what I try to do before I leave. That is why to Pfeiffer I change my name—it is German for Piper. Publoosity would be deadly fatal. The Gestapo wants to take me back. Up to now I sleep in the basement under the Barrel House because I am afraid. Down there the rats and mice protect me. But now I will be caught and they will—how you say so?—bake for me my goose."

"Nuts to that," I console him. "We get no Gestapo over here. The government cleans out fifth columnists. You got nothing to worry about. Just put that in your pipe and play it."

Pfeiffer smiles a little.

"You are kind, Herr Feep."

"Come home with me," I tell him. "I'll figure an angle for you. A guy with your talent—a regular rat Stowkowski—you won't have any trouble."

We start off down the side street. I am still talking to Pfeiffer and I pay no attention to the car that pulls up alongside the curb just ahead. The street is deserted anyway, so I just give Pfeiffer the old juice.

"I got a million ideas for you," I am saying. "Maybe not playing in a swing band, but other places. Hold it—I've got it—I see the light!"

But it is not the light I see.

It is the dark. Because when I say this I suddenly feel something hard smack me across the back of the head. A big hand reaches out and grabs me, and just as I turn around, I get it in the hat-rack again, and everything goes blankety-blank. For the second time that night I am down and out.

And when I wake up I am higher than ever in my life. Twenty thousand feet, to be exact.

I am in a plane, and so is Pfeiffer. We are lying on the seat of the rear compartment, and in the seat ahead a pilot is giving out with the old push and pull.

I sit up, and that is all I can do. Because Pfeiffer and I have our hands and legs tied together in Boy Scout knots.

Only one look at our pilot tells me he is very far from being a Boy Scout. He is a big side of meat with shoulders like a wrestler, and his head is shaved, even though his face isn't. He is wearing a pilot's outfit, but there is a little round badge in his sleeve. Pfeiffer looks at it and shudders.

"*Ach!*" he whispers. "Gestapo!"

SURE enough, I spot the swastika. I give Pfeiffer a nudge.

"What's happened?" I ask.

"Just what I am afraid of. They catch up to me, as I know they will. They drag us into the car and take us to some place where this plane in a secret hangar is kept. Now they fly us back to Germany."

I raise my head.

"But feel how cold it is. We're heading north. And look down there—we're over land, not water."

Pfeiffer shakes his head.

"We are probably to Canada going first. To another secret hangar. We make the trip in instalments, and I am worried only about the last payment."

The pilot never looks around. It is getting very frigid in the plane, and steam comes out of our yaps when Pfeiffer and I whisper. I squirm closer to him.

"I don't get this," I remark. "Just what is it you do in Germany that makes the Gestapo so hot to catch you?"

"I may as well tell you now," Pfeiffer decides. "I play for the rats."

"So what?"

"You do not understand. I play for the rats over the underground—the secret radio broadcasts against the Nazis. Music I make for them to come out, music I make for them to appear in every city. So they will jaundice bring, and typhus, and the plague. There is a rat for every man, you know—a population of millions. And I play oh so sweetly for the rats, to make them happy, to make them hungry. I play music that is with appetite filled, so they will eat. They will eat under buildings and bite away the foundations. They will destroy docks and warehouses and railroad bridges. They will make sabotage and the machinery up-ge-shcrew."

"I get it."

"So do the Gestapo. Every night I play, hidden away, over the wireless. And every night they hunt for me and my broadcasting set. Because the rats and mice come out and eat. Finally—how you say it?—the heat is upon me. I must smuggle myself from the country out. And now, even here, they have orders to find me and bring me back. So now they do. *Achoo!*"

This last remark is a loud sneeze. It is very cold, and Pfeiffer is shivering. So am I, but not from cold. I merely

have to look at the bullet-headed pilot to start shivering.

"You really can get the rats to go on a rampage with your music?" I whisper.

"That is so. Music has charms—*achoo!*"

I SIT there thinking about the screwy pickle I am in, but not for long. Because the pickle develops warts very soon. We start going down. The plane noses over and I look out and see us rushing down into blackness. No lights, no nothing.

At first I think we are cracking up, but the pilot is still sitting very calm. Then all at once I see a flare shoot out, and it hangs in the air while we land.

We taxi along some dirt almost into a clump of trees, and I look around. All I can see outside is woods, and some patches of snow.

"Canada, all right," I whisper to Pfeiffer, while the pilots gets out. "Must be another hideaway."

This turns out to be a good guess. Because the pilot comes around to the rear door, opens it up, and cuts our feet loose. For the first time I get a full look at his bearded puss, and it is a face that only Karloff's mother could love.

"*Raus!*" he says, kindly dragging Pfeiffer and me out **by the neck**. "To the cabin—march!"

And he pulls us along the ground toward a little cabin standing there all alone in the wilderness. The door is open and we go inside, Pfeiffer sneezing his way ahead of me.

Now I do not like the buzzard with the beard, but I will take him for a cellmate any time instead of the personality waiting for us inside the cabin.

He is sitting at a little table, and when we come marching in, he waves us to a seat with a smile and a big black Luger.

He is an old character, but his age does not make him any more harmless than a lot of other old things, such as tigers. He has a big beak of a nose which he points at us like he does the Luger, and behind the schnozz are two red eyes that go through me and come out of the back of my head.

"So," he says to the beard. "You bring guests, *hein?*"

"*Ja,*" snaps the beard, lifting a hand like he wanted to leave the room. "*Heil Hitler.*" And he stands at attention.

"Good, good. This is Pfeiffer. And the other garbage?"

I do not know who he is referring to, but I can guess. What he calls me is appropriate, because I look like I am down in the dumps.

The beard starts to wag.

"I wish to report that I make contact with the man Pfeiffer and his companion tonight at 9 o'clock, in the sedan. No trouble picking them up. I bring them with me to the plane and here we are."

"Good, good." The beak is smiling. "Go outside to the tanks and refuel at once. You must leave immediately and deliver our guests to the proper authorities."

The beard smiles and heils, then ducks out to refuel the plane. Meanwhile the beak gives us the old eye.

"**S**IT down," he says, gesturing with the gun in way that is too careless to suit me. "You seem cold, Pfeiffer?"

Pfeiffer is sniffing and shivering again.

"Yes," he whispers.

The beak smiles. "Too bad you are so cold, but it will not be for long. Soon your journey will be over, and then I am sure they will make it hot enough for you."

This does not strike either me or Pfeiffer as so funny.

But the beak laughs.

"Yes, they are waiting anxiously for you, Pfeiffer. The Pied Piper is quite a catch, even for the Gestapo. It is well worth the risk we are taking to maintain a plane service when we can handle such passengers as yourself." He grins very wide. "You are going for a ride."

"Achoo!" says Pfeiffer.

"Gesundheit," says the beak, very polite.

I study the situation. There is nothing in the old cabin but the table, some chairs, and a couple bunks. Nothing to throw or hide behind. And the beak has a Luger. In a couple minutes we will be back on the plane, headed for Germany. I wish very sincerely to get my hands on that gun—but my hands are tied. I begin to feel a trifle depressed.

And Pfeiffer just sits there and sneezes. He has a terrific cold.

The beak notices it. "It is too bad I cannot light a fire," he remarks. "But sparks fly up from a chimney, and this is Canada. One must be very careful, you understand."

Pfeiffer shakes his head. And then a kind of gleam comes into his eye.

"Perhaps I can make myself warm," he suggests. "If you do not mind, I will my pipe play the time to pass."

The beak chuckles.

"A serenade? *Wonderschon!* It is not every man who can hear the Pied Piper play."

Pfeiffer reaches into his coat with his bound hands. And the beak's Luger follows every move, in case Pfeiffer springs a gat or something. But nothing comes out except the clarinet from inside the overcoat pocket. It is pretty well dented, but Pfeiffer puts it up to his lips and lets out a blat. The squeaking starts.

The beak doesn't care. Out here in

the wilderness there is nobody to hear. So Pfeiffer begins to dig in. He smiles a little and wrestles with the cold pipe. It doesn't seem to work right, somehow. The cold air makes the notes lower. And Pfeiffer's cold does something to his breathing, so that the tones are all screwy. They carry a long wail, a sort of echo from far away.

SOMEHOW it is all kind of impressive—Pfeiffer sitting there tied up in this cabin in the woods at night, with a guy pointing a gun at his head—playing like one of those statues of Pan, or whatever they call him. His long fingers tug at the pipe and his lips pucker up, and the big squeals run up and down the air.

Then the door opens and the beard comes in. He has finished refueling and he is ready. He sits down for a minute when he hears Pfeiffer tooting away. He tries to get the beak's attention, but the beak is watching Pfeiffer.

And then I hear it. Far away. That rustling noise. That padding sound. It seems to be coming nearer, getting louder. More like a clumping noise. It sort of moves in rhythm to the piping. I look around, quick, but I don't see anything.

From the look in Pfeiffer's eyes, I know he hears it too. And all at once he pulls out the stops and gets loud on the clarinet. He rides to town. And over it comes the running sound, nearer and nearer.

Then the beak gets it too. He stands up all at once.

"Stop that!" he yells. But it is too late. All of a sudden there is a crackling sound, the walls of the cabin start to bend in, and the side of the door breaks down with a crash.

Pfeiffer's tune blares out louder, and there is a hell-splitting bang. The table spins into the corner.

"*Himmel!*" gasps the beak, turning around to face the door.

This is my chance. I throw myself across the room and grab the gun out of his hands. The beard falls down when the door topples over on him.

"Come on, Pfeiffer!" I advise him. For a minute or two there is nothing but confusion when the cabin is filled with what Pfeiffer calls on his pipes.

Then we are running down the trail, keeping the gun in the beak's ribs, and climbing in the plane. In three minutes we are off, making the beak pilot the ship.

* * *

"SO there is not much more to tell. When we return, we hand the beak over to the FBI, along with the plane. They get all the details on this Gestapo ring from the beak, and that is that.

"Naturally, Pfeiffer is a hero. I guess he will be doing sound effects for Walt Disney pretty soon. But right now he is working with the Coordinator of Information's office. You know, the babies that broadcast short-wave radio to the Axis.

"He is doing just what he does back in Germany—playing request numbers for the mice over there. He is trying to get the mice to revolt by using his pipe over the radio. Maybe he can get a bunch of them to tunnel under Berchtesgaden and kill Hitler. Perhaps the mice will get that rat.

"So that is why I come in here and order all this cheese. I take some down to the headquarters where the Pied Piper makes his broadcasts from, and feed it to the mice and rats that sneak into the studio when he starts to play.

"It is better to feed them than bump them off, because they do us such a good turn."

Lefty Feep sat back and folded his hands.

"Does this answer your questions?" he asked.

I stared him straight in the eye. "Listen, Feep. When you started this wild story of yours, I warned you. About holes in the story, wasn't it? And there is something you haven't managed to explain. Thought you'd get away with it—but I've caught you."

"To what do you refer, pal?" asked Feep, pleasantly.

"To that little matter of Pfeiffer playing in the cabin. You said he did something which caused an awful commotion; started some kind of row that you took advantage of in overpowering the Gestapo men and escaping."

"Of course," Feep answered me. "I can set you straight on that."

"Just a minute." I raised my hand. "I think I know what you're going to tell me. You're going to tell me that Pfeiffer played his pipe and a lot of mice started to tunnel under the cabin and eat away the foundations so that the door fell in. And I tell you right now, I won't believe it!"

"You don't have to believe it," Feep grinned. "This is not what happens. Pfeiffer has such an idea when he starts to play, but it is lucky for us that he also has a bad cold."

"What's that got to do with breaking the door down?" I snapped.

"I tell you before Pfeiffer has a bad cold and it makes his music sound different."

"I know that," I replied. "And I also know that you won't find mice running around in the wilds of Canada."

"Sure," Feep agreed. "It is not mice that break down the cabin door. Pfeiffer plays music for a mouse to come, but his cold causes a slight mistake. And he does not get a mouse."

"What does he get to break the door down?"

"A moose," said Feep, grinning.

Fantastic Surgery

By A. WENTWORTH

What are the chances of the soldier who is seriously wounded by the super weapons of this World War II?

ONE of the great medical lessons learned from wars is the knowledge of healing torn flesh and broken bones.

An American surgeon, the late Dr. William Baer, after his army surgical experiences in World War No. 1, introduced the practice of using live maggots to clean infected wounds. This treatment is now universally used.

Dr. Pierre Percy, another army surgeon, showed the importance of determining the difference between wounds of entry and those of exit and of the characteristics of the wound track.

Another method of treating war inflictions known as the closed method of treatment of wounds of the limbs, where there is both a broken bone and torn flesh, was developed by Dr. Winnett Orr, also an American surgeon.

It's much too early in the game to say what future surgeons will learn from the present war. But despite vast improvement in the surgeon's technique, men shot in the abdomen have no better chance of surviving today than they had during the first World War.

The higher powered ammunition used today is the prime reason. Army surgeons will find blood banks more essential than X-ray machines in handling these wounds. The delay involved in using valuable time for X-rays to locate the bullet wound is sometimes disastrous. Blood transfusions are almost always imperative—the greatest factor in death from a gunshot wound is the great amount of blood lost in severe hemorrhages.

The most effective method of killing is a gunshot wound in the abdomen. A 20% increase in the bullet's velocity in the past twenty-five years makes it cause more damage to the abdominal organs. The smaller the caliber of the rifle, the lower the death rate.

Modern bullets with their increased velocity cause a great deal of injury beyond control of the surgeon, but there are certain essential factors making for the recovery of wounded soldiers. Among these are: Immediate operation—the sooner the patient is operated the greater his opportunity to recover; type of anesthetic used; amount of time taken for the operation and care before and after this performance.

In addition to the surgeon's skill, there is a new life-saving instrument called the peritoneoscope. This instrument may prove the answer to this hitherto fatal wound. Soldiers in such hopeless shape from an abdominal bullet wound that they cannot be operated on may be saved by the peritoneoscope.

This long slender instrument carries a telescope and a tiny electric light at its tip and is equipped with a forceps for grasping a piece of bullet or shell or clamping shut a bleeding artery. The peritoneoscope can be passed through the bullet wound saving the need of cutting open the abdomen, an operation which might prove fatal to very sick men. Once the bleeding ceases, the condition of the victim may improve so that he can stand an operation if deemed necessary.

Air is first blown into the hole to make a space between the tissues and internal organs so that the instrument when inserted will not pierce them.

Patients often die from internal bleeding until the surgeon cuts open the abdomen and finds the bleeding artery. With this new instrument, the bleeding point can be found and the bleeding stopped without opening the abdomen.

The peritoneoscope is truly the "eye" at the end of the surgeon's knife.



by DWIGHT V. SWAIN

**Even the ugliest woman on
Earth would become lovely
in the eyes of the man who
took these marvelous pills!**

"**A** LEMON!" Roger Van Thorndyke declared with biting contempt, all the while eyeing the snapshot belligerently. "Definitely a lemon, Jasper. An embryo crone. They'll name her hag-of-the-year in 1960. Maybe sooner."

Jasper Tutt did not answer. For one thing, he could think of nothing to say. For another, he had a sort of squeamishness about arguing against anyone as rich and educated and good-looking as Roger, even if they had gone to school together. Finally, and most pertinent of all, Jasper had an unpleasant hunch that Van Thorndyke was right—that Lavinia was, indeed, a lemon.

"A face like a mud fence," the other detailed caustically, "but don't ever mention it in public; the mud fence

Beauty

A vision of feminine loveliness
rose before Jasper Tutt's eyes!



builders' association would sue you for slander. A figure on the order of one of those freak potatoes shaped like people that they exhibit at county fairs. She's got all the grace of a coal tippie. Why, even in the picture, her hair hangs down like wet fishline. And her complexion—well, I've seen better on a wart-hog. I'm not kidding you, Jasper; this creature's mother must have been frightened by a deformed hippopotamus—"

By now Jasper was quivering like a slice of aspic, each word of the indictment a fresh complex in that variegated assortment of neuroses which passed as his mind. At last he could stand it no longer.

"But I ain't no prize package myself, Roger," he broke in. "Lots of folks has

told me what a sawed-off, ugly little shrimp I am. I ain't got no money, neither; all I can spend on girls is what's left over from my pay for janitoring down at Scientific Associates' lab. I gotta be thankful to have a girl at all, even Lavinia."

Roger shook his handsome head despairingly. "You're hopeless, Jasper," he complained. "You've got a defeatist attitude. An inferiority complex. And until you get over it, you'll stay just what you are now: A 50-cent-an-hour janitor with the homeliest girl outside a freak show."

"Hhmmmp!" sulked Jasper. "Beauty's only skin deep."

"Then for God's sake skin her, Jasper, skin her!" Van Thorndyke retorted unkindly. Chuckling merrily at his own wit in resurrecting the ancient gag, he straightened his four-dollar tie, flicked a speck of dust from his hundred-dollar suit's lapel, and departed.

Jasper had a date with Miss Lavinia Sharp that evening. He did not enjoy it. Already the seeds of doubt Roger had planted as to the lady's desirability had grown to stout saplings.

He stole a glance at Lavinia's face as they left the neighborhood movie. A shiver ran through him.

"Wart-hog!" he shuddered.

"What, honey?" queried Lavinia.

Jasper controlled his voice with an effort. "Nothing, Lavinia," he mumbled, "nothing at all."

BUT all the rest of the way he continued to steal those sidelong glances. Devastatingly the awful aptness of Roger's similes burst upon him: Hair like wet fishline; figure like a freak potato; face like a mud fence; grace of a coal tippie; complexion of a wart-hog—

"Well, darling . . . ?"

Jasper jerked from his walking coma, realized that they were standing on the porch of Lavinia's home and that Lavinia was looking up at him with the air of a young woman who expects to be kissed promptly and thoroughly.

For a moment Jasper thought he was going to be sick. Then he got control of himself. With the grim resolution of a Japanese suicide pilot sending an explosive-laden plane into a headlong dive for a warship's deck, he swept Lavinia into his arms and briefly—oh, so briefly!—kissed her. After which, with an abrupt "Gottabetaworkearly," he was gone.

By morning Jasper's eyes had dark, puffy pouches under them. At 10:17 a. m., his breakfast gave up hope of being digested and allowed itself to be regurgitated. When noon came he was unable to eat. At 2:46 the building superintendent, his superior, bawled him out for neglecting properly to clean two of the lab sinks under his care. By five o'clock, his usual quitting time, he was only half finished with his day's work and wanted very much to die. At 5:03 Doctor Vladimir Pfaussenheimer found him.

Doctor Pfaussenheimer's mother was a Russian and his father was a German. He had an accent so thick that Scientific Associates, Inc., packed it in jars for sale as atmosphere to Hollywood's quickie film producers. His specialty was endocrinology and everyone who ever had any contact with him conceded he was a genius. Also, he had a heart.

When Doctor Pfaussenheimer entered his private laboratory and found Jasper perched atop a stool, therefore, the doctor did not throw him out. He did not even call the building superintendent. Instead, he said:

"Vot's der madder, Chasper?"

Jasper had been slumped forward on the lab bench, face hidden in his arms, making small, snivelling noises. Now he erupted bolt upright. Regardless of the state of his emotions, he knew it definitely was not politic to be found thus in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the most important research man in all Scientific Associates, Inc.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Doctor—" he began stammeringly, trying frantically the while to think up some excuse for his behavior.

Doctor Pfaussenheimer studied him, black eyes intent, bushy eyebrows like hedge fences in front of the glittering, polished dome of his bald head.

"Zumding iss wrong, Chasper," the doctor reiterated. "Vhy don't you tell me about it? Helup you I could maybe."

It was like dangling a carrot in front of a hungry donkey's nose. Jasper, at the moment, was a sucker for a sympathetic listener. He detailed his woes to the erudite one at great length.

"Y'see, Doc, it never bothered me before," he explained earnestly. "I knowed Lavinia was no Hedy Lamarr, and so what? But after lis'nin' to Roger for a while—well, Doctor, the more I think about it, the more I know I can't never bear the sight of her again. Because what he said's true! She's homely as a totem pole." He snivelled some more, miserably. "An' she's my girl an' I love her an' I'm so blamed ugly myself that I'll never get another if I let her go only I gotta because she's so awful-lookin' I can't stand the sight of her no more." He finished it with a rush, then sat back and blew his nose hard, still looking terribly bewildered and abject and broken-hearted.

DOCTOR PFAUSSENHEIMER continued to study him sympathetically. The scientist could appreciate the little janitor's situation, for emotional quirks and contradictions and conflicts were old stuff to a man who had to integrate a German-Russian family background and upbringing with current United States residence. A solution, however, was something else again.

"Chasper," he said finally, frowning until his eyebrows formed a hairy 'V,' "vould it helup any if your Lawinia vas peautiful, maybe?"

The janitor stared at him.

"I am vot you call endocrinologist, Chasper," he continued. "I vork mit people's glands. I find vot they do, vhy they do it. Zumtimes, effen, I make

vork differunt." He paused, gnawed briefly at his thick lower lip. "Vell . . . I haf chust a new zeries uf experiments finished. I haf deweloped a new hormone product." Again he paused, eyed the other. "I haf not on humans tried it yet, but it *should* to a voman giff peauty!"

"You—you mean that if someone takes this stuff of yours, they'll get beautiful, Doc? Is that it?"

The doctor waggled a warning finger. "Only vomen, Chasper. They vill affect only der female. Zertain glands they stimulate. Ven to ugly, scrawny little rats I giff them, those rats sleek, smooth, peautiful become. Rats overveight it reduces. Zumhow, an optimum mitin der body it creates. . . ." The doctor's voice mumbled on, explaining in detail, but Jasper was not listening. His spirits were climbing like a Grumman *Skyrocket* plane. A vision of a new, beautiful Lavinia swam before his eyes. . . .

"These are der tablets, Chasper," Doctor Pfaussenheimer told him half an hour later. "Chust see dot der young *fraulein* takes vun effery morn-ing."

Lavinia had been taking the doctor's pills for two weeks, harassed into it by Jasper's badgerings, before the little janitor noticed that his lady-love's excess weight was going fast. Curves were beginning to appear in the right places. Fresh, smooth skin, backed by firm young flesh was replacing the rough, sallow complexion of other days. Her hair took on new lustre, gleamed with hitherto undiscovered glints of rich auburn. Flashing eyes brightened her face. White teeth gleamed between warm, red lips. Even the bone structure seemed to change; where once her face had seemed square, it now was that graceful oval so prized by connoisseurs of beauty. She stood slim and straight

as a forest nymph. There was a seductive lilt to her walk.

In less than two months, men were straightening their ties when they saw they were going to meet her on the street. Other women were casting green-eyed, venomous glances of envy in her direction. Doctor Pfaussenheimer was beside himself with joy. And Jasper—Jasper was soaring so far above the clouds it was an effort to pull himself down to clean the top floor of Scientific Associates, Inc.

BUT having a beautiful sweetheart, Jasper discovered, was not all beer and skittles. Beauty encouraged expensive tastes. Gorgeous girls are anxious to display their charms in exclusive nightclubs instead of neighborhood movies. Lavinia the Lovely refused to have anything to do with the clothes Lavinia the Lemon wore uncomplainingly. She wanted hair-dos to accentuate the beauty of her auburn locks, silk stockings to show off her slim, shapely legs to the best advantage, pert hats with tiny veils to render her dark, long-lashed eyes even more intriguing than nature—and Doctor Pfaussenheimer's beauty hormone tablets—made them. Jasper listened to her chatter of this and that item which she simply *had* to have, thought of his \$20 weekly stipend, and wondered vaguely how the two would coordinate when he and his light-o'-love were married.

Less serious but more annoying were the men. The old Lavinia could walk past the pool-hall on the corner any time, day or night, and the loafers sprawled on the bench before it never so much as paused in their discussion of the Browns' chances this season, and were the Russkies really going to lick Hitler? The new Lavinia set staid and respectable business men to licking their lips wolfishly, while small boys

whistled in frank admiration. And there were always sleek young men who felt confident that she would prefer their company to Jasper's. The little janitor expressed his disagreement at the cost of several black eyes, bloody noses, and sundry contusions and abrasions.

By and large, however, Jasper decided, life was good. Was, that is, until Roger Van Thorndyke again intruded. He met Lavinia and Jasper on the street one spring afternoon, and a look came into his eyes that every mother warns her daughters against.

Five minutes later the three of them were having cocktails at Pierre's. Before they parted a date had been made for them to reassemble at Van Thorndyke's penthouse apartment the next evening.

By the time Roger, ever the perfect host, was taking their coats, Jasper's collar had grown suddenly too tight. Van Thorndyke's luxurious apartment might set off Lavinia's new-found beauty to perfection, but it certainly had the opposite effect on her fiance's worn brown suit and 69-cent shirt.

Roger promptly shoved a glass into Jasper's hand.

"Have a drink, old man," he invited. "I want to show Lavinia the view from the roof. No use boring you with it again, though."

BY THE time Jasper had quit gaping, Van Thorndyke and Lavinia were outside. Scientific Associates' prize janitor scowled.

"Nerve!" he muttered, slammed the untouched drink down on a convenient table, and stalked after the pair.

Lavinia was breath-takingly lovely in the moonlight. Her shining eyes put the stars to shame, and the dazzling smile she had turned on Van Thorndyke would have seduced a saint.

"Lavinia!" Roger whispered. He was very close beside her. His arm slid around her waist.

Jasper doubled his fists and began counting to 10.

Gently, Lavinia pushed Van Thorndyke away. "We mustn't, Roger," she said softly.

Jasper let out his breath. His lips relaxed in a tender smile.

"Why not?" their host murmured. "This is our night, dearest. . . ."

Lavinia turned on the smile again, shook her head. "Don't forget Jasper," she warned. "The little fellow's terribly jealous, you know. And there'll be other nights. . . ." Her voice was rich with promise.

Jasper went limp. He felt suddenly as if there was a rock in the pit of his stomach. Van Thorndyke's chuckle jerked him alert again.

"Don't worry, little lady," their host grinned wickedly. "Jasper won't interfere. I've taken care of that."

Lavinia looked puzzled. Again Roger chuckled.

"I had to invite Jasper, of course," he explained, "but I certainly didn't intend to have him around bothering us all evening. So I took the liberty of slipping a Mickey Finn into that drink I gave him. By now, he's so sick he isn't thinking about anything but his own stomach."

"Oh, Roger!" Lavinia's eyes widened with admiration at this master stroke. Her arms slipped around Van Thorndyke as he enfolded her in his.

"Hey!" yelled Jasper in outraged protest. The couple whirled. Lavinia's face flushed as she saw her erstwhile fiancé. Not Roger. He glared straight at Jasper.

"Well?" he demanded.

It was Jasper's turn to be startled. "Why, uuhhh," he gulped.

"What do you mean by intruding

on our privacy this way?" thundered Roger.

"You—, you—," sputtered Jasper. "You slip me a Mickey, swipe my girl—"

"You don't think a dope like you can keep a girl like Lavinia, do you?" sneered his rival. "Get wise, chump. She's out of your class."

JASPER'S mouth opened and closed several times, but no sound came forth. The skin of his face suddenly felt too tight and something was plugging up his throat so he couldn't breathe and everything seemed blurred.

"Lavinia, you said you loved me," he choked out at last. "You always wanted to get married. You—"

Lavinia tossed her lovely head.

"What have you got to offer a girl like me?" she snapped. "You don't think I'm going to settle down to love on a janitor's wages now, do you? Why, even before . . . before I changed . . . you bored me 'til I could hardly stand it. The most inspired suggestion you ever made in your life was to suggest going to a movie. Your idea of interesting small talk was to tell me how you liked some new brand of floor wax—"

"In other words," Van Thorndyke cut in caustically, "this is where you came in. And it wasn't nice knowing you."

Red rage seared through Jasper's every fibre. With a hoarse snarl he lunged forward. He hardly felt the fist that knocked him cold. . . .

Doctor Pfaussenheimer frowned ponderously when he heard the story, told with a wealth of tragic detail, the next afternoon.

"Can'tcha put me outa my misery, Doc?" moaned Jasper. "I don't wanta go on living now. Not without Lavinia. Oh, that rat, Roger! Oh—"

"Berhaps this iss chust as vell, Chasper," the doctor broke in thoughtfully. "Der hormone is a success. But my vork costs money, Chasper, und effort. Und I don't get paid as much as zum peoples thinks." He licked his lips. "So-o-o . . . if ve can . . . er . . . commercialize der discovery chust a little, berhaps . . ."

"But I don't wanta make money, Doc. I just wanta die. Lavinia—"

Doctor Pfaussenheimer snorted. "Don't be a *dummkopf*, Chasper. Vunce you haff money, *frauleins* vill swarm around you like flies around der honey-pot. You vill forget this other little fool, Lawinia."

A spark of interest lighted behind Jasper's dull stare. Dopey he might be, but he was no dope.

"What's the angle, Doc?" he queried pointedly. "Why would a big-shot like you take a guy like me in on anything?"

The doctor coughed. "Vell, Chasper, it would not do my reputation any good to haff der tabloids calling me 'Doktor Venus' or zumding . . . und besides, der iss a clause in my contract mit Scientific Associates dot says dewelopments I make during der term of der contract belong to them. . . ."

TWO months later Jasper was no longer Jasper, janitor at Scientific Associates' lab. Jasper, his cards stated, was Mr. Tutt, American representative for Beauty, Unlimited. And since the somewhat mysterious Beauty, Unlimited, certainly could produce the goods at the modest price of \$100 per beauty hormone tablet—one to be taken daily—few questions were asked. Lonely spinsters and doting parents of homely daughters thought it was enough that Jasper doled out little tan pills which, within months could change a crow into a bird of paradise.

At first Jasper was a bit worried.

"D'you think it's safe, Doc?" he asked anxiously. "You know, peddlin' these pills around the way I do. Supposin' some smart doctor gets the idea of analyzing 'em. Wouldn't we be washed up? Huh?"

Doctor Pfaussenheimer gave vent to a rumbling laugh.

"Don't you vorry, Chasper," he reassured. "For long has science known der elements vot make up der human body. But der secret of life undiscovered remains."

Jasper met Carol at the Ethiopian Room. She was, he decided, very nearly as lovely as Lavinia had become. Somewhat on the order of Madelaine Carroll, with shimmering waves of soft golden hair, and even softer curves here and there. But with a verve that was almost Latin, and slow eyes that could turn any man inside out with a single glance.

Finesse and a handsome tip got him an introduction. And Carol proved most tolerant when she learned that even a funny-looking little man who forgot his grammar when he got flustered could provide fur coats and long cars and expensive jewelry. Proved tolerant even to the point that Jasper one day was impelled to call Doctor Pfaussenheimer to the spacious suite Beauty, Unlimited, occupied on the twenty-second floor of the Strebler Building.

The doctor settled himself ponderously in a luxurious red-leather chair, declined the perfecto Jasper proffered.

"Vell, Chasper?" he probed.

Jasper lost some of his carefully-cultivated poise. He shifted nervously.

"Vell?" reiterated the doctor.

"Well," fumbled Jasper, groping frantically for words and slipping back into his old, near-illiterate jargon,

"well, Doc, I guess you was right. Money can do anything. Even get a guy like me a girl. Doc, I'm gonna be married!"

FOR a full minute Doctor Pfaussenheimer eyed him. Slowly a tremendous grin spread across his broad face.

"Chasper, my poy!" he rumbled in great good humor at last, hoisting himself to his feet and extending a massive paw. "Congratulations you deserve! Carol iss a lucky young lady indeed.

"Und our own relationship . . . I hope dot it iss chust beginning. Effen if you are a rich beauty monopolist und I am but der humble scientist in zearch of knowledge." He screwed up one eye in a caricature of a wink.

At the door he paused.

"Und Lawinia, Chasper? You haff forgotten her?"

Jasper's expression soured like cream in the sun.

"No, not by a long shot," he snapped. "The day I forget the raw deal she an' Roger gave me, I'll be dead. As far as lovin' her . . . well, Roger can have her. But believe me, if I ever get a chance to take 'em for the ride they deserve. . . ."

Doctor Pfaussenheimer chuckled. "Don't be too zurprised if dot chance soon comes, Chasper!" he warned cryptically as he closed the door.

Adolf Hitler's Nazi legions were advancing backward on the Russian front, but Jasper Tutt didn't know it; he remained in a blissful, kiss-inspired stupor. The day the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor he and Carol were so busy with marriage plans they didn't learn of the attack until Monday. Jasper was soulfully admiring his bride-to-be's wedding gown—and, even more,

Carol, inside it—as congress declared war. In a word, Jasper had it bad. But even his rosy halo was dented the next morning.

"It's a Mr. Van Thorndyke, Mr. Tutt," reported Miss Cronin, Jasper's confidential secretary. "I tried to tell him he'd have to make an appointment to see you, but he claimed he was an old friend and insisted on coming in now."

Suddenly Jasper knew how a man felt when Jack Dempsey belted him the old one-two to the breadbasket.

"W-w-h-h-o-o?" he quavered, the breath all at once gone out of him.

"Mr. Roger Van Thorndyke, his card says, Mr. Tutt. A very nice looking gentleman. Tall. Dark. Handsome." Miss Cronin sighed a little, wistfully.

Jasper stared deskward, brain aswirl with glowing question marks. Roger! Here! What on earth could he want? Why had he come? How should he treat him . . . ?

"Send him in, Miss Cronin," he croaked at long last. "Send him in."

ROGER had aged, Jasper decided. There were lines of worry marring his once-smooth face. Dark circles beneath his eyes. He stood in the doorway, hat in hand, shifting his weight nervously from one foot to the other.

"Well?" demanded Jasper harshly, endeavoring frantically to veil his own nervousness.

"Jasper—!"

"I understood you had some business to transact, Mr. Van Thorndyke. What is it?"

Slowly Roger shuffled toward the desk. Uninvited, he took a chair.

"It's—it's hard to come to you this way, Jasper," he began haltingly.

Jasper made a point of glancing at his watch. "My time is valuable," he

informed the other curtly.

"It's . . . it's about Lavinia, Jasper. You knew we were married?"

"No," Jasper stated flatly, "and I'm not interested now."

Van Thorndyke seemed not to have heard him. "We got married right after . . . after that night," Roger went on dully. "Everything's been fine, Jasper, only now—now—she's gaining weight again."

"She's *what*?"

"She's gaining weight. Her complexion . . . something's wrong with it." Van Thorndyke said it in much the same tone one would use to announce that grandmother had just been discovered in a trunk in the attic, neatly drawn and quartered.

Seconds passed. Jasper sat gaping at Roger in silence. Slowly, the tenseness began to leave the ex-janitor's face. The muscles relaxed. The corners of his mouth quivered; his eyes sparkled. Then, quietly at first, later in uncontrollable spasms, he laughed.

At first Van Thorndyke bore it in squirming silence. Then he exploded.

"Stop it, damn you!" he screamed. "Stop it! Don't you understand? As soon as Lavinia ran out of those pills you gave her, she began to go back—to revert to the way she used to be when you went with her—"

"Hair like wet fishline," Jasper recalled aloud. "A figure like a freak potato; a face like a mud fence; the grace of a coal tippie; a complexion like a wart-hog's—"

"Stop, stop, stop . . ." moaned the other. "Don't remind me. I can't even stand the sight of her, yet I've got to live with her. She won't give me a divorce. She won't even let me give her separate maintenance. She insists on living with me, gushing over me . . . Jasper, you've got to help me. You can't leave me saddled with that horror

for the rest of my life."

"What, Roger? Me interfere in your domestic affairs?" snickered Jasper. "I couldn't think of it. My conscience would hurt me. Besides, how do I know you really mean what you say? Maybe when I got through, I'd just find you were trying out a new way of slipping me a Mickey Finn." Politely but definitely he shooed the other toward the door. "You and I know that you love Lavinia for her own sweet self, not for externals," he mocked. "Who am I to interfere, Roger? And now, I'm busy . . . Goodbye." Gently, he shoved the other out the door, then burst into another side-splitting spasm of laughter.

JASPER was still chuckling when he punched the doorbell at Doctor Pfaussenheimer's home.

"This is too good to keep," he muttered aloud. "Doc sure will get a kick out of it."

A tall, polite stranger answered the door.

"Yes?" he inquired.

"I'd like to see Doctor Pfaussenheimer, please," Jasper requested. "Just tell him it's Jasper. He knows me."

The polite stranger shook his head. "Sorry, sir, but I'm afraid it's impossible for you to see the doctor. But won't you step in, please?"

Frowning, Jasper followed the other inside. Another stranger, older than the first, was in the living room.

"What can I do for you, Mr.—?" this second man inquired.

"Tutt," responded Jasper. "Jasper Tutt. I'm an old friend of Doctor Pfaussenheimer's. Dropped in to see him. Is anything wrong?"

The older stranger smiled a trifle queerly. "Nothing serious, Mr. Tutt. But I'm afraid you can't see the doctor

today. You see, he neglected to take out citizenship papers. Now that war's been declared, he and all other potentially dangerous aliens are being rounded up. They'll be held in concentration camps until after the war." He bowed a trifle. "I'm Charles Germer, bureau head for the Federal Bureau of Investigation locally."

"But the doc's no Nazi!" Jasper sputtered, forgetting his veneer of grammar. "Why, he's a good guy—"

"Nevertheless, Mr. Tutt, we must hold him," the FBI man answered smoothly. "He is a German national. Just where his political sympathies lie we cannot be sure, but the acclaim with which his work has been met in Germany certainly doesn't indicate that he's strongly at odds with the Nazi regime. And his scientific ability makes him so potentially dangerous that we can't afford to take any chances with him."

For a moment Jasper was overcome with sympathy for Doctor Pfaussenheimer and his plight.

"'Stough," he muttered, wagging his head dolefully.

Then, suddenly and with awful clarity, the truth slapped him in the face.

"Hey!" he gasped, "What'm I gonna do?"

"Something wrong?" the FBI man inquired politely.

"Nothing," moaned Jasper. "Nothing—only I think my meal ticket just slid out from under me."

How thoroughly it had disappeared he learned at an FBI-supervised audience with Doctor Pfaussenheimer two days later.

"*Nein*, Chasper, I *vill* not giff you der formula for der tablets," the doctor declared firmly.

"But, Doc—"

The other shook his big head ad-

amantly. "I vill not do it, Chasper. It vould be public broperty mitin a week. Der guffernmunt chemists vould check it pefore you vould be allowed to take it."

"I'll starve—"

"Und dot," Doctor Pfaussenheimer concluded, as if he had never heard the interruption, "iss final! *Auf wiedersehen*, Chasper."

BY the time Jasper reached the street his brain finally had grasped the fact that the financial honeymoon was over. He started to hail a cab, then checked himself and caught a street car instead. When he got off he ducked into the saloon on the corner.

"Rye," he told the bartender. "Double-headers. Three of 'em." He downed them in gulps, one after another, like stiff doses of a particularly unpleasant medicine.

Carol was waiting for him at her apartment. She was wearing a mink coat.

"Look, darling!" Eyes dancing, she pirouetted gracefully before him, showing off both herself and the garment to best advantage.

"How much?" Jasper demanded belligerently, his voice a trifle thick.

Carol tilted her head, eyed him disapprovingly. "Darling! Is that the way to talk to the girl who's going to marry you next week? Why, it's genuine mink, and the most beautiful—"

"How much?" Jasper repeated. There was a sour twist to his mouth and his face was even more gargoylesque than usual.

"Not much," Carol pouted. "Only \$1,750." She brightened. "It's a real bargain, Jasper—"

"You can take it back."

Carol's eyes narrowed a trifle. A worried little frown rippled across her lovely forehead.

"What's wrong?" There was no longer a lilt in her voice.

Jasper laughed unpleasantly. "I'm broke," he grunted.

"Broke!"

"Yeah," Jasper nodded. "The guy who's supplied those beauty pills is in jail. He won't be out 'til after the war. So I'm washed up."

"But what about all the money you've been making? You've sold hundreds of those tablets. And at a hundred dollars apiece—" A vinegar note of suspicion crept through the usual sugary sweetness of Carol's tone.

Jasper laughed. "Gone," he reported succinctly. "I only got half. And girls like you cost money. A lot's been comin' in, but more's been goin' out. I've spent it like a shipload of drunken sailors. Right now, I'll be lucky if I break even after I pay up all the bills."

There was frost in Carol's gaze.

"So what happens now?" she demanded, irritation saturating every clipped syllable.

Jasper met her eyes head-on. The three ryes were a ball of fire in the pit of his stomach and for once he did not feel inferior or afraid. He swayed a little.

"Well?" snapped Carol.

"So now you walk out on me," said Jasper thickly. "You take a powder an' leave me in the lurch—just like I damn' well knew you'd do all the time, down underneath, even if I was sap enough to kid myself into thinkin' it was me instead of the dough you liked."

"Right," Carol retorted, her tone savage, vindictive. "You little fool! You didn't think I was going to marry you for love in a cottage, did you?"

WITH an irritated toss of her lovely head, she pivoted, skirts swirling around shapely, silken legs, and stepped briskly into her bedroom. She

slammed the door behind her.

A lone tear, plummeting from Jasper Tutt's chin, spatted on the polished floor in echo.

Jasper shivered as he shuffled onto the bridge. The zero wind pushed him along, penetrating his overcoat as if the garment were a screen door. A stray breeze found its way up his left pant-leg, sending new chills the length of his spinal circuit.

The fringe of ice along the bank now was left behind. Black water swirled and eddied below him. He could see it twist and writhe like a living thing in the pale moonlight. He stopped, looked around.

The bridge was deserted.

Once again Jasper went over it all: Doctor Pfaussenheimer in a concentration camp for enemy aliens. Carol gone. Roger and Lavinia hating him, with all their hearts. And he, Jasper—he choked back a sob—alone. Friendless. Broke.

His numb fingers curled around the bottle in his pocket. Slowly he drew it out, stared at it. Poetic justice! His new life had begun with a bottle of these pills, given him by the doctor for Lavinia. And now, that life would end the same way—with a bottle of pills, all he had left, in his pocket as he jumped off the bridge.

Again he peered down. Involuntarily his teeth chattered. The dark water was hungry, unfriendly. For a moment he thought of turning back. After all, there were 30 pills in the bottle—that was a \$3,000 stake. . . . Then the awful loneliness gripped him again.

"No!" he choked. Clumsily he crawled onto the rail. For a moment he squatted here, shivering and shaking, like a big, awkward cross on a swaying wire fence. He drew a deep breath, closed his eyes tight, relaxed his grip, and pitched forward. . . .

The icy water sent a thousand red-hot needles into him. Between the time he hit the surface and the instant he began slowly to fight his way to the surface again, he made up his mind definitely about one thing: Broke or prosperous, popular or friendless, miserable or in ecstasy, he didn't want to die.

A fraction of a second later his head popped out of the water and into the wintry air like a jumping jack shooting out of its box.

"HELP!!!" screamed Jasper. Then the water closed over his head again. Half the river rushed in his open mouth and thence to his lungs. He was going down . . . down . . . down . . . and the Aurora Borealis was blazing its way across his brain in colors beyond the imagination even of a futurist painter. . . .

SHE was, Jasper decided, the homeliest girl he ever had seen, Lavinia not excepted. Not that there was any resemblance. Where Lavinia tended to the soft, lumpy type, this specimen exemplified the bony, angular, buck-toothed variety of female.

"Hello," she said.

Jasper peered at her blearily again. "Where am I?" he demanded.

"In my houseboat under the bridge," she answered, then sent him a reproving glance. "Say, mister, what were you tryin' to do? Commit suicide? You wanta be more careful how you lean over railings. I had an awful time fishin' you out. Why, that overcoat of yours darned near pulled me down with you."

"Really, Miss—, Miss—, er . . ."

"Just call me Sophie, mister. I'm Sophronia Apperson."

Jasper beamed, sighed gently. Suddenly he felt very much at ease. "All right, Sophie it is," he agreed. "But

remember, you've got to call me Jasper, too." He glanced around the tiny cabin admiringly, everything was very ship-shape, neat as a pin—even crisply absurd little curtains at the windows.

Sophie smiled shyly. A nervous blush tinted her face the delicate shade of catsup.

"No kiddin', Sophie, I'm sorry you had so much trouble over me," Jasper continued earnestly. "If it hadn't been for you, I'da been one gone goose. I can't never make up for that."

"Shucks, Jasper, that wasn't nothin'," observed Sophie modestly. "I've yanked half a dozen fellers out of the river here. An' in the summer—well, I can't hardly get time for fishin', what with draggin' stray kids out o' the water."

Jasper eyed her thoughtfully.

"Sophie," he queried at length, "is there a bottle in my overcoat pocket? The right-hand one?"

Sophie investigated. "Sure," she reported. "Right here." She held up that last, precious bottle of Doctor Pfaussenheimer's beauty hormone tablets.

Jasper gave her the sales-talk from A to Izzard. When he was through her eyes were aglow with interest.

"You mean," she questioned, a little breathlessly, "that these pills will work even—even for me? That they'll make me beautiful? Like the movie stars an' the models an' all?"

The other nodded. "That's right," he assured her. "Those 30 tablets will make you as lovely as anything that ever came out of Hollywood. You'll be Lana Turner and Ann Sheridan in one bundle."

"Gee!" whispered Sophie raptly.

"Not that it'll be permanent, unless this war's over sooner'n I'd want to bet," Jasper warned. "But it'll give you a chance. A smart girl can grab

off the kind of guy she wants in half the time it'll take her system to get back to normal. You can nail some fellow who's got dough enough to buy the city hall. Then, when my pal, the guy who makes the pills, gets out of jail, I'll guarantee you'll have a life supply free."

SOPHIE had been sitting on the edge of the bed, chin cupped in her hands, soaking up every word of the little man's recital. Now she leaned back against the footboard, deep in a reverie all her own.

"Just think of it!" Jasper enthused. "All the things you've wanted. The whole works. Cars, clothes—"

"Nope," said Sophie in abrupt interruption.

"Huh?"

"Thanks just the same, but I guess I can get along without all those things," the girl continued. "First place, you don't owe me nothin' for haulin' you out, so you can forget that to start with."

"But—"

Sophie's glance silenced him. She frowned as she struggled to explain further, her homely, honest face a study in earnestness.

"Just 'twouldn't be fair," she declared. "Oh, I'd like to get married, all right. Cold turkey, though"—she forced a pained smile—"I'm so darned homely no man ever looked at me twice.

"But to do like you say, take beauty pills, why, I figure that just ain't givin' the man a fair chance. Too much like dynamitin' fish.

"Besides," she went on brightly, "I got an idea I wouldn't like bein' beautiful. Have to quit fishin' for fear my complexion'd get spoiled. Couldn't go jumpin' into the river after kids every five minutes for fear I'd spoil my hair-

do. Have to watch what I ate all the time to keep my figure." She shook her head vehemently. "Nope. I'd rather stay homely."

Adoration was dawning in Jasper Tutt's eyes.

"Then—, then—" he stammered, "will you marry me?"

"You!"

"Oh, I'm no bargain," Jasper hastened to add. "But all of a sudden it comes to me that you're the kind of a girl I've been lookin' for all along, only I got sorta dazzled by some fancy window-dressing along the way. An' you said you'd like to get married. I'd try hard to be a good husband. An' after what I've been through, you'd never have to worry about me runnin' after a pretty face—"

Sophie eyed him soberly. Then:

"It's awful nice of you, Jasper. But you're just tryin' to make up for my savin' you—"

"SOPHIE, look at my face."

She stared obediently.

"Now," he directed, "can you say that anyone with a mug as ugly as mine is doin' anyone a favor by marryin' 'em?"

For a moment a smile broke through on the girl's lips. She killed it almost as soon as it appeared, sat thinking.

"How about makin' a living?" she probed a minute later. "I wouldn't want to marry a man I didn't respect an' I sure couldn't respect a man who couldn't take care of me."

"I could get back my old job as janitor over at Scientific Associates' lab, honest I could," he assured her eagerly.

"I always sort of wanted to have a honeymoon," she suggested.

Jasper nodded. "Yeah. Me too." He frowned. Then his eyes lit on the bottle between them on the bed. Slow-

ly a wicked grin spread across his face. "What is it, Jasper?" Sophie demanded, puzzled.

The other's tone was jubilant. "That honeymoon's in the bag!" he declared. The grin spread even wider across his face. "An old friend of mine—a guy named Roger Van Thorndyke—was in the other day askin' for some more pills. I'll sell him these at double prices. Maybe he can figure a way to make 'em last 'til after the war, when Doctor Pfaussenheimer gets out." He chuckled at the vision of Roger's face

when, out of pills again, he discovered the manufacturer was in jail. "I'll take care of it tomorrow morning," he declared. "We'll be married in the afternoon."

Sophie stared at him in wide-eyed admiration, then looked hastily away as another blush began to suffuse her face. "You know, Jasper," she confided, "I won't hardly know how to act. No one's ever kissed me."

Jasper assumed his most masterful air, pulled her toward him. "I'll start teaching you right now!" he declared.

NATURAL INK

ONE of the strangest of the many curiosities at the New York Aquarium is the snail-like sea-pigeon. The sea-pigeon is a shell-less snail, less than a foot long, with a dark reddish-brown color. It moves in the water by means of a pair of wing-like appendages. Its resemblance to a pigeon flying through the water accounts for its name.

The sea-pigeon lives upon sea-lettuce consuming about a tea cup full every day. The young of the sea-pigeon are deposited in long strings of bright yellow eggs composed of a mucous-like

substance which hardens into a stiff jelly very quickly. Each string of eggs numbers about one-half million eggs.

Probably the most interesting fact about the sea-pigeon is its means of defense in case of attack. When danger approaches, the sea-pigeon releases a large quantity of dark, inky fluid which covers up its escape. The fluid thus secreted has been found to be as good as our own manufactured ink and will make a durable record on writing paper.—*Ellen Reed.*

SCIENTIFIC BRIDGES

IF THE super-tanks, weighing 70 to 90 tons and more, now being employed in war-torn Europe, would have to take part in actual fighting in America they probably would have to cross railroad bridges to get to their various destinations.

Very few of our highway bridges could hold such heavy tanks and most of the railroad bridges (all, but the strongest built) would find it a perplexing problem.

The maximum permissible truck-length load for the strongest of our ordinary highway bridges is figured at 22 tons by highway engineers. The heaviest tanks used in the United States Army now safely comply with that figure, weighing 18 to 20 tons; but a super-tank load three or four times

that great would wreck our highway bridges immediately.

In all probability, U. S. railroad bridges, built for heavy rolling stock would be, slightly reinforced by supporting cribwork, able to bear the brunt of such super-tanks. A full loaded freight car weighs about 74 tons, allowing 50 tons for the load and 24 tons for the car itself. This places a load of the same magnitude as a super-tank on the railroad bridge.

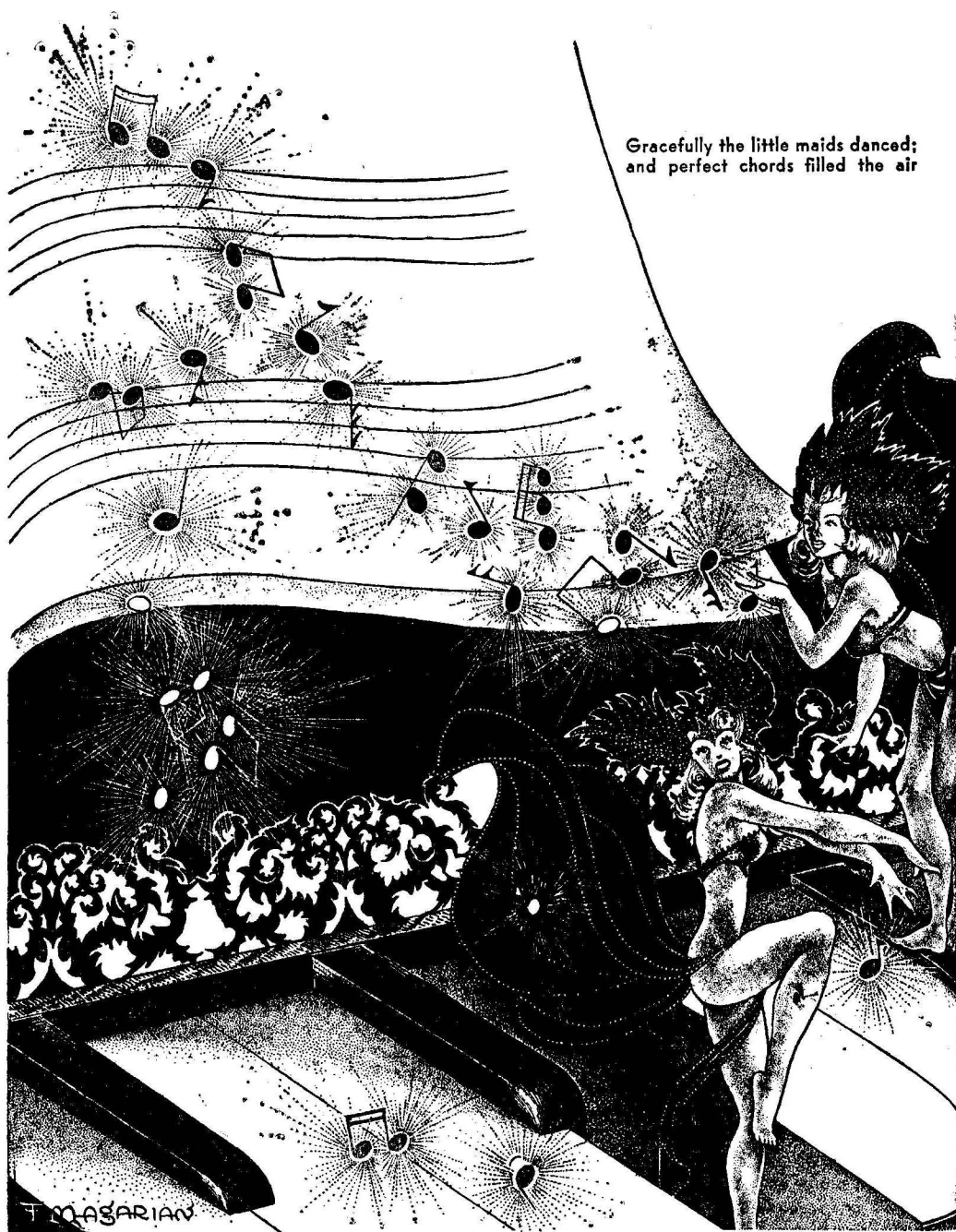
The dangerous factor is that the weight of the tank is concentrated in a great deal shorter length than a train.

Military tacticians stress America's need of medium and lighter, faster tanks, rather than the all-powerful, but slow, ponderous super-tanks.—*George Watson.*

TINK Takes a FLING

by **WILLIAM P. McGIVERN**

Gracefully the little maids danced;
and perfect chords filled the air



T. MASARIAN

Tink got himself into a lot of trouble when he fell in love with Jing, the music fairy!

CENTRAL PARK was alive with the first touch of spring. A soft balmy breeze skipped gaily through the green shrubbery and the sun that splashed extravagantly and gloriously over the wide lawns transformed the emerald heart of Manhattan into a beautiful fairyland.

A robin sang, leaves frisked over the gravelled walks and nature's general air of happy contentment was reflected in the faces of the starry-eyed couples strolling through the park.

One of these couples sauntered slowly past a bubbling drinking fountain, completely unaware that they were the subject of a rather bitter argument.

"Disgusting!" Nastee said peevishly.

Tink glanced at the passing couple and sighed.

"It's not disgusting," he said dreamily, "it's wonderful. They're in love."

"Bah!" Nastee said.

The couple in question strolled on, completely unaware that their rapturous state had started another of the



arguments that went on interminably between Tink and Nastee, the city-dwelling Leprechauns.

The two tiny people were lying on the concrete rim of the bubbler looking lazily up at the sky when their eternal argument resumed. Now, Nastee swung himself to a sitting position and stared moodily at the glinting water that bubbled up from the fountain.

"Love," he said. "Bah! It's stupid and silly. I don't like it."

A man stopped and bent over for a drink and Nastee, knowing ordinary humans couldn't see him, amused himself by kicking a spray of water into his eyes.

"Damn these crazy fountains!" the man snarled, groping for his handkerchief. Swearing eloquently he strode angrily away.

Tink closed his eyes and a dreamy smile touched his lips.

"Love is the most glorious thing in the world," he said.

Nastee looked at him exasperatedly.

"Stop saying that over and over again," he said. "Anyway, how do you know?"

Nastee's sharp eyes caught the sudden flush in Tink's cheeks.

"I just know, that's all," Tink said defensively.

"So that's it," Nastee said with a sly grin. "You've fallen in love yourself."

Tink reddened in confusion.

"Of course not. You're being absolutely silly. How could I be in love? I've only seen her once."

"Oho!" chortled Nastee. "Who is she?"

Tink sat up and put his chin in his hand. A worried frown was on his face.

"That's just it," he said, "I don't know her name or anything about her. I just got a glimpse of her through a window while she was working." He sighed tragically. "She's glorious."

Nastee's curiosity got the better of him.

"What's she like?" he asked. "What does she do?"

"Well," Tink said eagerly, "she's pretty as a rose and she works for a composer."

"She must be smart," Nastee said grudgingly.

"Naturally, she's smart," Tink said. "I could tell at a glance that she was the only one in the bunch with brains *and* beauty."

"Bunch?" Nastee said in surprise. "Was it a harem?"

"Don't be vulgar," Tink said frostily. "She is the end girl in a chord. There are three other girls assigned to this particular composition, but none of them compare with mine."

"Mine!" Nastee jeered. "Do you think she'll bother with you?"

"I suppose you're right," Tink said gloomily. "Anyway I'm going to see her again and try to talk with her."

"When?" Nastee demanded.

"Right away," he said.

"I think I'll go along," Nastee said.

Tink stopped. "Oh, no you don't."

"You can't stop me," Nastee said. "There's no wall safe here to lock me in like you did the last time. Anyway I'll be good."*

"Is that a promise?" Tink demanded.

Nastee smiled slyly.

"Of course," he said.

THE young man at the piano was concentrating on his work with al-

* See "Tink Takes a Hand," October '41 FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. In this story, Tink and Nastee make a wager, selecting a bystander, and proceed to discover which of them is most capable—Tink in making the victim happy; Nastee in making him miserable. Tink finally won the bet by locking Nastee in a wall safe, where Nastee had gone to steal a jewel in a rather underhanded trick.
—ED.

most fierce intentness. A shock of unruly black hair fell over his pale forehead as his fingers pounded out dramatic, thunderous chords, but he only shook it from his eyes impatiently and continued playing.

Occasionally he stopped long enough to pencil in a few notes on the unfinished score before him, then his fingers returned to the keyboard to draw forth harmony and melody that swelled through the small, plainly furnished room with magic beauty.

Finally he stopped and ran both hands wearily through his untidy hair. His face was drawn with tiny lines of fatigue, but an unquenchable flame of inspiration burned in his eyes.

He was about to return to his work when a slim girl appeared in the doorway that led to the apartment's tiny kitchen. She wore a brightly colored apron and there was a smudge of flour on her nose. Her smile was gay.

"Would New York's finest composer care to stop for a cup of coffee?" she asked.

The young man at the piano grinned at her and stretched luxuriously.

"Sounds like a good idea," he said. "I'm getting a bit tired. Will the wife of New York's finest composer join me?"

"I certainly will," the girl answered. "Come on."

The young man sighed and his face became serious.

"Ann," he said suddenly, "how do we know this music is any good? How do we know Mr. Hummert will use it for his revue even if I do finish it by Friday?"

The girl placed her hands on her hips in a comically belligerent pose and one small foot tapped the floor impatiently.

"Peter Hardwicke," she said, "if you don't stop doubting your own ability I'll—well, I don't know what I will do,

but it will be something drastic. Of course your overture is good. Even though it isn't finished yet I know that. And if Mr. Hummert doesn't take it," she added defiantly, "why someone else will."

"Hummert *has* to take it," the young composer said, almost savagely. "Don't you realize honey, this is our big chance. If I muff it I may never get another."

"You are not going to muff it," his wife said crisply, "so stop thinking about it. Now come into the kitchen and have a cup of coffee. The rest will do you good."

The young man stood up and put his arms around her.

"I don't know what I'd do without you," he said huskily.

"I do," she said. "You'd never get a decent cup of coffee."

He smiled at her and rumbled her short auburn hair.

"Don't get fresh with New York's finest composer."

They both laughed then and walked into the kitchen, arm-in-arm.

WHEN Peter Hardwicke returned to his work a few moments later he noticed that a draft of air was blowing through the room. Glancing about he saw that the window facing Central Park was open about an inch at the bottom.

He was sure that it had been closed when he left the room, but it was definitely open now. Frowning over this minor mystery he stepped to the window and closed it, unaware that his action almost occasioned a major disaster in the plans of Tink and Nastee.

"Whew!" Tink cried. "That was close. He almost caught the seat of my pants when he slammed the window."

"It would have served you right," Nastee said, "for being so poky."

Tink climbed to his feet and dusted himself off. His merry face was beaming with expectancy.

"Anyway we're inside," he said.

Peter Hardwicke had returned to his piano and again his flying fingers were scattering brilliant melody about the room. His back was to the window, concealing the keyboard from Tink and Nastee.

"All right," Nastee said sourly, "we're inside. Now, where's this girl you're mooning about?"

Tink executed a little jig.

"Follow me," he said.

Leaping from the sill he caught a lamp cord and swung himself up to the piano. Nastee joined him an instant later.

From this point of view they had a clear view of the piano keyboard. Tink stretched himself on his stomach with a contented sigh and cupped his chin in his hand, but Nastee's mouth fell open in surprise.

For visible to him on the keyboard were four beautiful, gracefully moulded girls, dancing with elfin delicacy over the piano keys and leaping lightly as feathers over the flashing fingers of the composer.*

They were clad in wisps of flowered material that billowed and floated around them as they soared from key to key with lithe abandon. Their every movement, every gesture was synchronized to the tempo of the music, and the gay festive mood of their dance was attuned to the spirited rhythm of the composition.

"Holy gee!" Nastee gasped. For once his surly sarcasm was forgotten. His

metropolitan sophistication was staggered.

Tink grinned at him.

"They're pretty keen, aren't they? But notice the one on this end. She's in a class by herself."

Nastee glanced at the girl whose charms had captivated Tink and shook his head slowly and sadly.

"Red hair," he said succinctly. "That's bad."

"What's bad about that?" Tink demanded. "I like red hair."

Nastee sat down and swung his legs over the side of the piano. Now that his first interest in the dancing girls had worn away, his normally irascible attitude was returning.

"Too much temper," he said. "She's probably the type who'd throw acorns at you when she got mad."

"You're crazy," Tink said with heat.

With injured dignity he turned away from Nastee and then his cheeks flamed with humiliation. For evidently the sound of the altercation had carried to the dancing girls on the keyboard.

All four of them were regarding him with wide startled eyes. In their surprised consternation they lost the tempo of the music and huddled together whispering animatedly and peeking occasionally at Tink and Nastee.

THE melody pouring from the piano became perceptively ragged. Peter Hardwicke brought his hand down in a desperate savage chord and then ran his fingers distractedly through his hair. "Damn!" he muttered. "That doesn't sound right at all." He wiped his hands on the legs of his trousers and began playing again, repeating the passage that had broken down.

The elfin girls had recovered from their shock by this time. Responding to the music they came to life in a brilliantly spirited dance that was as lilt-

*Of the many legends that abound in Irish mythology, one of the most charming is the folk-tale of the little people who are believed to be spirit or soul of music. These creatures, usually feminine in gender, are reputedly embodied in all great works of music, and it is their presence that lends magnificence to the compositions.—Ed.

ing as a leaf in a breeze.

Once again the music was sweet and melodious and graceful.

The red haired girl flitted down the keyboard and twirled about in perfect time before Tink.

"It isn't at all polite to stare at people," she said over her shoulder.

"It's not polite, but it's fun," Tink said. "What's your name?"

The girl tossed her head saucily.

"What difference does it make to you?" She started to dance away.

"Wait a minute!" Tink cried. "I've got to know your name if you're going to spend the afternoon in the park with me."

Twirling, the girl danced slowly back to Tink. Her delicately chiseled chin was grimly firm.

"Who said I was going to the park with you?" she demanded.

"It was just an idea," Tink said uneasily.

"It wasn't a good one," the girl said.

"All right," Tink shrugged resignedly, "we'll stay here and get acquainted. It won't hurt to tell me your name, will it?"

The girl glanced up into Tink's cheerfully smiling face and she missed a beat.

"No, I guess not," she said, a little breathlessly. "I'm Jingle."

"Then I'll call you Jing," Tink said promptly.

The red haired girl dropped her eyes and smiled. Then she wheeled away and twirled toward the opposite end of the keyboard, but in her excited confusion her feet skipped another beat.

The music stopped with a heavy discouraged crash. The young composer stood up and clenched his fists nervously.

"Something's off," he muttered. "What a time to get snagged. I've got to get this thing right."

His wife came into the room then and saw him standing drumming his fingers on the top of the piano. "What's the matter, Peter?" she asked anxiously.

"I'll be darned if I know," he answered, with a weary shake of his head. "Everything was going beautifully until I stopped to have that coffee. Now I'm missing something. I should have worked straight through."

His wife turned away. "I'm sorry I bothered you," she said in a small voice.

"Oh, honey, it's not your fault. It's just a case of nerves. When I think of how important this thing is, I can't concentrate on anything."

"I shouldn't have bothered you," Ann said. She held a handkerchief to her nose.

Peter crossed the room in two quick strides and took her in his arms. With one finger he lifted her chin until he was able to smile into her eyes.

"Smile," he said. "Please."

She smiled tremulously.

"That's better. Please don't pay any attention to what I say, honey, when I'm all worked up like this. It's my fault, I know, but I get tied up in a knot when the music isn't coming right. Am I forgiven?"

With a sob, Ann buried her face against his tweed jacket.

"It was all my fault, Peter," she cried, the words coming through his coat in an indistinct murmur.

Peter patted her shoulders awkwardly.

"Well, let's don't argue about that," he said with a grin. "The big thing that Mr. and Mrs. Hardwicke have to do is get this overture set right. I'm going to knock off for ten or fifteen minutes and maybe I'll have an inspiration when I get back to work."

TINK took advantage of the interruption to make strides.

"Listen, Jing," he said urgently, "you've no idea how beautiful the park is at this time of day. I can't describe it to you, you've got to see it for yourself."

"But I can't," Jing said, for the fifth time. She glanced apprehensively down the keyboard where her three companions were gossiping together in a tight little circle.

"They're shocked enough as it is," she said, "and besides I have to go to work when the music starts. There's no one to take my place."

Tink frowned and rested his chin in his hand. For fully a minute he remained thinking, then he leaped to his feet with a shout.

"I've got it," he cried. "Nastee can take your place for a half hour or so. He catches on to things in a hurry."

Nastee who had been listening glumly to the discussion raised his head and stared at Tink with cynical amusement.

"What makes you think I will?" he sneered.

"Oh, he couldn't," Jing said hastily. "We've already caused enough trouble with the music this afternoon. We can't mix things up anymore."

"Nastee wouldn't mix things up," Tink said with fine assurance. "He has a very musical nature. Anyway, it will only be for a few minutes. Please."

"Well—" Jing glanced timidly at her companions, "if it's only for a few minutes—"

"Fine," Tink cried. "Come on, Nastee, be a good sport."

Nastee's face was thoughtful, but sly lights lurked in his little eyes.

"I'll do it," he said. "I'm not such a bad guy, after all."

"Wonderful!" Tink said gleefully. "You see, Jing, it's all set."

"Maybe I shouldn't," Jing said, "it really isn't right." She glanced doubtfully at Nastee. "Will you do your

best to follow the music? It isn't terribly difficult."

"Sure," Nastee said. "I'll do my best."

After another second of hesitation, Jing flung her streaming hair back with a toss of her head and sprang lightly to the top of the piano beside Tink.

"All right," she said, "but only for a little while."

Hand-in-hand they leaped to the window cord and swung to the window. With a tinkling laugh they were gone.

WHEN Peter returned to the piano a half hour later he noticed that the window facing the Park was open again. He closed it automatically, too absorbed with his musical problems to worry about trifles.

He flexed his fingers nervously and drew a deep breath. Then he struck the opening chord of the overture. As the sound swelled up from the piano he jerked his hands away as if the keys were suddenly red-hot.

Shaken, he listened in horror to the hideously sour chord that lingered in the room like a bad odor. A feverish light of desperation gleamed in his eye.

Never had he produced music like this.

Summoning his courage he attacked the piano again, striving mightily to infuse his composition with melody and harmony, but each succeeding chord was more objectionable than the last.

Everything was wrong! The melody was sour, the rhythm was jerky, the harmony was a travesty, and the complete score seemed suddenly an uninspired hodge-podge of din, discord and dissonance.

"What's got into it!" Peter cried, burying his face in his hands. "It's horrible, it's sour, it's all wrong!"

In desperation he leaped to his feet and scooped up the sheets of music in

his hands. Trembling in every muscle he glared at them as if they were directly responsible for his predicament.

"Damn it!" he shouted. "What's the matter?"

Ann appeared in the doorway, her face white.

"Darling, what's wrong? Is anything the matter?"

Peter clasped his fist to his forehead with a moan.

"Is anything the matter?" he shouted. "No, everything's dandy! Everything's fine!"

Waving the crumpled sheets of music over his head he strode to the middle of the room, his face flushed with helpless rage.

"It isn't necessary to shout at me," Ann said quietly. "Maybe you'd better lie down awhile. You're upset."

"That's it," Peter said breathing heavily, "I'm just upset. The whole damned score is a stinking mess and Hummert would have to be a mad man to think of using it, so I'm upset. That's all, upset. I discover after eight years of work that I can't write music that makes sense, so I'm upset. I'm not irritated, I'm not angry, I'm not going stark raving mad, I'm just a little bit upset. You've got it all figured out, haven't you?"

"Please, Peter," Ann said. Her lower lip trembled. "You've never talked like this to me before."

"That," Peter said in a strangled voice, "was because I was never upset before. Now, as you have pointed out so brilliantly, I'm upset. I'm liable to say anything."

Ann stared at him wordlessly for an instant, then with a muffled sob she turned and ran into the tiny bedroom. She returned a moment later with her hat and coat on.

Peter looked at her and the color suddenly drained from his face.

"So you're walking out," he said bitterly. "All right, go ahead. You're doing the smartest thing in the world. I'm not worth sticking to."

With a sudden vicious gesture he tore the sheets of music in two and flung them into the air.

"There goes nothing," he said. "Just the remains of the final flop effort of my illustrious career as a composer of rotten music."

Ann looked at him steadily for an instant as if she were trying to memorize his features. Then she turned and left the room.

Peter glared helplessly after her and viciously kicked a torn sheet of music into the air. It settled quietly, forlornly to the carpet.

With an oath he grabbed a bottle of Scotch from a table and strode into the bedroom, kicking the door shut with an angry bang.

AFTER an idyllic hour in the park, sunning themselves on a toadstool and chummily discussing life and its problems, Tink and Jing returned to the apartment.

The appalling scene that met their eyes completely shocked them from their complacently contented mood.

Torn sheets of music were strewn about the floor and over the entire apartment brooded a dismal silence.

The three chord girls were crouched in terror on top of the mantel clock, their eyes wide with fright. Nastee was stretched comfortably on the keys of the piano, his impish face adorned with a sly, mischievous smile.

"Oh!" Jing gasped faintly. "Something terrible has happened."

Tink stared apprehensively at Nastee's recumbent figure. There was something in his smirking, triumphant smile that caused him considerable uneasiness.

"Oh," Jing wailed. "I knew I shouldn't have left."

Her three companions crouched together on top of the clock, and in fearful, drama-charged whispers, related all that had occurred while Tink and Jing had been away.

Jing turned white.

"Oh, this is terrible," she whispered. Turning impulsively to Tink, she cried, "You must do something. You simply *must*."

Tink patted her shoulder and glared accusingly at Nastee.

"You see the trouble you've caused," he said.

"Sure," Nastee said smugly. "I haven't enjoyed myself so much in years. Boy!"

"Oh!" Jing cried. "Did you cause all this trouble on purpose?"

Nastee stretched luxuriously. He was enjoying himself thoroughly.

"Certainly," he replied. "It wasn't hard either. All I had to do was trip the girls when they'd dance past me. It sure played the devil with the music."

"Oh," Jing said faintly. The magnitude and callousness of Nastee's prank left her breathless. She turned imploringly to Tink.

"What are you going to do?"

Tink scratched his head. What a fine mess!

"I'll think of something," he promised. But his voice was lacking its customary cheery assurance.

"You've got to," Jing said frantically. "If this work isn't finished on time it'll be all my fault. I'll never be given another chance."

She buried her face in her hands and began to cry.

Tink shifted uneasily from one foot to another, appalled by this emotional outburst.

"All right, I'll do something," he said.

He sat down and screwed his fore-

head into a frown. This situation was a lulu. He racked his brain for several minutes before he reached two conclusions. The composition would never be finished unless the composer was prompted to return to work. The composer would never return to work unless his wife returned to him, and domestic harmony was restored. Those two things were obvious. Therefore it only remained to get the composer and his wife back together.

That was all, but that was plenty!

HE STOOD up and nervously chewed on a piece of thread. The first thing that had to be done was to prevent the composer's wife from leaving the apartment house and disappearing into the trackless maze of Manhattan. If she got out of the immediate vicinity they might never be able to get her back on time.

He turned grimly to Nastee and pointed a determined finger at him.

"You're going to stop the girl from leaving this building. She can't have gotten out of the lobby yet. You're responsible for this entire mess and I intend to see that you help undo some of the damage."

Nastee grinned wickedly at him.

"I'll stop her," he said, "but that don't do any good. I've got things scrambled to the point where you can never straighten them out."

With a satisfied chortle he swung himself down from the keyboard and scampered across the floor to the door.

"That's the first step," Tink said. He turned to Jing. "You get your girls together and pick up these torn sheets of music. Then find some glue and put it all back into shape."

"All right," Jing said, "but what are we going to do about the composer?"

"That," said Tink, "is my job."

One of the girls from the clock said:

"He took a bottle of whisky with him to the bedroom."

Tink looked nervously at the closed bedroom door, then he squared his shoulders.

"I'll handle him, all right," he said.

Jing smiled tremulously at him.

"I know you will," she said.

Tink wished that he shared her confidence. Intervening in the affairs of humans was ticklish enough, but when a quart of whisky had to be considered in his calculations, the situation assumed the precarious qualities of a juggled box of dynamite.

Drawing a deep breath he slid down the lamp to the floor and advanced toward the bedroom. Jing, on the window-sill, waved encouragement to him as he sallied forth to battle.

He entered the room by the simple expedient of rolling under the half inch crack provided by the slightly warped door. Inside he studied the scene carefully, and what he saw did not particularly encourage him.

The young composer was sprawled in a chair beside the bed with the bottle of Scotch within convenient reach. It was apparent from the opened bottle, and his flushed face that he was seeking the solace of Bacchus.

Tink sat down on the floor and cupped his chin in his hands. This situation required delicacy and tact. He studied the composer carefully and thoughtfully for several minutes.

IT WAS evident from the young man's face, he decided, that he regretted his actions, but his pride was preventing him from making the overtures that would effect a happy reconciliation.

A bad thing, Tink thought gloomily.

Finally he stood and climbed up the spread to the top of the bed. From there he leaped to the top of the dresser. A plan was already forming in his head.

Not particularly original, he realized, but still it was worth trying.

He scurried about the dresser top until he found what he was looking for, an ordinary hairpin. Hoisting it to his shoulders he sprang back to the bed and ran along the edge until he was within a foot of where the composer was sitting.

Then, using all his strength, he threw the hairpin into the air. It landed with a faint metallic *plink!* on the arm of the composer's chair and bounced to the floor.

Startled, the composer looked around and then glanced down to the floor where the hairpin lay gleaming at his feet. He picked it up and stared at it. Then his fingers tightened on the pin crushing it out of shape. An expression of pain flitted over his features as he stared blankly, unseeingly at the pin in his hand.

Tink watched hopefully. Maybe that reminder of his wife would soften him up and melt away his stubborn pride.

For several seconds Peter Hardwicke tensed in his chair, then he slumped back and the pin fell from his hand to the floor. With that same hand he reached for the Scotch bottle.

Tink shook his head disconsolately. No soap.

He returned to the dresser top and began prowling around.

For several minutes he searched unavailingly. Then, next to a make-up box, he found an atomizer of perfume. He stared at the bulb and hose leading to the bottle and a smile curved his lips.

If anything would do the trick—this was it.

The bulb was taller than he, but after several attempts he managed to crawl onto its round, soft surface and balance himself there. This wasn't going to

be easy, he realized uneasily.

He waited until the jelly-like surface settled under his feet, then he leaped high in the air, jerking his knees under his chin. Descending, he kicked downward with all his might.

But something had happened to his timing. Instead of hitting the bulb flush, he struck its sloping side. The results of this change of procedure were just short of disastrous. Fortunately a jar of soft, filmy powder was next to the atomizer, and Tink's surprised body bounced from the bulb into this cushioned receptacle.

The powder closed over his body in a billowing, cloying wave, burying him completely. When he struggled up, choking and gasping, he was thoroughly covered with white, persimmon-flavored talcum.

And Tink despised persimmon. In spite of this and his ignominious nose-dive, he was not ready to admit defeat. Undaunted he emerged from the powder bowl and climbed to the top of the atomizer bulb.

HE WAS, however, more careful this time. Instead of leaping into the air like a ballet dancer he contented himself with bouncing gently on the rubber surface of the bulb.

The results were less spectacular but more effective.

His light pressure on the bulb sprayed a thin, delicate stream of perfume into the air. The tiny globules of perfume hung in the air like motes on a hot day, then gradually drifted downward.

Peter Hardwicke raised his face suddenly from his hands and there was a wild, tormented look in his eyes. He stared desperately about the room.

"Good God!" he muttered. "I'm losing my mind. I thought she was standing beside me."

Tink worked harder on the atomizer bulb, pumping the delicate aroma until it thoroughly permeated the room.

He's weakening, he thought exultantly.

But Tink weakened before Peter Hardwicke did. Panting and limp, he was forced to cease his heroic efforts a few minutes later.

The young composer was still holding out. His hands were clenched before him and the knuckles were straining white, but he made no move to leave.

Tink regarded him disgustedly. Nothing seemed to avail against his steely stubbornness.

He felt a moment of panic as he realized how much was hanging in the balance. Jing was depending on him to straighten this thing out. What Nastee was doing, he had no idea. The thought of Nastee caused him to clench his fists bitterly. If he had known any real swear words he would have used them without hesitation.

But he couldn't give up now. He tramped moodily about the dresser top until he was forced to the realization that he had exhausted its possibilities.

Then he explored the rest of the room. Finally he came to the closet. The door was slightly ajar and he inspected, without any great enthusiasm, the few miscellaneous garments hanging there.

They didn't suggest anything to him so he climbed a bath robe rope to the upper regions of the closet where he saw two shelves.

On one shelf was a bottle of Scotch. Tink wrinkled his nose distastefully at it and continued upward. On the second shelf he made an important discovery. A loose cloth bag with wooden handles had been shoved back against the wall of the closet, obviously in an

attempt to conceal its presence.

Tink looked inside the bag and he laughed out loud. His tinkling chuckle was, for the first time in an hour, completely carefree and joyous. For he knew his problems were over.

It would take a little manipulating but that was a minor matter. In fact it only took him two minutes to make the necessary preparations inside the closet.

Still, there was one job left that was rather ticklish. He had to discover some way to prompt the young composer to open the closet door.

But now that Tink was on the right track this obstacle seemed a simple matter. His confidence and assurance returned, bringing with them his characteristic ingenuity.

Popping out of the clothes closet he scampered under the bed and climbed quickly to the table top where the Scotch bottle was placed.

How to make the young man walk across the room and open the closet door? Tink thought he had it.

He waited patiently until the composer reached for the Scotch, then with all his strength shoved against the bottle.

The bottle swayed slightly, the composer's hand missed the neck by a fraction of an inch and, with another shove from Tink, the bottle toppled from the table to the floor with a splintering crash.

"Damn!" Peter Hardwicke said disgustedly.

For a moment he stared broodingly at the bottle without moving a muscle, and Tink's heart hammered despairingly.

Maybe it wouldn't work after all!

A sigh of relief escaped his lips when the composer finally stood up and walked to the closet for another bottle of Scotch.

Everything was going to be okay now. Leaning comfortably against the Scotch shot glass, Tink waited happily for developments. A cheerful, expectant smile was on his lips.

Wouldn't Jing be proud of him!

NASTEE felt little enthusiasm for the scene he was witnessing. Mrs. Ann Hardwicke was checking out at the apartment desk and he was finding the whole thing a trifle boring.

"I'll send someone for my things," Mrs. Ann Hardwicke was saying to the desk clerk.

The young clerk was discreetly curious.

"Naturally, we're sorry you're leaving," he said. "Has the service been satisfactory?"

"It's not that," Ann said. "It's—something else."

Her voice was miserable.

Nastee leaned against an ink-well on the desk and yawned. Tink had told him to stop this girl from leaving, but why should he? Tink was getting too high and mighty lately. This would show him he wasn't so clever.

At that moment a heavy set, florid faced man bustled up to the desk. He was well dressed and had the nervous air of impatience that stamps self-important people.

"Boy!" he snapped to the desk clerk, "I'm in a hurry."

He pulled out a heavily stuffed wallet and laid it on the desk while he fished in his vest pocket for a pen.

The wallet lay on the desk, almost touching Ann's open purse. Nastee looked at the two objects for an instant with contemplative eyes. Then he chuckled mischievously. A golden opportunity!

Ann thanked the clerk for his kindness and walked away, trying desperately to hold back the tears.

She was half way across the lobby when she heard an angry bellow behind her. Turning she saw a fat, important looking man striding toward her, waving his arms excitedly.

The man caught her arm and dragged her forcibly back to the desk.

"I saw you," he shouted. "You can't pull your tricks on me, sister."

"Please," Ann said, "what is the meaning of this?"

"Don't gimme that stuff," the fat man cried. "You stole my wallet. Somebody call the police."

"I did no such thing!" Ann said hotly.

The desk clerk looked his pained embarrassment.

"Please," he said. "We can settle this matter quietly. Mrs. Hardwicke, I know you didn't take this gentleman's wallet, but if you would let us look through your purse it would prove your innocence."

"Why, certainly," Ann said.

She opened her purse and her knees began to tremble. A man's wallet was lying among her make-up and letters and change.

"Oh!" she said faintly. She was too terrified to do anything but stare at the incriminating wallet.

"You see?" the fat man cried triumphantly. He snatched his wallet from the purse.

"It's—some mistake," Ann said helplessly.

"I'll say it was, sister," he snapped. "You'll have time to regret it, too. The cops are always happy to catch one of you hotel thieves."

"I'm not a thief," Ann said, starting to cry. "I live here with my husband."

"That's a hot one, sister," the man said. "Wouldn't care to take me up to your husband, would you?"

Ann sniffled miserably.

"No, I wouldn't," she said in a muf-

fled voice. She couldn't crawl to Peter now that she was in trouble. She started crying harder.

"Of course you wouldn't," the man snapped. "You're lying from the start to finish. And don't think those crocodile tears are going to help."

"They're not c—croc—odile tears," Ann said, between sobs.

"Mrs. Hardwicke," the desk clerk said, "I think it would be wise to take this man up to see your husband."

"Your darn tootin'," the man said. "If you've got a husband I want to see him. Come on."

He dragged Ann to the elevator and the desk clerk followed, distraught.

Nastee lay on the desk blotter, weak with laughter. It had been the funniest thing he had seen in years. . . .

PETER HARDWICKE jerked open the closet door of the bedroom and was almost hit on the head by the heavy knitting bag which fell from the top shelf. He picked it up slowly. One string of yarn had been tied to the inside doorknob, so that when he opened the door it had pulled the bag from the shelf.

With fingers that suddenly trembled he opened the bag and lifted out several half-finished tiny garments. Under a ball of bright blue wool he saw a pair of knitted boots, about two inches long.

He stared dazedly at the knitted baby clothes, his face whitening. Remorse flooded over him.

"The poor kid," he choked. "And I drove her away."

Feverishly he stuffed the garments back into the knitting bag and grabbed his coat from the closet. He banged out of the room like a madman.

Tink smiled contentedly. Things would straighten out now. Whistling merrily he jumped to the bed and bounced to the floor.

Peter Hardwicke was striding toward the living room door when an imperative, angry knock sounded. He jerked open the door. Ann was standing there, between an angry looking fat man and the desk clerk. Her eyes were red from crying.

The fat man stepped forward importantly.

"Look here, mister," he began, but he got no farther.

Peter shoved him out of the way and grabbed his wife by the shoulders.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he said roughly.

Ann started crying again as Peter's arms went around her hungrily.

"Just a minute," the fat man broke in angrily. "Your wife tried to steal my wallet. What are you going to do about it?"

It took several seconds for the import of this remark to sink into Peter's mind. When it did he took Ann by the shoulders and gently moved her out of the way. Then he stared thoughtfully at the heavy set, red-faced man.

"What am I going to do about it?" he repeated softly. "Just this. If you aren't out of my sight in three seconds I will turn your life insurance policy into a claim. Do you follow me?"

The fat man got the general drift.

"Now, listen Buddy," he said uneasily, "I—"

"One!" Peter said firmly.

"But—"

"Two!"

The fat man turned and ran. When Peter said 'three' his padded posterior was disappearing around the corner of the corridor.

Peter put his arm about Ann's shoulder.

"Come on," he said gaily. "I've got an overture to write. Now that there are three people interested in it I can't fail."

Ann squealed as Peter swung her up in his arms and strode into the apartment.

Tink and Jing had watched this scene with shining eyes.

"Oh, Tink," Jing said, "you're wonderful."

Nastee appeared in the doorway, an unpleasant scowl on his face.

"Bah!" he said. "Everything I do turns out wrong."

Tink looked at him thoughtfully.

"Maybe this will be a lesson to you," he said.

"Bah!" said Nastee.

Jing was humming softly to herself.

"I think," she said sweetly, "that Nastee needs a more forceful kind of lesson. Don't you agree, Tink?"

Tink looked at her and nodded.

ORCHESTRA HALL was crowded to capacity with smartly dressed men and women. From their vantage point on the edge of the conductor's podium, Tink and Jing breathlessly regarded the glittering scene.

The orchestra was tuning up in the pit and the sound of the experimental scrapings drifted through the air, as exciting as sparks in a breeze.

In the expectant audience Jing picked out the young composer, Peter Hardwicke, and his wife. They were sitting together, hand-in-hand, occasionally looking happily at each other.

"I hope the overture is good," Tink said.

"It is," Jing said, "I know."

Nastee was present also, sullen and ungracious, sitting glumly by himself a few inches from Tink and Jing. His little face was screwed up unpleasantly and Tink realized uneasily that more devilment was being plotted behind those surly features.

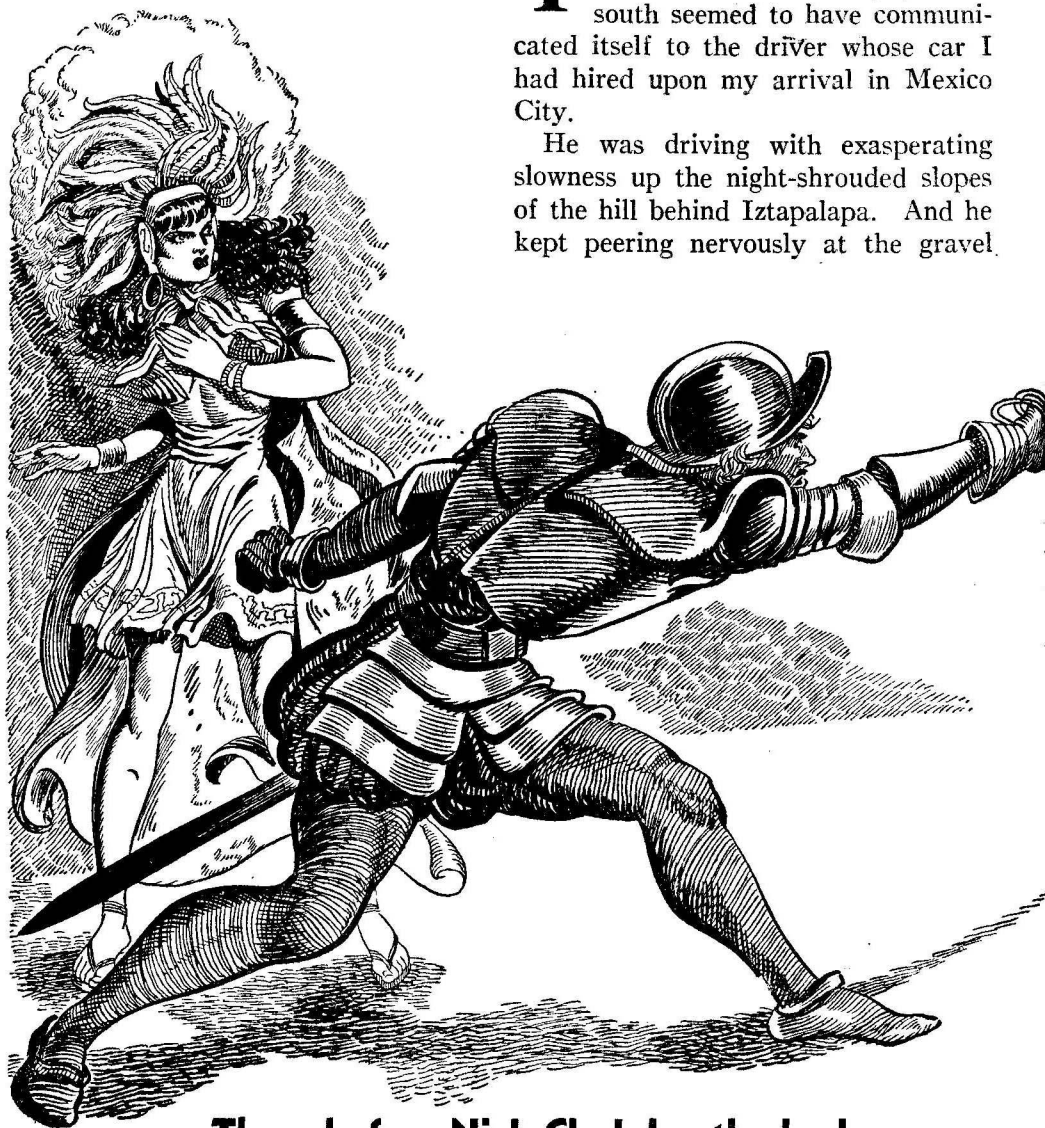
"Remember, Nastee," he said worriedly.
(Concluded on page 191)

The QUEST in

My sword rang against the shield
of the infuriated Aztec warrior

THE formless dread I had felt during my whole long journey south seemed to have communicated itself to the driver whose car I had hired upon my arrival in Mexico City.

He was driving with exasperating slowness up the night-shrouded slopes of the hill behind Iztapalapa. And he kept peering nervously at the gravel



**There before Nick Clark lay the body
of Kay Madison; was she dead, or had she
really gone 400 years into Mexico's past?**

TIME

by
**EDMOND
HAMILTON**



road revealed in the glow of the headlights, as though fearful of a sudden obstruction in the darkness.

"Can't you go a little faster?" I asked him urgently.

He shrugged his shoulders and muttered a proverb to himself. "He should not hurry who goes to meet the devil."

I understood his Spanish. "What are you talking about?"

The Mexican turned a swarthy, nervous face toward me. "This isn't a good place at night, *senor*. This hill was sacred to the old gods. And this Doctor John Madison whom you go in such hurry to visit is not liked by my people. He meddles with the old things."

I began to understand, then. I had been in Mexico enough, in my job as pilot for Pan-Columbian Airways, to

realize that the average Mexican still possesses strong superstitions about the ancient Aztec ruins.

It's not strange that that is so. The Aztec blood runs strong in these people. They are descendants of a race who reared the strangest and most terrible civilization in history. That fantastic empire was dust four hundred years ago, but its dark legends of winged serpent-gods and mighty kings still brood in the blood of its far descendants.

But I had no sympathy with superstition tonight. My own mind was too tormented by dread, and had been so ever since I had received the telegram from Doctor Madison that had brought me south on the first plane.

"Come at once. Kay in danger."

For the thousandth time, I tortured my mind by trying to imagine what was wrong. Why hadn't Doctor John been more specific?

He must have known that I would be in an agony of fear, for Kay and I were to have been married as soon as they returned to the States. In fact, I hadn't wanted her to go with her father at all.

I hadn't been able to see why a first-rank physicist like Doctor Madison should want to set up a laboratory in so distant a place as Mexico City. And I had contended that since his assistant, Burke Ullman, was going to accompany him, Kay wouldn't be needed.

But she had insisted. Her letters for two months had told of progress that her father and his assistant were making, in some mysterious experiment. Then to weeks of silence. And this disastrous telegram.

The car stopped suddenly. "This is the *estancia* of Doctor Madison, señor."

We had reached the summit of Cerro de la Estrella, and had stopped in front of a rambling white stucco mansion with red tile roof.

The night was clear. The vast domed vault of stars was like a brilliant proscenium arching over the ring of mountains that cups the Valley of Mexico. Down a few miles from this hill-top clustered the blinking lights of Iztapalapa village, and some miles further north blazed the brilliant lights of the metropolis.

Far southeastward, Popocatepetl and Ixtlicihuatl bulked like enormous cloud-banks in the night sky. The two snow-clad volcanoes, towering above this whole scene like ancient guardian genii, brilliantly reflected the thin starlight.

THE Mexican driver went off like a shot as soon as I paid him. I turned toward the house. It was dark except for the lighted windows of one wing. And from that wing, a queer, big shaft of ghostly radiance shot skyward and faded into the stars. It seemed to come right up through the roof of the wing—a faint but enduring pillar of light.

I supposed it was part of Doctor Madison's experiments, and that it was what had aroused the Mexican's superstitions. But I wasted little thought on it at this moment. Desperately anxious for Kay, I was pounding urgently on the massive front door. To my surprise, it was unlatched and swung creakingly inward to disclose a dark hall inside.

"Doctor Madison! Kay!" I called, as I stepped into the hall.

There was no answer. The vague, unlighted rooms about me had a cold mustiness in them that matched the chill of the brooding silence.

I found a switch, and the hall sprang into light. The room had an astonishing resemblance to a museum. It was crowded with fantastic stone remnants of ancient Aztec art and religion.

A big stone head of the serpent-god Quetzalcoatl bared menacing fangs at

me from a corner. Against one wall stood a broken rock panel carved with stiff figures of plumed Aztec warriors. Around it were hung queer, sword-like weapons of gleaming obsidian, with serrated edges.

"Kay!" I called again, my voice now raw with mounting fear.

Only whispering echoes replied. I remembered the lights I had seen in the west wing, and hastily located the door leading that way.

A short passage led into a long, big room that occupied most of the wing. It was brightly lighted and was quite evidently Doctor Madison's physical laboratory, for it was jammed with electrical and scientific apparatus that made an odd contrast to the stone relics I had just left.

At the center of the laboratory was an extraordinary apparatus or machine. It looked like an enormous searchlight. Through its massive quartz lens, a vertical shaft of dim white light or force drove upward through the skylight in the roof. There was a low, steady throbbing from generators which fed power to this queer searchlight.

Upon its massive quartz lens there rested two glass coffin-like cases, flooded by the white light. I went over and looked wonderingly into the nearest of the glass caskets. My heart gave a great leap of horror and then seemed to stop beating.

Kay Madison lay in that casket! She lay motionless with closed eyes, and the waxy pallor of her still face had a dreadful meaning.

"No, not dead!" I exclaimed hoarsely to myself. "*No!*"

Frantically, I tried to reach up and open the glass casket, but could not. And Kay's unmoving white face seemed to mock my agony.

She was dressed in a simple sweater and skirt, her honey-colored bobbed

hair spread out upon the pillow. Her fun-loving blue eyes were shut, and the red lips that curved so easily for laughter were now a straight line. The cold, deep calm that lay on her face was dreadful to me.

I STAGGERED, shivering as from physical shock. It was only then that my stunned gaze took in the other glass casket. In it lay Burke Ullman, Doctor Madison's thirty-year-old laboratory assistant. His big, stalwart body was as motionless as Kay's, and his dark, sardonically intelligent face was frozen in the same waxy stillness.

"Kay!" I couldn't see her white face any more through the tears that blinded me. "Kay, I came as fast as I could—"

But I had come too late! The ghastly knowledge echoed in my agonized mind as though fiends were shrieking it tauntingly in my ears.

The danger that Doctor Madison's telegram had mentioned had struck, and Kay and Ullman both were dead. And all my dreams were dead, too.

"Nick! Nick Clark!"

A shrill voice was shouting my name in almost frenzied accents. I turned tear-blurred eyes toward the man who had entered the laboratory.

For a moment, I did not recognize him as Doctor Madison. He had changed that much. The keen-eyed, brusque-mannered silver haired physicist I had known had become a dishevelled, unshaven and wild-eyed old man. His haggard face had aged years, and the hand with which he feverishly grasped my arm was trembling.

"My God, Nick, I'm glad you're here!" he babbled. "I've been going nearly crazy waiting for you. I must have fallen asleep, just now—"

I hardly heard him for my eyes were still fastened on Kay's still face.

"When did she die?" I asked heavily.

"Die?" Doctor Madison's bloodshot eyes stared at me. "Nick, what's the matter with you? Kay isn't dead. Neither is Ullman."

It was as though his words sent a bursting rush of blood to hammer through my brain. I spun toward him, wild with relief.

"She isn't dead? Then what is she doing in that coffin? Why does she look as though she were dead?"

Madison chose his words before answering. "Nick, try to understand this. Kay isn't dead. But she's gone out of her body. Like Ullman."

I stared at him wildly. "Gone out of her body? Are you talking mysticism, or what?"

"Not mysticism, but science," he corrected earnestly. "Kay's body lies in that casket. But her *mind*, the real Kay, no longer inhabits it."

He explained feverishly, gesturing tremblingly to emphasize some of his points.

"Nick, I know it sounds insane. But if you were a scientist instead of a flier, you'd know it's not impossible. The human mind, with its web of memories and associations that make up what we call personality, is merely a network of electric currents flowing through the neurones of the brain. Physicists and psychologists have recently been devoting more and more study to this web of electricity that makes up a human mind.

"That's been my own work for many months. I long ago went far beyond the encephalographical work of the Harvard group. You see, I believed that it should be possible to lift that immaterial electric web of the mind out of a human brain and superimpose it upon a new brain! You can comprehend the vast medical significance such achievement would have."

Doctor Madison's hands were shaking as he continued. "Nick, I succeeded in the first step of my experiment. I did the thing with Burke Ullman, and then with Kay. I lifted their minds out of their bodies."

"But where *are* they then?" I cried. "Where is Kay?"

Madison was pale as death. "Nick, she is four hundred years in the past."

CHAPTER II

Into Past Ages

STUNNED by the incredible assertion, I looked numbly from Doctor Madison to Kay's lifeless, lovely face.

"In the past?" I repeated stiffly. "What in God's name do you mean?"

"Just what I said, Nick. I lifted the minds of Burke Ullman and Kay from their bodies. And I hurled the immaterial electric webs of their two minds into past time."

It occurred to me that Doctor Madison's brain had cracked from the strain of work. He must have read that thought on my face.

"No, Nick, I'm *not* crazy! What I did is not impossible, has never been impossible. Surely you must have read something of the new physical theories that define time as a fourth dimension similar to length and breadth and thickness. Why can't we travel along that time-dimension into the past ages of earth?"

"It just isn't possible!" I burst out. "I'm no scientist but I've read enough to know that the greatest authorities agree that no power could force matter back along the time-dimension."

"And they are right," Doctor Madison nodded haggardly. "No matter can be thrust back along that dimension. But the electric network of a human

mind is not matter! It is immaterial force, and *it* can be projected back into time by a suitably powerful force."

"My God!" The awful implications of his statement had opened an appalling vision to me. "You mean that Kay's mind is at this moment wandering bodiless in a past age?"

"Nick, let me explain," begged the physicist. "I didn't want to send Kay back. She insisted on going—to look for Burke Ullman."

He poured forth his story feverishly. "It began with my encephalographic experiments at the university. They led me to believe that the electric synaptic pattern of a human brain could be lifted from its physical framework and embodied in a pattern of non-material photons. In other words, that a human mind could be made to live independently of its body.

"Those experiments succeeded. Burke Ullman volunteered for the final test, and I was able to divorce Ullman's mind from his body. And we found that Ullman's mind, existing as an electric photon-pattern, could actually impress itself upon another man's brain, and control that man's body. For the photon-pattern amplified the electric power of his mind to such degree that it easily dominated the other's brain and body."

A shudder ran through me. "You mean that his mind could leave his own body, in your experiment, and *possess* another man's body?"

"That is what it amounted to, Nick. Perhaps I should have halted the experiment there. But a new possibility had occurred to me. Why couldn't I use this new power to achieve successful time-travel? Matter could not be projected into the past. But an isolated, immaterial mind could. In fact, every time that you remember anything, you are momentarily projecting

your mind into the past!

"I discussed the possibility with Ullman. He was at once in favor of it, and offered himself as a subject for the dangerous experiment. He believed that we could make use of this method of mental time-travel to win for ourselves a fortune worth millions of dollars."

"That sounds like Burke Ullman," I muttered. "That sardonic devil would risk anything for money and power."

"No, Nick, you're wrong," Doctor Madison denied earnestly. "I know you never liked Ullman, but his motives in this case were above reproach. He pointed out to me that if we could win wealth through my discovery, we could set up a splendid scientific foundation which would be devoted entirely to developing my new discoveries for the good of the world."

"How did Ullman expect to win this fortune?" I exclaimed. "You could send his mind into the past—but a mind couldn't bring back anything material."

"I know, but a mind could bring back *knowledge*," Doctor Madison pointed out. "It could bring back knowledge of a secret worth millions."

He asked me abruptly, "Nick, have you ever heard of Montezuma's treasure?"

I STARED. "Montezuma, the last emperor of the Aztecs?*" I vaguely remember reading something once about a great lost treasure—"

"A great treasure, indeed!" the haggard physicist exclaimed. "Nick, the royal treasure of gold, emeralds and

*The Aztec empire that the Spaniards conquered in 1520 was a vast, rich realm. From their capital of Tenochtitlan that occupied the site of what is now Mexico City, the Aztecs ruled an empire bigger than Spain itself. Twenty million subject people paid them tribute, and gold, jewels and slaves poured in from a dozen provinces.—Ed.

other precious stones was fabulous in value. But what became of that treasure after the conquest? We know the Spaniards never got it, though they even tortured members of Montezuma's household in vain attempt to learn where it was hidden. Nor have any of the many treasure-seekers who have sought its hiding-place in the centuries since then, ever found it. It's the greatest lost treasure in the world.

"Ullman believed that we could find it. He believed that if I hurled his mind back four centuries to the days of the Aztec empire's glory, he could learn where the royal treasure had been kept hidden. He—or his photon-embodied mind—could then come back with that knowledge and we would know where to find the legended hoard."

"So that was it," I muttered, appalled by the audacity of the scheme. "That's why you came down here to Mexico City and set up this laboratory."

He nodded haggardly. "Yes, Nick. It was a mad thing to do, but Ullman painted such wonderful pictures of the great scientific work that treasure would finance, that I agreed to the plan. We established my laboratory in this place, and I prepared to project Ullman's mind into the past.

"We had chosen this hilltop for a special reason. It was a sacred place to the Aztecs, and each year their rulers came here and spent thirteen days in religious rites. We knew that the royal household had been at this spot, for that purpose, in the year 1519 just before the conquest. So I was to send Ullman's mind back to that exact time, and he'd 'possess' the body of one of the Aztec rulers and learn the treasure secret."

Doctor Madison's face was gray and quivering. "I did it, Nick. I built this projector to stab a strong electromagnetic tractor-beam back along the time-

dimension. I combined with the Beam the encephalographic force to lift Ullman's mind from his body as a pattern of electrified photons. Then I used it, hurling Ullman's photon-bodied mind four centuries into the past. A little later, I reversed the action of the Beam so that when he was ready to return, he could merely enter it and be drawn back here.

"But he didn't return! I waited days, and he did not come back. Something had happened to him back there in the days of Aztec empire. Somehow, his mind was trapped back there. Until then, I had not informed Kay of what we two had planned. But now my agitation and alarm were so great that Kay insisted on me telling her what had happened.

"I told her. I explained that Ullman's mind would be forever cut off from his sleeping body here by four centuries of time, unless he could return. And when Kay heard that, she declared that someone must go back and help Ullman escape the dreadful trap. She said that I must send *her* mind back, to find and help him."

"**A**ND you did that?" I cried. Anger flared up hot in me and I grasped the aging scientist furiously. "You tore Kay's mind from her body and flung it back into that dreadful danger?"

"Nick, I didn't want to do it!" he gasped. "I begged Kay to give up the idea. But you know her fine sense of honor. She said that Ullman had been sacrificed for my experiment, and that it was our duty to risk anything to help him."

"That would be like Kay, yes," I groaned. "But still you shouldn't have dreamed of doing such a thing to her."

"I wish to God I hadn't!" The cry ripped from Doctor Madison's tortured soul. "But I too felt my responsibility

to Ullman. I'd have gone myself but it was impossible, for only I could operate the apparatus. So—I sent Kay. I sent her mind back there to the same time, warning her to return quickly whether or not she was able to help Ullman.

"That was a week ago, Nick. And she has not returned either. I've kept the Beam going every minute, reaching back through time to draw their minds back here the instant they entered it. They had only to enter the Beam back there, to return. But they have not returned.

"I've gone nearly crazy, waiting. Finally, I could stand it no longer and wired you to come. I need your help for what I'm going to do."

Stunned, I looked wildly at the sleeping form of the girl I loved, lying motionless in the glass casket atop the projector.

"Kay's mind — Kay herself — back there in the days of the Aztec empire!" I muttered hoarsely. "Kay, living in another body back there—"

The awfulness of it rushed over me. I was separated from her by a barrier of four hundred years that no matter could cross. She was somehow trapped like Burke Ullman back in that sinister, fantastic empire.

Her father was speaking feverishly on. "Nick, I'm going back after her. My mind—back across time to look for her and Burke. That's why I sent for you. I'm going to try to teach you to operate this apparatus—"

I did not let him finish. My decision was already made, with the speed with which the mind functions in moments of great stress.

"No, you're not going, doctor," I said unsteadily. "I'm going. I've got to be the one who goes."

I claim no credit for heroism in that decision. Terrible as might be the risks

I challenged, they daunted me far less than the risk of losing Kay forever.

Doctor Madison tried hard to dissuade me. His conscience was heavy with guilt for Ullman and Kay, and he did not want to risk adding me to the list of his experiment's victims.

"For God's sake let's not stand here arguing!" I cried finally. "Get your machine ready, and tell me what to do."

The violence of my emotion crushed his resistance. He was no longer the strong-willed scientist I had known, but a haggard, shaking wreck. He tottered about, hastily preparing for the desperate attempt.

My thoughts may be imagined. I, Nick Clark, was an ordinarily healthy and normal young man, with little interest in science or history or anything else except Kay and my job of flying. I shrank as any normal man would from the thought of having my bodiless mind flung back into a barbaric age of the past.

But the more I felt the horror of it, the greater was my agony at realizing that Kay was experiencing that horror now. My desperation made me glad when Doctor Madison had finished his preparations.

HE HAD turned off the Beam, and upon the massive quartz lens of its projector had placed a third glass casket like those of Kay and Ullman. Hoarsely, he gave me my final instructions.

"Nick, I've set the Beam to hurl you back to a time a few days *later* than that to which Burke and Kay were projected. They may both have found themselves in some kind of trap. I want to avoid that for you.

"When the Beam hurls you back, you'll find yourself in that past time as an unbodied mind without ability to hear, speak or see. But you'll be able

to move. Your will can reverse the polarity of your electrified photons, and thus enable you to breast earth's magnetic currents."

"But what can I do back there if I can't see or hear?" I cried to him.

"Nick, you must possess the body of some Aztec back there and use it as a tool, as Ullman and Kay planned to do. You can do it, for your electrified photon-pattern will be strong enough to dominate an ordinary brain and body. But only the Beam can then disengage your mind from that body!

He added earnestly, "Soon after I've sent you back, I'll reverse the Beam. When you have found Kay and Burke and are ready to return, you need only step into the Beam back there and your minds will be torn from whatever bodies you've possessed, and will be drawn back here to your own."

With my heart pounding, I climbed upon the huge projector and lay down in the third glass casket.

Doctor Madison attached wires to tiny electrodes he had clamped on nerves in my neck. He closed the lid of the casket and stepped down.

Drowning the loud thudding of my pulse came the throbbing of powerful generators. I waited, hardly able to breathe in my tension.

Then light and force exploded with a terrific impact. I did not feel that impact physically. It was a psychic shock that tore at my brain, invading the innermost secrets of my being.

I felt myself hurtling through infinite abysses of roaring darkness, as the Beam flung my mind back into the past.

CHAPTER III

The Conquistadors

IT IS hard for me to depict my sensations during that nightmare rush

through time. I had no longer a physical body to convey sensation to me. I was an isolated mind, a mere web of electricity impressed upon a pattern of immaterial photons.

My only feelings were of intense darkness and of a howling roar from the dimensional abysses through which I was being hurled. But I did not hear that roar by auditory means. It came to me, rather, as a sensation of electrical force.

I could still think and remember. The tenuous electric network of intelligence and memory functioned as clearly in its new photon-pattern as it had done in my solid body. I knew that I was Nick Clark, or Nick Clark's mind, and that I was rushing at crazy speed along a hitherto untravelled dimension of infinity.

Finally, the sense of dizzy speed began to diminish. The roar of maelstrom forces through which I raced seemed to beat less powerfully upon me. Into my wild thoughts came realization that the Beam had finished hurling me back into time, and had been turned off.

I found myself floating quiescent in darkness. That is how it seemed to me. I could neither see nor hear. But I could feel currents of earth's magnetic force upon which I floated, and which bore my photon-pattern upon their breast as waves bear a swimmer.

I was in utter silence, darkness and isolation. I could not see or hear for, I had no physical senses of sight or hearing. I was an immaterial mind, flung back more than four centuries to this year 1519 in which I must somehow find Kay and Burke Ullman.

"You must possess the body of some Aztec back there and use it as a tool," Doctor Madison had told me. "Only so can you find them."

Yes, that was what I must do. But

how was I to locate a living man in the rayless dark in which I now existed?

As I poised, puzzled by the difficulty, I became aware of distant electric pulsations impinging feebly on my mind as the currents carried me along. It did not take me long to realize that they were electric vibrations of thought from some living man's brain.

I must find that man, and use his body! The magnetic currents were bearing me away from him. But Doctor Madison had said that I could travel with or against the magnetic currents by using my will to reverse the polarity of my electric-charged photon-pattern.

I tried that now. And it worked. There was no reason why it should not. Human will, like human thought, is essentially a flow of electric current through the neurones. The slight current was enough to affect the polarity of charge in the photons that now embodied my mind.

For I found that I was now traveling back against the magnetic current that previously had borne me helplessly along. I was nearing the man whose brain was broadcasting those faint electric pulsations.

I groped my way closer to that throbbing brain. I intended to dominate and use the brain and body of this man. There was something ghastly about the plan, almost diabolical. But I had no other way.

"You've got to do it!" I told myself desperately, conquering my shrinking revulsion. "It's your only chance of finding Kay."

I entered that pulsing brain. It sounds uncanny, I know. But it seemed even more uncanny to me at the time. My photon-bodied mind, being immaterial in the true sense, could pass through any kind of matter. It passed now through the skull of that man and into his brain.

MY MIND now inhabited that other's brain—and dominated it. The man had been sleeping. It was the vague vibrations of his dreams I had received. But now, as I entered his brain, he started to awake in a spasm of startled horror.

There was a quick struggle between our minds for possession of his body! He must have thought he was assailed by madness.

"You will sleep!" I willed with all my mental power. "Your conscious mind will sleep!"

His resistance weakened rapidly. Then it gave way altogether. His conscious mind slept, dominated and crushed into stupor by the amplified electric power of my mind, as Doctor Madison had predicted.

Now I could feel physical sensations. The electric pattern of my mind, installed in his brain, completely "possessed" his body.

I sat up in my new body and looked wildly around me.

"Good God!" I whispered to myself. "I *am* back in that far past."

It was night. I was sitting at the edge of a camp of sleeping men. Shadowy sentries tramped to and fro in the soft darkness nearby. A campfire had smoldered to red embers.

Not far away loomed the black hill upon which Doctor Madison's laboratory had stood. But there were no lights of haciendas on it now. Neither was there a single spark to westward, where the lights of Iztapalapa village should have gleamed. Everything was utterly changed.

"I, Nick Clark, back here in the year 1519," I muttered in awe. "In another man's body—"

That reminded me. For the first time I looked down at this new body of which I had taken possession.

I had expected that I should find my-

self now inhabiting the body of one of the Aztecs whose barbaric empire was supreme in this remote time. But my body was that of a white man.

I was apparently a swarthy, stocky man of middle age. I wore a steel breastplate over a leather jerkin and baggy black breeches. A battered steel helmet lay nearby, and so did a heavy sword and dagger. The men sleeping in camp around me were all similarly attired.

"My God!" I choked. "It was in this year 1519 that Cortez led his Spaniards to conquer Mexico—"

Realization overwhelmed me. I had seized the body, not of an Aztec, but of one of the Spanish conquistadors.

But the most stunning aspect of my unprecedented situation was this: I knew who I was in this new existence!

I KNEW somehow that my name was Don Pedro Lopez, captain in the army of Don Hernando Cortez. I knew that I was thirty-two years old, and that I had left a run-down plantation over in Cuba to enlist in this adventurous quest for the fabled riches of Mexico.

I, Nick Clark, could remember every day of the hardship and battles through which Cortez had led us in the past weeks. I remembered how we had landed on the savage jungle coast, how we had marched up into the Tlascalan country and crushed that hostile people in bloody battle, making them agree to become our allies. And how we had marched ever on toward Tenochtitlan, fabled capital of Montezuma's rich, vast empire.

Only yesterday, I remembered, we Spaniards and our Tlascalans had reached this place called Iztapalapa. We had disregarded the repeated requests of Montezuma's ambassadors not to come further. And we had

camped here for the night, feverishly eager at being so close to our golden goal.

"But *how* can I remember all this?" I wondered wildly. "It's my mind, Nick Clark's mind, that dominates this body now—not Lopez' mind."

An explanation suggested itself, from some things that Doctor Madison had told me. I was subconsciously drawing from the memories engraved by Lopez' former experiences upon the brain which my mind now inhabited. It was that subconscious memory that made me know all these things.

I stood up, looking wildly at the slumbering Spaniards around me. The camp was in a grove of tall cypresses at the foot of the hill. My hardy comrades-in-arms were sleeping on the bare ground in their armor.

What was I to do? I had never counted on finding myself one of these conquistadors. I knew that Burke Ullman, eager to learn the secret place of Montezuma's treasure, had planned to seize the body of one of the Aztec royal household. And Kay had planned the same thing.

Both Kay and Ullman must at this very moment be living as two of Montezuma's household. And I, who had come back to find and help them, had by hell-born chance stumbled into the body of one of the daring Spanish adventurers who had come to loot Montezuma's empire!

Stunned, I looked up at the dark hill looming nearby. My straining eyes could just make out an almost invisible vertical glimmer of white light against the stars. I knew it was the Beam, that Doctor Madison was keeping continuously projected back along the time-dimension.

"If I went up and stepped into that Beam," I thought rapidly, "my mind would be jerked out of Lopez' body and

back to my own body in my own time. But I can't do that! I can't return without finding Kay!"

As I stood thus, overwhelmed by the situation in which I found myself, a man's voice spoke in the darkness behind me.

"*Hola*, Don Pedro—you're up be-times this morning! You must be as impatient as I am to see the gold of Tenochtitlan."

I SPUN around. The handsome, frank-faced young Spaniard who confronted me was garbed like myself in helmet, breastplate, jerkin, breeches and boots.

I knew from that same queer subconscious memory who this was. It was one of my closest comrades in the expedition, Gonzalo de Sandoval.

He did not suspect, of course, that I was any other than his comrade Pedro Lopez. How could he, when I wore Lopez' body? I gathered my whirling thoughts, and answered him unsteadily.

"I couldn't sleep for excitement, Sandoval. We really enter the Aztec capital today?"

I spoke in Spanish—a Spanish far more fluent than my own. It came, I knew, from the same subconscious source.

"Aye, this is the great day," laughed the young captain. "I wonder if it's true that Montezuma's temples are built of solid silver? We didn't find any such in Cholula, so I doubt it. But Don Hernando says there'll be wealth for us all here, God willing."

At that moment a bugle rang out nearby. Dawn was paling over the hill eastward. The camp was waking, the Spanish soldiers yawning and swearing as they stretched stiffened limbs.

They were a tough, hardy-looking lot, deeply bronzed by the tropical sun, scarred by half-healed wounds. Oaths

rose from them as they quarreled over the breakfast cooked over the campfires. These men were a compound of avarice, fanaticism, and dauntless bravery.

Sergeant Bernal Diaz, a bluff, keen-eyed veteran, came up to Sandoval and me.

"Don Hernando has called council of his captains before we begin the march," he told us. He added gruffly, "God send you good counsel, for we shall need it this day."

"What, sergeant?" said Sandoval, laughing. "You're not getting nervous now that we've reached the very gates of the golden city?"

"A golden city can be a golden trap," growled the veteran. "I don't trust these Aztecs and their sudden friendship."

I walked with Sandoval through the camp toward the tent of our commander. It was all still like a strange dream to me. I, Nick Clark, of the twentieth century, one of these conquistadors of Spain!

The sun was rising. The whole camp was now bustling with preparations, the veterans furbishing up their helmets, swords and shields in order "to impress the heathen." Nearby waited the Tlascalcan allies, some two thousand brown Indian warriors wearing quilted cotton armor and armed with bows and *macuahuitls*, or flint-edged swords.

Popocatepetl and Ixtlicihuatl bulked their snow-clad masses against the rising sun, a black plume of smoke rising from the former volcano. Toward the north, beyond the grove of cypresses in which we had camped, gleamed the vast blue sheet of Lake Tezcuco.

WHEN Sandoval and I reached the leader's tent, we found the other captains gathered outside it. I recognized them all, subconsciously. Pedro

de Alvarado, the second in command, was the most striking figure—a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, florid young giant. But I knew the others too—de Montejo, the cheerful; de Oli, the ferocious and reckless; red-bearded young de Leon; Diego de Ordas, one of our best soldiers; and a half-dozen others.

With them was Father Bartolome de Olmedo, the chaplain, a grave, kindly man. Dressed as always in his black gown, bareheaded and without weapons, he was earnestly polishing the cross he meant to carry.

"That's right, *padre*," Alvarado was chaffing him. "You take care of the heathen's souls and we'll take care of their gold and jewels."

"And their women—or at least the good-looking ones," added Montejo with a laugh.

De Oli squinted at me in his scowling way. "What's the matter with *you* this morning, Lopez?" he demanded of me. "You stare at us as though you'd never seen us before."

Startled, I realized that I had betrayed the dazed sensation that gripped me at being one of these half-legendary conquerors.

What if I told them that I was not really Pedro Lopez, that I was really a man from more than four centuries ahead of this time? They'd simply think that I had gone crazy, of course.

"I am wondering why we don't get started," I answered. "The men are ready to march."

"Here comes Don Hernando now," put in Sandoval.

Cortez was coming out of the tent. With him was a handsome Indian woman with expressive, intelligent black eyes. I knew she was Marina, Cortez' mistress and interpreter for him with the Aztecs.

With intense interest I, Nick Clark, stared at the leader whose name had

gone down in history as the greatest adventurer. He was an impressive figure, wearing a polished breastplate over a fine black doublet and breeches that were embroidered with gold.

Of middle age, he had a hard, strong face whose pallor was accentuated by his thin black beard. His grave eyes had hints of subtle craftiness in them. He looked like a man at the same time iron-willed, fearless and wily.

He spoke to us in soldierly fashion, his eyes sweeping our faces.

"Gentlemen, we come today to the most perilous part of our enterprise. We are about to march into a city whose people number in the hundreds of thousands, the capital of an empire numbering millions. And there are less than four hundred and fifty of us, for we cannot rely upon our Tlascalan allies should we ourselves meet defeat.

"It is possible that these Aztecs meditate treachery. You will remember that Montezuma repeatedly sent word forbidding us to come to his capital, and only when we insisted on marching forward against all obstacles did he change his stand and invite us to enter Tecnochtitlan. We may very likely be entering dangers that make all our struggles and hardships so far as nothing.

"But if the dangers are great, the rewards are great also. These Aztec lords have fabulous wealth of gold and precious gems. It is the will of God that we take these riches from them, since they are heathen dogs who make bloody sacrifices to their accursed idols. Therefore be vigilant, fearless and quick to obey my orders, and we shall all win our fortunes."

"And also we shall win the souls of these people for Christ," Father Olmedo put in earnestly.

"Of course—of course, *padre*," Cortez assented quickly. "The cross shall

replace their horrid idols. For that reason, God is with us!"

AN EXCITED shout of agreement went up from all the captains around me. They were stirred equally by gold-lust, the fever of adventure and religious sentiment.

I, Nick Clark, had been trying to collect my seething thoughts while Cortez spoke. And I had quickly come to the only decision possible.

I must remain with the conquistadors. For they were going into Tenochtitlan, and somewhere there in Montezuma's household were Kay and Ullman. Somehow, once in the city, I must find those two.

Now two Aztec princes approached us, followed by a short retinue of warriors. They were fierce-eyed, red-brown men, with gorgeous plumes in their black hair. The two princes wore white cotton mantles, whereas the warriors were garbed in heavy quilted armor, and carried *maquahuitls*.

Marina, the handsome Indian mistress of our leader, exchanged a few words with the haughty Aztecs and then spoke to Cortez in Spanish.

"They are the envoys whom Montezuma has sent to lead us into the city."

Cortez bowed politely to the proud Aztec lords. "Tell them that we are ready to march, Marina. Gentlemen, to horse!"

Within a short time, our whole force was moving northward in regular order along a road leading from Iztapalapa to the lake.

First stalked the Aztec envoys. Behind them, Cortez and we captains rode upon our horses. I found that at my saddle hung a heavy battle-axe, and there was a socket-like rest that held a short lance. I had put on my helmet, like Alvarado and Sandoval who rode beside me.

Behind us mounted captains came Mesa, the gunner, with our little wheeled cannon and falconets. These were followed by our crossbowmen and arquebusiers, and they in turn by our savage Tlascalans.

Our cavalcade reached the edge of Lake Tezcuco. A causeway of stone eight yards wide ran straight north across the blue waters of the lake for several miles. In the dim distance at its end, we described the outlines of a fantastic city that rose from the middle of the lake.

I made out a great mass of buildings of pink stone, out of which towered shining white *teocalli*—temples built in the shape of terraced pyramids. One colossal temple loomed at the center of the city, dominating everything. Thin smoke rose from its truncated summit.

"*Dios!*" swore Alvarado, staring incredulously. "This Tenochtitlan is a city bigger than any in Spain itself!"

"Aye, and we are but four hundred," muttered Sandoval doubtfully, turning in the saddle to look back at our little company.

Even the hardy Spaniards behind us had fallen silent, hushed by growing awe and apprehension as they took in the immensity of the Aztec metropolis.

My own heart was beating rapidly. Somewhere in that barbaric, weird city ahead, Kay was dwelling in a stranger's body! Somehow I'd find her, get her back to our own time, against all odds.

So I, Nick Clark of the Twentieth Century, rode straight on with my fellow-conquistadors, down the long causeway toward the legended city of Montezuma.

CHAPTER IV

In Montezuma's Palace

TAUT suspense gripped all in our little company as we marched down

the wide causeway in the brilliant sunshine. My comrades in arms, gazing awe-strickenly toward the fantastic city we were approaching, seemed wondering what was to happen to us there.

I, Nick Clark, shared their suspense. For I knew no more than they just what would befall us in the Aztec metropolis. As I have said, I knew no more history than does the average man. I knew only that the Spanish *had* finally conquered this land, but of the immediate events to come I was as ignorant as my comrades.

We came now to a gap in the stone causeway, twenty feet long. It was spanned by a removable wooden bridge over which we marched with the horses' hooves clattering loudly. And as we advanced, we passed over two more such bridges flung across similar gaps in the causeway.

"*Diablo!*" muttered Alvarado, his blue eyes frowning. "I don't like these cursed bridges. If the heathen should remove them, we'd be trapped in yon city like woodcock in a snare."

De Montejo, spurring beside us, laughed cheerfully. "We'll teach the dogs new lessons if they try such tricks on us. Eh, Lopez?"

He looked at me, but I shrugged doubtfully. "I don't know. There seem to be thousands of them for everyone of us. Look at that!"

Hundreds upon hundreds of canoes were darting from the city ahead toward us. They were long craft of dug-out design, each holding several Aztec men or women. The men wore leather sandals, a knee-length white tunic belted by a blue or red sash, and over it a cotton mantle. The dress of the women was very similar, except for a short white skirt.

Their canoes came swarming over the blue waters of the lake, and their copper-skinned occupants watched our

passing company with wide black eyes. To them, we were as fantastic as their city seemed to us. Especially, our horses stirred their profoundest excitement, for they had never seen such animals before.

Tenochtitlan loomed before us now not a quarter-mile down the causeway. This great city in the lake was like an ancient Venice. Its great mass of pink stone buildings and green gardens was intersected by scores of canals through which canoes glided rapidly. Above the gardens and lowlier structures rose the pyramidal white *teocalli*, looking like foothills of the mountainous main temple whose colossal bulk dominated all.

Temples, rooftops, streets, canals, even the causeway ahead of us, were all thronged by multitudes of men, women and children watching our advance. There was something appalling in the sheer numbers of the Aztec population who had gathered to witness our entry into Tenochtitlan.

"*Dios*, they'll never believe this in Spain when we tell it!" gasped Sandoval.

Cortez drew rein ahead of us, and turned quickly to order a halt. "The heathen emperor is coming out to meet us, gentlemen. Let none of you offer any rudeness now under pain of death."

A WILD blaring of barbaric horns came from ahead. A solid mass of Aztec warriors was coming down the causeway in rapid, swinging march.

They were fierce-looking fighting-men, wearing heavy quilted armor, with brilliant bird-plumes in their hair. They had padded wooden shields on their left arms, and each carried a barbed javelin in his free hand. Over each man's back was slung a bow and a keen *maquahuitl*.

They came straight toward us, and we stiffened in the saddles and gripped our sword-hilts. Then with a crash of horns, they stopped. Through their ranks was borne a magnificent litter, studded with bright jewels and covered by a canopy of woven green feathers of brilliant hue.

This litter was set down by the richly-dressed Aztec nobles who had carried it. Out of it stepped the most splendidly appavelled figure in all that throng. I, Nick Clark, knew that I was looking at Montezuma himself, hereditary lord of the farflung Aztec empire.

He wore on his head a circlet of massive gold representing a winged snake whose eyes were flashing emeralds. Over his fine white tunic was a wonderful cloak of woven green plumes, and his sandals were heavily embroidered with gold. The *maquahuitl* or Aztec sword at his side was of jewels, instead of flint. He was of middle age, and his dark, red-brown face was distinctly handsome. But it seemed to me there were shadows of apprehension in his expressive black eyes as he looked at us.

Cortez had dismounted and stood waiting with Marina, our Indian woman interpreter. Glistening in steel from helmet to toe, our leader strode forward and greeted the Aztec king through the means of Marina's translation. Then, she translated as Montezuma replied.

"Malinche," he addressed Cortez, "you and your company are welcome in Tenochtitlan, whether or not you are indeed the sons of Quetzal."

"Quetzal?" repeated Cortez puzzledly, and the Indian woman made quick explanation.

"Quetzalcoatl is an ancient god of the Aztec people, who is supposed to have been a white-skinned man who came from the rising sun."

"Ha, so they're superstitious about us?" muttered Cortez. "That is well. Tell him we are indeed the sons of Quetzal, Marina."

It seemed to me that a pallor came over Montezuma's face as he heard. He bowed almost humbly. Then he presented his chief nobles.

Cuitlahua, his brother and the lord of Iztapalapa, was a massive-faced warrior who also regarded us with superstitious awe. But Guatemozin, the king's nephew, an eagle-faced, stalwart young man in brilliant plumes, had the shadow of a secret, scornful smile in his black eyes as he bowed.

"I shall myself conduct you to the palace assigned you, Malinche," Montezuma then declared, and re-entered his jewelled litter.

We spurred forward and followed the guarded litter down the causeway and into the city itself. And my heart was pounding with excited hope as I looked at the silent, awe-stricken, watching Aztec crowds.

Were Kay and Burke Ullman among those crowds, in Aztec bodies? Was Kay watching me at this moment, unaware that it was I?

Doctor Madison had said that when Ullman went back to seek the secret of the Aztec hoard, he had planned to enter the body of one of Montezuma's household. And that Kay, seeking to find and help Ullman, had planned the same thing. But how was I, Nick Clark, to find them among Montezuma's numerous nobles and retainers?

Sandoval's sharp exclamation cut into my desperate thoughts. "*Mira! Look at that temple, Lopez!*"

WE were approaching the large open square at the center of the city. The great metropolis was all around us now, a maze of flat-roofed buildings of pink stone laced by trop-

ical green gardens and cut through by intersecting canals crowded with canoes. All around this fairy city lay the blue lake, crossed by causeways running north, south and west. And seemingly hundreds of thousands of the red-brown Aztecs choked the city through which we passed, staring at us and our horses and guns in wonder.

But Sandoval was looking up at the colossal white temple that rose from the central square. The flattened summit of that huge terraced pyramid was two hundred feet above our heads. Up there on the summit was a small, chapel-like structure, and near it was an enormous hanging drum that was now suddenly booming like rolling thunder over the crowded city.

"*Dios*, what's that?" exclaimed my comrade startledly.

Marina, who walked beside Cortez, shuddered. "It is the temple of Huitzilpochtli, god of war. They are sacrificing victims, for only then does the serpent drum beat."

I too felt a shiver of repulsion. Human sacrifice! And Kay was somewhere in this barbaric place!

Across the square from the great temple of Huitzil was a walled palace into whose enclosure Montezuma and his nobles conducted us.

"Malinche, this was the palace of my father Axayaca," the Aztec emperor told our leader. "It is now your lodging. Tonight, in feast at my own palace on Chapultepec, we shall greet you more fittingly."

Montezuma then left us, with Cuitlahua and Guatemozin and his other guards. Silently, we looked at Cortez.

He first gave sharp orders to the men to close the gates of the palace wall, mount our guns, and set guards. Then, inside the glistening white main hall of our new lodging, he spoke rapidly to us captains.

"Gentlemen, we are in a dangerous situation but a brave man can pluck riches out of danger. You have all seen the wealth of this city."

"Aye, and we've seen its hordes," muttered De Oli. "There's as many warriors here as there are sands in the sea."

Alvarado flashed his carefree smile. "*Diablo*, one good Christian sword is worth a hundred of these heathen dogs."

"Their superstition makes them think we may be gods," Cortez said craftily. "If we can play on that, everything will be ours. So see that there is no drunkenness or brawling at Montezuma's feast tonight."

"How many of us go with you to the feast, Don Hernando?" I asked him anxiously.

I waited tensely for the answer. If Kay and Ullman were now two members of the Aztec king's household, I might somehow find them there.

"A half-dozen of us will be enough," Cortez decided. "Alvarado, Sandoval, De Montejo, Avila and you, Lopez. De Oli, I leave you in command here."

I felt sharp relief at being included in the party. And in the next few hours I awaited with feverish impatience the coming of night.

It all seemed like a dream as I, Nick Clark, watched the red sun sink in a blaze of splendor in the west. As darkness fell upon Tenochtitlan, torchlight flared from windows and rooftops. Lights were gliding along the canals and across the lake. And atop the dark temple of Huitzil, bulking like a thundercloud against the stars, a red fire glowed.

I shuddered again with repulsion, wondering sickly how many prisoners were huddled in the cages of that sinister pile, waiting their turn to have their hearts torn from their living

bodies before the idol. For such, Marina had told us, was the Aztec method of sacrifice.

CUITLAHUA, the king's brother, came to conduct us to the feast. We six captains in full armor, and Marina, went amid guards bearing torches along the causeway leading west. The way led up the hill of Chapultepec through a grove of enormous cypresses to the oblong stone mass of Montezuma's palace.

We all, I think, felt oppressed by the fantastic strangeness. Unfamiliar birds shrieked from the dark trees, and there was a blood-chilling wailing from the cages in which were kept the king's ocelots, or Mexican tigers. Indian slaves and Aztec warriors were to be seen everywhere.

Inside the palace, the banquet-hall was a long, white hall brilliant with torchlight and heavy with incense-smoke of burning copal. There were more than a hundred people here, members of Montezuma's family, subject kings, and lesser nobles. The feast was prepared on low tables, but the Aztec ruler sat alone at a table of his own.

He rose to greet us, speaking again through the interpreter. He first introduced many of the brilliant, jewelled throng.

"You know my brother Cuitlahua and my nephew Guatemozin," he said. "These others be the lords of Tezcuco, Tacuba, Tlacopan and other provinces. Yonder women are my two queens and the princess Atzala."

Atzala, Montezuma's daughter, was a lithe girl of tigress beauty in brilliant feather headdress and cloak, at whom Alvarado stared long.

"*Diablo*, yon wench is one heathen I'd enjoy converting, Lopez," he whispered to me.

"Aye, I'll warrant you'd make a

Christian of her sooner than Father Olmedo could," chaffed Sandoval.

I paid little heed to their talk, for my eyes were desperately searching the faces of the brilliant, barbaric throng.

Were Kay and Ullman in this very room, in other bodies? It seemed possible. Yet how was I to know them, how make them know me?

"Malinche," Montezuma was saying to Cortez, "if you are indeed *teules* or gods, why did you sons of Quetzal come to our land?"

Cortez answered readily, pointing to the solid golden dishes on the tables. "We came seeking that yellow metal. It is prized among us."

Guatemozin spoke, an ironical look on his eagle face. "Is it possible that the gods are so poor they have not even the yellow metal?"

"That fellow is a doubter," muttered De Montejo to me. "He doesn't believe we're *teules*."

"The gods have great riches—and great power," Cortez was saying smoothly. "But they have sacred uses for the yellow metal, unknown to you."

Montezuma's troubled face cleared a little. "If the metal is all you came for, you are welcome to it in whatever quantities you wish. But we shall talk of this later. Now let the feast begin."

HE seated himself in the very low chair at his table, and we took similar chairs at the other tables. Before us were golden and silver dishes, as well as fine red-and-black Cholulan pottery. There were many kinds of dressed meat and fowl, small cakes of bread, and cups of foaming chocolate. Later they brought us goblets of an alcoholic native drink strongly similar to pulque.

My comrades ate and drank heartily, but their eyes were less on the food than upon the gold, precious stones and

pearls about us. The gold-lust that had brought them here was flushing their faces as much as the pulque. All except Alvarado, who was staring admiringly across the table at the princess Atzala. The beautiful Aztec girl was a silent figure.

Montezuma raised his goblet and spoke a few words that Marina rapidly translated for us.

"Invocation to Quetzal, who has deigned to send his sons to visit unworthy Tenochtitlan!"

Cortez answered politely, though I knew his crafty eyes did not miss the covert sneer on Guatemozin's face. Toasts were drunk back and forth, voices getting louder as the potent pulque did its work.

To my desperate thoughts came a sudden inspiration. I stood up, holding my goblet as though to speak another toast to our royal host. But when I spoke, I spoke rapidly in English.

"*Kay! Kay Madison!*" I said rapidly. "*It's I, Nick Clark! I've come back to find you and Burke!*"

My comrades looked at me astonishedly, and Cortez asked me sharply, "What is that you babbled, Lopez? It sounded like English."

"Only an old toast I learned from an English prisoner once," I mumbled, sitting down hastily.

I was crushed by disappointment. For there had been no answer at all to my desperate call. And I had cherished a feverish hope that those I sought might be in this very palace.

The feast went on. Slaves constantly replaced the dishes and refilled the goblets. The air was thick with copal incense, and now Indian buffoons and dancers came to entertain us. My hardy comrades, drinking deep despite Cortez' warning, applauded loudly.

"Ah, this is better than the jungles of Cempoal or the freezing heights of

Tlascala!" swore De Avila loudly. "Why so long-faced, Lopez?"

"The incense smothers me," I muttered. "I need a breath of air before I choke." In fact, my bitter disappointment had overwhelmed me.

Despairingly I arose, apparently unnoticed in the festivity, and walked to one of the wide doors that opened out into the dark garden.

The air was cool and fresh out there under the great cypresses, and laden with perfume of flowers. Before and below me lay the wonderful panorama of Tenochtitlan by night, winking torches outlining its maze of canals and streets. The black temple of Huitzil flashed a signal fire across the lake. In the distance, Popocatepetl smoked in solemn silence.

A HAND touched my arm and I turned with a start. It was Atzala, the Aztec princess, who had followed me out into the garden. The torchlight from the banquet hall illumined the barbaric beauty of her slim brown figure and naked limbs. But underneath the brilliant plumes of her headdress, her oval face wore a pallor of intense emotion.

"Nick!" she whispered, looking up at me with wild black eyes. "It really is you, Nick?"

Those few words in English sent a bursting wave of almost hysterical relief through me. I grasped her bare shoulders.

"Kay!" I cried. "Then I've found you? It is you in this other body, Kay?"

She clung to me, sobbing. And I put my arms around her and held her close to me.

It was a strange moment. Physically, it was Pedro Lopez, the mailed Spanish conquistador, who embraced Atzala, daughter of Montezuma. But

actually, it was Nick Clark and Kay Madison of the Twentieth Century who clung almost frantically to each other.

Her black eyes were misted with tears when she looked up. "Oh, Nick—why did you do it? Why did you come back to this terrible place and time?"

"I came after *you*, Kay! Your father told me how Burke Ullman had come back to this time after the secret of the Aztec treasure, and of how you'd also come back in search of Ullman when he didn't return. And then you too had failed to return."

I held her face between my hands. "Kay, why didn't you return? Why have you stayed on here, in this body?"

"I *couldn't* return, Nick," she gasped. "Burke Ullman wouldn't let me."

"Ullman?" I stiffened, for I had almost forgotten. "Then he is here too?"

"Yes, Nick! He seized the body of one of Montezuma's family, just as I later did. The body of the king's nephew—Guatemozin."

"Guatemozin?" I was badly startled. Then I remembered the ironical, skeptical attitude of the royal nephew. "Burke Ullman, in Guatemozin's body? But why should Ullman prevent you from going back to your own time?"

"He wants the secret of the treasure, Nick. The royal Aztec treasure that was never found, that even in our own time still is hidden."

I nodded quickly. "I know. Your father told me how he and Ullman planned to learn the secret place of the treasure, so that they could use that wealth to finance their further scientific research."

KAY'S eyes—Atzala's black eyes!—flashed. "Burke Ullman never intended to use that treasure for such a purpose, Nick! He really wants the treasure to give himself riches and

power, back in our own time. He simply told that story of using the treasure for research so that my father would agree to send him back here, let him learn the secret. He plans to return to our own time with the secret, and to keep it for himself.

"But Ullman hasn't learned the secret yet. Only Montezuma, the king himself, ever knows where the royal Aztec treasure is hidden. Even the porters who take gold or jewels to add to the hoard are slain upon their return. And the Aztec king tells the secret of the hiding-place only to his successor, when he himself is about to die.

"That's why Burke Ullman has stayed on and on here in Guatemozin's body, constantly intriguing to learn the secret from Montezuma. And that's why he wouldn't let me return to our own time. For I know his real purposes now, and he dares not let me return and tell father what he is planning."

"So that's why Burke Ullman has kept you here!" I exclaimed. All my old dislike of the big, sardonic young scientist had flared up anew. "I might have guessed!"

Then I added quickly, "But Kay, how can he keep you from returning? You've only to go to that hill behind Iztapalapa and step into the Beam, and your mind will be drawn out of this body back to your own."

"I know, but I can't go there, Nick!" she almost sobbed. "That Hill of the Sun is sacred to the Aztecs, you know. Only when the new sun is born each year may even the royal family go there, as they had gone there when Ullman and I seized the bodies of Guatemozin and Atzala. But at other times, even I am not permitted to approach the Hill of the Sun. And Guatemozin—Ullman—has watched me to make sure that I do not go."

Hot rage burned up in me. "Ullman won't stop you any longer, Kay! You and I are both going there—we're going to enter the Beam and return to our own age and leave Ullman back in this barbaric world!"

She did not answer but her black eyes widened with sudden dread, and I perceived that she was looking over my shoulder.

I turned. A tall, grim figure was behind me, an eagle-faced Aztec magnificent in plumes and jewels and armor.

It was Guatemozin—it was Burke Ullman.

CHAPTER V

The Abduction

MY HAND went to the hilt of my sword. It was a moment of tense drama as I confronted my enemy there in the starlit garden of the great Aztec palace. Even to the eye we must have made a dramatic group—Pedro Lopez, the mailed Spanish conquistador, Atzala's slim, barbarically beautiful figure, and the dark eagle-face and magnificent panoply of Guatemozin.

But only we ourselves knew the superhuman pitch of this conflict. Only we knew that in the bodies of Spanish conqueror and Aztec warrior and royal princess, three people of the Twentieth Century that was still four hundred years in the future now confronted each other.

Ullman—for I must call him that—was first to speak. And the English words came strangely from the lips of Guatemozin.

"I heard you there in the banquet-hall, Nick Clark. So you came back to this time, too?"

He laughed. "You always were an adventurous sort of fool. But I imagine you'll be sorry for this adventure.

For you are never going to return to your own time. You'll live out your life in that body, now."

My fingers tightened on my sword-hilt, and my voice was harsh. "You think you're going to stop me from returning as you've stopped Kay? You're wrong, Ullman. The treasure be damned! We're going to leave this."

"I don't think so, Clark," he denied coolly. The smile in his black eyes was damnably confident. "Three of us came back through time, but only one of us is going to return."

His voice was suddenly deep with passion. "A treasure worth millions, lying hidden all through time, waiting for *me!* I can do things with that wealth—things I've always dreamed of. I've challenged time and death to learn its secret. And neither you nor Kay, nor her maundering old father, are going to ruin my plans."

My sword came out with a rasping rush, and I stepped forward with deadly purpose.

"Kay and I are going out of here, Ullman," I said tightly. "We're going to the Beam. If you try to stop us, I'll kill you."

A low laugh came from his lips. "You haven't a chance, Clark. The hill where the Beam is, is sacred to these people. I need only warn them that you plan to set foot upon that sacred hill, and they'll tear you to pieces."

For a moment, I felt baffled. Kay and I—our two minds—were trapped in the bodies of Atzala and Pedro Lopez. Only the Beam could disengage our minds from these bodies we had seized, and return us across time to our own proper forms. And we couldn't reach the Beam.

The rage that boiled up in me was too great for logic. "You'll not give warning to the Aztecs, Ullman," I muttered. "I'll make sure of that—"



He must have read my desperate resolve in my eyes. For he recoiled and flashed out his *maquahuitl* as I lunged at him.

MY STEEL blade rang against the flint-edged Aztec sword. I beat down his parry and stabbed with a low, quick thrust. It was Pedro Lopez' swordsmanship, drawn from subconscious memory, that served me now.

But with a lithe movement, he darted aside the thrust. Then before our battle could go further, there was an alarm of shouting voices, and men and torches



Steel fingers were about Nick Clark's throat

were all around and between us.

Our duel had been heard in the banquet-hall, and Spaniards and Aztecs alike had poured out. Cortez and Montezuma were both among those who had emerged.

"Enough of this, Lopez!" Cortez ordered me angrily. "Have you lost your senses?"

Guatemozin-Ullman was speaking quickly to the king. Marina rapidly translated the Aztec for us.

"Why do you brawl here with one of our guests, the *teules*?" Montezuma had demanded.

Guatemozin's finger stabbed accusingly at me. "That *teule* yonder was annoying the princess Atzala. I could not brook such insolence from a foreigner to one of our royal house."

Exclamations of anger came from the Aztec nobles as they heard. *Maquahuittls* and daggers appeared in their hands as they glared at me. My Spanish comrades instantly unsheathed their swords.

It looked for a moment as though a bloody conflict was to be precipitated there in the palace garden. But neither Cortez, who realized our precarious situation, nor Montezuma, who superstitiously deemed us sons of the gods, desired any such fight.

"Put down your swords, gentlemen!" thundered Cortez. "Do you wish to bring all the heathen hordes down around our ears?"

Atzala had sprung forward to Montezuma and was speaking passionately. Kay had heard and understood Ullman's accusation.

"Guatemozin does not speak truth, father!" she cried to the king. "The *teule* yonder offered no insult to me."

Montezuma's troubled face cleared. "Then all is but a misunderstanding," he declared. "Friends, let us return and continue the feast."

When that was translated to him, Cortez diplomatically refused. "With your permission," he told Montezuma politely, "we'll retire to our own lodgings. My captains are weary from the long journey to these lands, and have already eaten and drunk overmuch. Come, gentlemen."

I stood, torn by conflicting emotions. How could I go and leave Kay in this palace where Ullman had a chance to work her harm?

Yet there was no faintest possibility now of getting her out of the place and making a way with her to the Beam. If I tried to take Atzala out of the palace now in the face of the Aztec rulers and nobles, the certain result would be a conflict that would spell doom to us.

Atzala's lips whispered to me as I stood desperately irresolute. "Go now, Nick. You must. When next you come to the palace, we'll make plans. I'll be safe till then."

"Are you coming with us, Lopez?" Cortez demanded, frowning blackly at me over his shoulder.

I saw the triumphant expression in Guatemozin's black eyes and knew that Burke Ullman was enjoying my predicament. But I had to turn my back on him and with my fellow-captains accompany Cortez from the palace.

AS WE followed our Aztec guides back across the causeway into dark, slumbering Tenochtitlan, Cortez was ominously silent. But Alvarado and Sandoval and the others chaffed me with rough humor.

"*Diablo*, I never dreamed Lopez was such a ladies' man!" laughed Alvarado. "Two minutes alone with that princess, and he has her in his arms."

"And a sweet armful she looked," smiled Sandoval. He clapped me on the back. "Better have Father Olmedo baptize her, Lopez. Even if she's a

king's daughter, she's still a heathen."

Not until we were back in the torch-lit main hall of the Axayaca palace that had been given us for quarters, did Cortez speak to me. His face was flushed with passion as he gave me a blistering rebuke.

"Your philandering with that Aztec princess could have sent us all to the Temple of Huitzil as sacrifices, Lopez!" he accused harshly. "How in hell's name could you have been so witless as to tamper with a woman of the royal house?"

Dully, I realized that there was no use telling him the truth. There was no use trying to make him believe that I knew the girl who really inhabited Atzala's body, and that I was really not Lopez at all.

"I meant no harm, Don Hernando," I muttered. "I was a little drunk and the girl was beautiful."

"You're a fool," he spat. "Can't you all realize that we are balanced on the very brink of a dreadful precipice? Four hundred odd of us, not counting our uncertain Indian allies, bivouacing here at the heart of an empire that numbers millions of fierce warriors! All that's held them off our throats has been their superstitions about us."

His crafty eyes gleamed. "If we make clever use of their superstitions, we can establish ourselves here and soon take over the rule of this whole vast, rich domain. Then there'll be gold, jewels and women for all of you. But if we slip and let them realize we're *not* sons of the gods, we'll reap nothing but blood and struggle."

"That devil Guatemozin will do everything he can to convince Montezuma that we're only men!" I burst out. "He'd like nothing better than to have the Aztecs set upon us."

"Aye, I marked that Guatemozin sneered when you announced that we

were the sons of Quetzal," corroborated Sandoval.

"Then you have only deepened his enmity by your actions tonight, Lopez," accused Cortez sternly. "I forbid you under pain of death to meddle again with that Aztec princess."

That night, I could not sleep. I lay on my mat, revolving in my mind a thousand desperate schemes for the rescue of Kay.

I *must* somehow get her away from this barbaric metropolis, flee with her to Iztapalapa and reach the Beam that would draw our minds back across time to our own bodies. But how was I to do it?

Burke Ullman—Guatemozin—would be watching for such an attempt. He might even seek to forestall it by having Atzala slain. Yet I could not believe even he dared lay hands on Montezuma's daughter. My final resolution was that, despite Cortez' prohibition, I must see and make plans with Kay the next time we went to the palace.

Next day, I found my resolution thwarted. We were not to go to the palace. Montezuma had sent word that he himself was coming to show the leaders of the *teules* the wonders of his city.

"Do you suppose Atzala will be with him?" I asked Sandoval anxiously.

"I hope not," he answered emphatically, "for your sake, Lopez. Don Hernando will surely have you hanged if you try to see her again."

WHEN Montezuma arrived in his litter, followed by an extensive train of nobles and guards, neither Atzala nor Guatemozin were with him. I felt a deepening of my desperate fears. What was Ullman doing?

Cortez left Alvarado in command of our palace-stronghold, but took most of us other captains when he accompanied

Montezuma's retinue toward the great temple.

Even in my desperate anxiety, I felt the fascination of the scenes before me. I, a man of the Twentieth Century, walking through Tenochtitlan of the Aztecs! It all still seemed dreamlike to me, the streets and canoe-crowded canals, the markets, the slaves, the warriors.

The royal party led us up the steep and dizzy stair in the side of the towering terraced pyramid. Upon the flattened summit of the temple stood the idol of the war-god Huitzilopochtli. It was a grotesquely horrible figure, sheathed in gold and wound round with golden serpents. At its feet was a pan of incense in which three human victims' hearts burned.

In front of Huitzil's idol stood the disk-shaped stone of sacrifice upon which the victim was stretched that his heart might be torn from his living body. Nearby hung the enormous serpent-skin drum whose throbbing we had already heard. Priests of the god, who wore blood-sprinkled black robes and had long hair matted with blood, glared at us.

"We shall offer sacrifices in honor of your coming, Malinche," Montezuma told our leader. But Cortez made a horrified gesture.

"No, we want no such hideous sacrifices!"

Montezuma stared. "If you are really *teules*, you should welcome the offerings. It is strange, unless Guatemozin is right—"

When we returned to our palace, Cortez disclosed anxiety. "Gentlemen, I fear that Montezuma is beginning to doubt our supernatural origin.

The next few days deepened that disturbing impression that the Aztecs no longer considered us as godlike beings. We began to sense a difference in their

attitude, a covert insolence pregnant with menace.

I, Nick Clark, realized what was going on. Burke Ullman, as Guatemozin, was assuring Montezuma and the other nobles that we were no gods but men who could be attacked and slain. Ullman was willing to precipitate such an attack to make sure that *I* was destroyed!

It all made me feel an increased desperation. I had not had the slightest chance to speak to Kay in these few days. Cortez had flatly refused to allow me to go along on his two visits to the royal palace.

CORTEZ returned from his second visit to the palace looking dark and grim. And that night he called a secret council of us captains.

"Gentlemen, the volcano is about to erupt under us," he said harshly. "I'm convinced Guatemozin and others are persuading Montezuma to order an attack upon us. We may have little time before it breaks."

Oaths went up from my comrades. Every one of them felt the same alarm at the possibility.

"*Dios*, we'd be outnumbered thousands to one!" swore Alvarado. "Shall we turn and march out of the city?"

"No, we can't do that!" I exclaimed in sharp dismay. "That would mean—"

I didn't finish. What I had been about to say was that leaving Tenochtitlan would mean leaving Kay here, trapped in Atzala's body.

"Lopez is right—we dare not attempt to march out," Cortez admitted frowningly. "The whole howling hordes would be on us instantly."

"But we can't just sit penned up here and let them surround us," Sandoval protested.

A wild inspiration suddenly came to me. It was an audacious idea that

might save the situation, not only for my Spanish comrades, but for myself and Kay also.

"There's only one thing we *can* do!" I exclaimed. "We can take Montezuma and his family prisoners, and hold them as hostages."

My fellow-captains were stunned. Sandoval gave stammering voice to their incredulous amazement.

"Good God, Lopez, you can't be serious! Whoever heard of four hundred cavaliers marching into the heart of an empire and then daring to make a prisoner of its emperor?"

But Cortez' eyes had an eagle flash. "Lopez' idea is good! It's an audacious gamble, but it's our only chance. With Montezuma our prisoner here, we can issue orders in his name and rule this whole realm."

He continued calmly. "Tomorrow morning, six of us will visit Montezuma in his palace. If God is with us, we'll bring back the king and his family to be our hostages."

Sandoval and the others still seemed stunned by the daring of the plan I had proposed. Even to the fearless conquistadors, it seemed mad.

We slept on our arms that night. And my sleep was a feverish one, for my mind seethed with mingled hopes and fears. If our plan succeeded, Atzala would be brought here with the rest of Montezuma's family. I'd have Kay safe with me, and we could somehow then reach the Beam.

Next morning, Cortez sent word to Montezuma that he would again visit the king. A little later, we set out. Beside our leader and the interpreter Marina, there were just five of us—Alvarado, Sandoval, Avila, De Leon and myself.

"Six men going to seize an emperor in his palace!" muttered Avila. "My God, we must be crazy!"

Alvarado laughed in his carefree way. "At least, if we succeed, the feat will go down in history."

WHEN we entered Montezuma's throne-hall in the royal palace, we all breathed more easily to discover that only a few guards and women attended the king. Guatemozin was not in evidence. I wondered fleetingly where Ullman was. Kay had said he was ceaselessly intriguing to learn the secret of the royal treasure, which only the king was permitted to know.

Montezuma greeted us with assumed friendliness, but there was an evasive quality in his manner. We had approached his throne. Two old councilors were standing beside him, but the guards were at the outer door.

Cortez spoke to the Aztec ruler in rapid, stern tones, with Marina quickly translating. "We know everything!" Cortez told the king. "You have been plotting to attack us, your sacred guests."

The unexpected accusation stupefied Montezuma. A look of terror came into his eyes, and a gray pallor overspread his face.

"Then you are indeed *teules*?" he whispered terrifiedly.

I saw that our divination of the truth seemed supernatural knowledge to him, reviving his superstitious belief that we were gods.

Cortez too saw that, and pressed the advantage. "Yes, we are *teules* and you can conceal nothing from us. We know every word that your lips utter, every thought that passes in your mind."

Our leader continued firmly, to the terrified king, "It is necessary that you be protected from the evil men who have sought to turn you against us. For that reason, you and your immediate family must return with us to our palace

and remain there as our honored guests."

Crushed as he was by superstitious terror, Montezuma was still enough the monarch to object to this.

"What, Malinche! You would make me a prisoner in my own capital? This cannot be!"

"Would you rather the vengeance of the gods fall on you?" Cortez demanded.

Cringing pitifully from that threat, Montezuma still feebly resisted. "What would my nobles and people say of me if I did as you ask?"

I felt a feverish impatience at the delay. "Don Hernando, we daren't waste more time!" I exclaimed.

De Leon cried roughly, "Why waste arguments on the heathen dog? If he does not agree instantly, let us plunge our swords in his body!"

When Marina translated that threat, Montezuma gave way. The physical threat completed the work of the superstitious terror we had sown.

"I cannot resist the will of gods," he said hoarsely. "I and my family will go with you, Malinche."

Cortez' face flashed triumph. "Good! Summon your brother Cuitlahua, your nephew Guatemozin, the princess Atzala and your own servants."

"Cuitlahua and Guatemozin are not now here," whispered the terrified monarch. "Atzala is in the women's wing."

He stammered an order to one of the old councillors to summon the princess, and asked the other to call together his personal servants.

"Lopez, go with the old one and bring the princess," Cortez ordered me swiftly. "She knows you and will come more willingly, mayhap. It's the devil's own luck we can't lay hands on Cuitlahua or Guatemozin, too."

ALL this tense scene had taken but minutes to enact. There had been

no alarm to rouse the guards outside the throne-room.

My hopes were soaring as I hurried with the fearful old councillor through the palace halls and corridors. If we could get Montezuma and his family safe to our own quarters, then Kay would be safe from Ullman—

Two fierce-eyed Aztec warriors challenged us at the entrance to the chambers of the princess. I knew who they were. The guards that Guatemozin—Burke Ullman—had set to watch Atzala!

They were refusing us passage. Desperate, knowing that alarm might break at any moment, I drew my sword and rushed them.

I dropped one with a stab through the throat and swung fiercely toward the other. The Aztec had drawn his maquahuitl, and he thrust first.

"Tlateloco! Tlateloco!" he yelled the fierce Aztec warcry as he struck.

The flint-edged blade slashed into me below my upraised right arm, biting deep and exploding a fiery agony in my breast. But I brought down my own blade upon his feathered headdress next moment, felling him.

I staggered, dazed by the shock and pain of the deep wound. Blood was spurting from it, but I tore a strip from a cotton hanging, thrust it inside my jerkin to staunch the flow.

"Nick!" came a sharp cry. It was Atzala whose slim figure had appeared in the doorway from the chambers beyond. "You're hurt!"

"Not badly," I lied hoarsely. "Quickly, Kay—come with me. We're taking Montezuma prisoner."

She gasped, and then spoke with feverish rapidity as we hurried back toward the throne-room. "Nick, I've been terrified for you! Burke Ullman—Guatemozin—has been inciting the king to attack you all. He convinced

the king that I might betray the plot, that I must be guarded—”

I hardly heard her, for pain from the wound made every breath an agony. That *maquahuatl* had bitten deep.

In the throne-room, all was ready for departure. Montezuma's women and personal servants and councillors were gathered, looking as terrified as the monarch himself. His litter was brought in and he entered it.

Cortez told us urgently, "Gentlemen, all depends on getting him to our quarters without incident. Pretend to be casual, make it seem that this is only another royal visit to us."

So, closely surrounding Montezuma's litter but pretending merely to escort it in friendly fashion, we all passed out through the palace. The Aztec guards outside bowed low to their ruler's litter as it passed.

In the streets of Tenochtitlan, the sight of the royal litter and retinue evoked a similar respectful response from the crowds. None dreamed of any possible compulsion upon the king in his own capital.

We reached the great square. My steps now were dragging, my strength running out of me like water, from my wound. I was barely aware that we were passing through the courtyard gates of our Axayaca palace.

"Close and guard the gates!" blared Cortez' voice. "We'll announce tonight that the king has taken up residence with us sacred guests."

"*Dios*, we did it!" Alvarado was exclaiming almost unbelievably.

I felt myself falling senseless.

CHAPTER VI

The Fight at the Temple

I AWOKE to find myself lying on a soft mat in a small chamber of our

quarters. Bright sunlight slanted in through a small window. With it came the sound of a loud din, of shouting voices and rattling arrows and the occasional barking roar of a Spanish arquebus.

All my strength seemed to have deserted me, for when I tried to get up I became dizzy. An unfamiliar weakness gripped me, and I now saw that my hands and wrists looked thin and shrunken. A little polished mirror nearby showed me that my face—Pedro Lopez' hawk-like face!—was pallid and pinched.

A slim brown figure in brilliant feathered garments entered the chamber, and then dashed forward with a little cry at seeing me sitting up. It was Atzala.

"Nick!" she cried. "You're awake at last! I've been so worried—your wound healed but your coma seemed to go on and on."

I looked down bewilderedly at myself and found that in fact the deep wound in my side was now only a healed, livid scar.

"How long have I been unconscious, Kay?" I stammered.

"You've been lying there for weeks, Nick!" she exclaimed. "You never became conscious—I was afraid you never would."

"Thank God you're safe, at least," I said fervently. "But what's been happening? It sounds as though they're fighting outside."

She nodded tensely. "They are. The Aztecs are besieging us here in the Axayaca palace. They've been attacking for several days, led by Guatemozin."

"Burke Ullman!" I exclaimed. "That devil *would* incite them to attack! But we brought Montezuma here, and he's still king—"

"He's a king without power now, Nick. For a while after you brought

him here, the Aztecs seemed stunned. They obeyed his commands, even though he was only a captive of the Spaniards. But then they began to turn against him. Guatemozin—Burke Ullman—incited them to revolt. They attacked this palace, and have been besieging us in it ever since. Cortez has been trying to make Montezuma quell the revolt."

Her eyes filled with tears. "Nick, I can't help pitying Montezuma. He's so broken now. He talks to me—thinks that I'm still his daughter Atzala, of course. And he's haunted by the fact that he let the Spaniards into Tenochtitlan. He knows now they aren't gods."

"Kay, what about *us*?" I asked feverishly. "I've got to get you out of here. We've got to get to the hill of the Beam and return to our own time."

Her slim brown shoulders sagged. "It's hopeless, Nick. We can't get out of here now. Look at that!"

And she pointed through the open window. I stumbled over to it, with her arm supporting me, and peered wonderingly outside.

My Spanish comrades were defending the wall that surrounded this Axayaca palace. They had mounted our few guns and falconets in embrasures, and also were using crossbows on the howling horde outside.

For outside the wall swarmed thousands of yelling Aztec warriors. That fierce, feathered horde completely surrounded the walled palace, and slingers and bowmen among them kept a rattling shower of stones and arrows coming over the wall.

AS I looked, an ominous throbbing, booming sound floated down to me, from the summit of the gigantic Temple of Huitzil across the square. I looked up and saw black smoke rising

from the chapel up there.

The girl beside me shuddered. "They're sacrificing more victims to Huitzil, to insure victory over us. That serpent-drum has been booming every few hours for days."

"God, we can't get out through that horde," I muttered, appalled. "Guatemozin would be waiting to seize us. Burke Ullman wants to make sure that *he* is the only one of us who returns to the Twentieth Century with the treasure-secret."

"He doesn't have that secret yet, Nick. Perhaps he hopes to be named king in Montezuma's place, and learn it then."

"Take me to Cortez," I said after a few moments. "I've got to know if he intends to try breaking out of here. If he does, you and I must be ready then to make a dash for the Beam."

Atzala-Kay supported me on the way through the chambers and courts of the big palace, to the main hall. I was still dreadfully weak, but a little strength was now coming back to me.

In the great hall, dozens of our Spanish soldiers lay wounded on mats along the wall. Father Olmedo was bending over one who was dying. Alvarado came in from outside, his face bleeding from an arrow-scratch, his blue eyes blazing with battle-light. He saw me and hailed me.

"Lopez, you're up at last! That's good—we need every man now against those hellish heathens outside."

Close behind him, their armor scratched and dented by combat, came Cortez and Sandoval. Cortez' face was dark and taut. He addressed himself to the girl beside me.

"Princess, did you inform your father of my request that he address his people?" he demanded.

Atzala-Kay shook her head. "The king says that he cannot do it. He says

that the people will not listen to him now."

"*Por Dios*, he's got to do it!" flared Cortez. "He may be able to calm those howling wolves out there. Come—I'll see him myself."

We followed the leader to the spacious quarters of the palace in which Montezuma and his retinue of councillors and women lived.

Montezuma came forward slowly to meet his Spanish captor. I saw that the Aztec ruler was indeed a broken man. His handsome face had a gray, colorless look, and his dark eyes were haunted. He shook his head miserably when he heard Cortez' stern request.

"The people will not listen to me now, Malinche," he said dully. "They deem me a traitor. By now, they will have chosen another king."

"You are their rightful king and it behooves you to bring them to order," Cortez insisted relentlessly. "You must do it, and do it now."

His iron will crushed Montezuma's resistance. The Aztec emperor falteringly agreed.

With his councillors, and with Atzala, he went up heavily to the flat roof of the big palace. A few of us Spaniards followed at a little distance. We kept a little back, as Montezuma went to the terraced edge of the roof and stood there in the sunlight looking out at the Aztec horde.

The furious assaults of the Aztec warriors upon the wall ceased abruptly. They had recognized the king. Thousands of fierce faces turned up toward him, in a manner that still had some of the old-time awe in it.

Montezuma's voice rang thinly through the sunlight. "My people, you must desist from these mad attacks. The *teules* are our friends. That is why I came to live with them. I, your king, order you to withdraw."

A fierce yell came back from the Aztec horde. "You are no longer our king, traitor. We have chosen Cuitlahua as our ruler!"

MONTENZUMA'S brilliant figure seemed to sag, at that news. But he raised his hand and began to speak again.

"You have not the right to choose another king when—"

He was interrupted by a heart-chilling screech from far out in the Aztec crowd, the ominous Mexican war-cry.

"*Up, Tlateloco!* Cuitlahua and Guatemozin lead us now!"

At the same moment, a bow twanged and two arrows buried themselves in Montezuma's body. He began to fall.

"Alvarado! Quick, get him back!" I yelled, and stumbled forward.

Atzala was bending over the fallen king. Alvarado and Sandoval dashed past me as I stumbled weakly forward, and helped lift the prone figure and bear it back to safety.

Arrows and stones were now showering upon the roof. The Aztec horde was surging forward against the wall with an intensified fury.

"Tlateloco! Tlateloco!" they yelled. "Death to the *teules*!"

Cortez' voice blared orders. "Mesa, sweep them with the guns! De Oli, take your crossbowmen to the north wall—they're thickest there."

We bore Montezuma to his own chambers. His wounds were fatal, one glance sufficed to show. But he was still alive, and opened his eyes as Cortez' iron figure stalked into the room.

"Malinche, you can let me die now," he whispered with bitter irony. "There is nothing more I can do for you."

Father Olmedo pressed earnestly forward. "Do you not wish to die in the true religion of Christ, rather than in idolatry?"

Montezuma shook his head feebly. "No, I die in the faith of my fathers. Leave me, all of you—all except Atzala."

We obeyed, leaving Atzala alone in the room, bending over the dying king. Out in the big hall, Cortez looked at us gloomily.

"We've played almost our last card, gentlemen. With Cuitlahua and that devil Guatemozin leading the Aztecs, they'll never stop attacking."

De Montejo, covered with dust and blood, came staggering in. "They've breached the north wall and are breaking in!"

Cortez shouted to us. "Out to the breach, every man! If the fiends get in among us, we're lost."

I snatched up helmet, breastplate and sword and followed the others out. My long weakness was passing, and while I still felt faint and dizzy, I realized the importance of holding the Aztecs out.

If they overwhelmed us, with Guatemozin as one of their chief leaders, then both Kay and I would be wholly in Burke Ullman's power!

By using heavy logs as battering-rams, the Aztecs had managed to breach the masonry wall at the north of the palace. They were fighting like wildcats to get through the break, and a dwindling group of Spanish swordsmen were endeavoring to hold them back.

"Mesa, move your guns to command the breach!" Cortez was yelling to our gunner. "Men, hold them out with your swords meanwhile!"

"Easier said than done, that!" gasped a bloody, breathless figure beside me whom I recognized as Sergeant Bernal Diaz. "They're fiends from hell. They've taken four of our men captives—see!"

HE POINTED and I glimpsed a knot of Aztecs outside dragging

the helpless four Spanish captives across the square toward the looming Temple of Huitzil.

"Strike hard or all our hearts will fry before that cursed idol!" yelled Alvarado. "St. Jago and at them!"

I found myself in the very thick of that crazy fight at the breach. A sea of distorted brown faces swam in front of my blurred vision as I struck and stabbed, shoulder to shoulder with my comrades.

We piled Aztec bodies waist-high in the breach and still they came at us like tigers. Had they stood back and used their bows and slings through the breach, they must have killed us all. But their fanatic religion made them intent on taking living prisoners to offer Huitzil, and they utterly disregarded their own danger to lay hands on us.

"My God, Captain Lopez, do you suppose any of us will ever see Spain again?" panted Bernal Diaz to me as we fought.

"Not if they break through," I gasped. "Why in hell's name doesn't Mesa bring up the guns?"

I, Nick Clark, had almost forgotten that I was a man of the Twentieth Century in this moment of bloody struggle. The supreme importance of protecting Kay from the yelling horde made me temporarily as blood-mad as my cursing, panting Spanish comrades.

De Oli, fighting beside me like a madman, was seized with another of our men by the maddened Aztecs. With yells of triumph, the two captives were dragged out into the horde outside the wall.

"After them!" roared Alvarado. "We can't let them take our comrades to sacrifice!"

But at that moment, Cortez' voice blared through the din. "Stand clear of the breach! Mesa has the guns ready!"

Mesa and his gunners had dismounted half of our few little cannon from the walls, and had trained them upon the breach in which we were struggling.

Barely in time, we darted aside. The guns roared, hurling a shower of missiles that struck the Aztecs crowded in the breach. In a twinkling, they were a heap of dead and dying. The others recoiled.

"Now close the breach while we have the chance!" Cortez ordered. "Timbers and stones there—quickly!"

All of us worked furiously, dragging the squared timbers and stones in readiness for such emergency. Soon, the breach was barricaded.

The Aztecs had drawn back outside the walls, daunted by the fearful execution just done to them. Their heart-chilling howls filled the air in deafening volume. And we saw De Oli and the other captive, being dragged up the side of the pyramidal Temple of Huitzil in the distance.

I felt dizziness and weakness overcoming me as I staggered back into the palace. Atzala came running to meet me in a corridor.

"Nick, Montezuma is dead!" she told me. Her eyes were full of tears. "He just died, believing that I was his daughter—"

"He's better dead," I said dully, still gasping for breath.

She caught my arm. "Nick, he told me the secret place of the royal treasure before he died! He said that I must convey the secret to Cuiclahua, the new ruler."

"The treasure?" I repeated. I had almost forgotten it in the desperate urgencies of our situation.

"Yes, Nick—he told me just where it is hidden. It's in a cavern cunningly concealed in a ravine on the north slope of Popocatepetl."

HER dark eyes were flashing with hope as she continued. "Nick, why couldn't I bargain with Guatemozin—with Burke Ullman? If I agreed to tell him the treasure-secret, he would surely in return allow us two to get through the Aztecs to the Beam."

"No, Kay!" I exclaimed. "It would be mad folly to try that. Ullman would get the secret from you and then destroy us both. He intends to be the only one to return to the Twentieth Century with that secret."

I swayed, my fatigue and weakness overcoming me. She grasped my shoulder to support me.

"Nick, you're sick and exhausted! You must lie down and rest—you shouldn't have been out there fighting—"

I was only dimly aware, so great was my drunkenness of exhaustion, of dropping to a mat in the chamber to which Atzala-Kay led me.

I must have slept like a drugged man. I knew that several hours had passed when I awakened, for now it was dark outside the window. An uproar of excited cries in the courtyard had awakened me.

"Kay!" I called. There was no answer. She was not in the room.

I felt sudden alarm. I grabbed my helmet and sword, and stumbled through the palace in search of her.

Montezuma's body lay in one room, between flaring torches. The grief-stricken women of the dead king were wailing and chanting over him. But Atzala was not there, nor was she in the torchlit courtyard outside.

Sandoval came toward me, his handsome face pallid in the flickering light. "Lopez!" he exclaimed to me. "That princess, the girl Atzala—"

"What of her?" I cried in fierce alarm. "What have you done to her?"

"We did nothing to her!" he swore. "But she has escaped from us! She darted suddenly over the wall a few minutes ago before our sentries could prevent. And the Aztecs out there have seized her and are dragging her to the temple!"

I felt a freezing horror as I realized what had happened. Kay had carried out her plan of going out to bargain with Guatemozin-Ullman for our liberty.

I sprang frantically up to the wall. Night shrouded Tenochtitlan, but torches tossed and bobbed all around the great square where the Aztec horde still kept watch upon our palace-stronghold.

The altar-fire upon the summit of the lofty Temple of Huitzil flashed quivering red rays across the night. A great mass of Aztecs was moving up the side of the temple. Their exultant shouts, that Sandoval hastily translated, came clearly to our ears.

"To Huitzil with the traitress Atzala! Let she who loves the *teules* share their fate!"

An urgent Aztec voice rang above the tumult—a voice that I recognized as that of Guatemozin—of Burke Ullman.

"No, do not take the princess to sacrifice!" Ullman was vainly commanding. "She possesses the secrets of dead Montezuma—"

Burke Ullman *knew* that in dying, Montezuma would have bequeathed the treasure-secret to Atzala! Ullman, avid for that secret, was trying to save her life long enough to gain her knowledge.

But even Guatemozin could not check the blood-mad Aztecs now. They now hated Atzala as they had hated her father Montezuma, as supposed traitors to them. They meant her to be sacrificed with the Spanish captives.

"No, Lopez!" cried Sandoval to me in sudden alarm. "Alvarado, help me! He's gone crazy!"

I HAD tried to fling myself down over the wall, to rush to Kay's aid. In that moment, I was quite incapable of calm reason.

Sandoval and the others held me and prevented me, dragging me down from the wall into the torchlit courtyard. I raged there like a madman.

"Are you going to stand here and let them sacrifice De Oli and our other comrades as well as the princess?" I cried. "Listen!"

The great serpent-drum atop the *teocalli* had suddenly begun booming and the ominous reverberation was greeted by fiendish cries from the Aztec horde to whom it signalled the beginning of sacrifices.

Alvarado swore vehemently. "*Diable*, Lopez is right! We can't stand by and let them tear out our living comrades' hearts!"

A fierce shout of agreement went up from the crowd of conquistadors. But Cortez raised his arm commandingly in the torchlight.

"We can do nothing!" he affirmed. "If we try to make a sortie to the temple to rescue them, we'll lose a score of men in trying to save a half-dozen."

I appealed to the leader's sense of strategy. "But Don Hernando, if we can gain the summit of the temple and overthrow the idol there, the fall of Huitzil will strike confusion into the Aztecs."

My desperate appeal made an impression on Cortez. "It is true that that might win us a respite," he muttered. "The fiends are superstitious to the last degree. It might gain us enough time to prepare for an exodus from the city—"

Cortez made quick decision. "We'll

try it! Every horseman and arquebusier and crossbowman make ready! De Montejo, I leave you here with the Tlascalans to keep open our way of retreat. Quick now, gentlemen!"

With a roar of approval, the conquistadors made ready for the desperate sortie. We mounted our mailed horses, untied our heavy battle-axes, and waited while the Tlascalans unbarred the heavy gates.

Father Olmedo lifted his hand in solemn blessing. "God's help will enable you to overthrow yon wicked idol. Strike hard for the right."

"God and St. Jago!" roared Alvarado in the old Spanish battle-cry, as the gates were flung open and we spurred out into the square.

Iron-shod hooves of our mounts rang and clattered on the paving as we rode full tilt toward the torchlit mass of Aztecs around the base of the towering temple. Behind us in a run came stout crossbowmen and arquebusiers and swordsmen. Cortez, in full mail, galloped at our head.

"The *teules* come forth!" screamed a warning Aztec voice.

The next minute, our close-packed mass of galloping riders hit the horde of feathered warriors. We tore into them like steel into paper.

I, Nick Clark, crazy with fear for Kay, wielded my heavy battle-axe upon the feathered heads and distorted faces of coppery warriors whose *maquahuitls* stabbed out of the press at me. In the tossing torchlight the battle there at the base of the temple was a crazy, whirling chaos.

BOOMING like hoarse thunder far above us in the darkness, the great serpent-drum continued to throb over all the war-cries and death-shrieks of the struggle. The roar of arquebuses punctuated the din as our footmen came

running up to support us.

With us mailed horsemen as a spearhead, we clove through the Aztec horde and reached the base of the temple. Before us rose the steps of that dizzy, unrailed stairway that ascended the side of the *teocalli*.

Cortez' strong voice trumpeted across the battle from where our leader rode in the van.

"Alvarado! Hold the dogs here with your horsemen while the rest of us gain the summit!"

I threw myself off my horse and joined Cortez, Sandoval, Bernal Diaz and our swordsmen as they started up the side of the terraced pyramid.

Scores of Aztecs had retreated up the stairway and now opposed our progress with fanatic resistance. It was steel blades against flint-edged *maquahuitls* as we fought up the dizzy stairway in the torch-shot darkness, with the serpent-drum booming louder and louder in our ears.

CHAPTER VII

La Noche Triste

NOT even the fanatic Aztecs could stand before us as we pressed up the stair. The booming of the great drum, signalling the beginning of the sacrifice of the Spanish captives, inspired my comrades with frenzy.

I, Nick Clark, felt a frenzy equalling theirs when I thought of Atzala-Kay among those chosen victims. Fighting shoulder to shoulder with Cortez and Sandoval, I struck and stabbed with a strength drawn from the last reserves of my weakened body.

"Tlateloco! Tlateloco!" shrilled the fanatic Aztec battle-cry.

"God and St. Jago!" roared the Spanish yell.

Whizz of arrows and stones, clash of

swords and *maquahuitls*, the screams of men who lost footing on blood-slippery steps and plunged off the side of the steep and giddy stair—all were wild background to the hoarse throbbing of the serpent drum.

From terrace to terrace of the *teocalli* we fought upward until at last we reached the flat, unrailed summit of Huitzil's temple. The altar-fire in front of the grotesque idol was blazing high, its red light illuminating the whole ghastly scene.

One Spanish captive had already been sacrificed. His ripped, contorted body lay on the crimsoned floor and his heart was in the smoking pan at Huitzil's feet. De Oli, his face flushed dark red, lay bound across the sacrificial stone and the black-robed high priest was raising his obsidian knife to plunge into the victim's breast.

Cortez and Sandoval and my other comrades yelled in rage and horror and plunged forward through the wild Aztecs who still opposed us. But my eyes had flown to the row of bound captives awaiting their turn upon that dreadful altar, and I had glimpsed Atzala's prostrate figure.

Heedless of the terrific struggle around me, I bent with wild anxiety over the slim figure. She was bound hand and foot but was unharmed and collapsed quivering in my arms as I cut her bonds with my bloody sword.

"Kay, you're safe now!" I said hoarsely. "We'll get you out of here."

"Lopez!" yelled a strong voice to me through the fight. "Help us with the idol!"

It was Sandoval. He and Bernal Diaz had fought their way to the looming idol of Huitzilopochtli that towered at the edge of the temple-summit. They were endeavoring to dislodge it from its base, while Cortez and the others fought a furious battle over De Oli at

the sacrifice-stone.

I kept Atzala-Kay behind me for protection as I hurried across to the idol. Black-robed priests, screeching like demons, attacked us with their glass knives but we cut them down and then the three of us pushed with all our strength at the towering idol.

It rocked a little on its base, then rocked more violently. We summoned our strength in a convulsive final effort. And the huge statue of Huitzil tottered and fell, crashing down onto the steep side of the pyramid below, bumping and thundering down through the red-lit darkness.

"Thus perish all such heathen idols!" yelled Bernal Diaz, his face flaming with triumph in the firelight.

"Huitzil has fallen!" screamed a cry through the Aztecs, in accents of superstitious horror. "The *teules* have overthrown the god!"

CORTEZ and the others had freed De Oli and slain the last of the Aztecs on the summit. The serpent-drum had fallen silent.

"Down out of here and back to the palace before the dogs recover from their confusion!" Cortez shouted to us.

I half-carried Atzala down that slippery stair to the base of the pyramid, and drew her across my saddle-bow as I remounted my horse.

Uttermost confusion of bewilderment and dismay had momentarily gripped the Aztecs at the fall of their idol. We reformed our forces and pushed through them in the direction of Axayaca palace.

I glimpsed Guatemozin now under the light of distant torches, his fierce face contorted as he sought to rally the warriors against us. Burke Ullman, I knew, still was determined to seize us two and destroy us after extracting from Kay the treasure-secret

which he correctly guessed Montezuma to have told her.

But not even Guatemozin could arouse the Aztecs to effective resistance at this moment. They were so dazed by superstitious horror that we were able to smash through them and safely gain the open gates of our palace-stronghold.

Once in the palace, I carried Atzala aside. She—Kay—was still shuddering with uncontrollable horror as I held her in my arms.

"Nick, I tried to carry out my idea and bargain with Ullman," she choked. "But before I ever reached him, the Aztecs had seized me and were carrying me to Huitzil. Ullman tried to get me away from them, but their hatred for Montezuma and his family is implacable—he couldn't."

I soothed her, as best I could. "You're safe now, Kay—for the time being, at least."

She would not be reassured. "Nick, we're all trapped here and Burke Ullman will go to any lengths to get his hands on me, and to prevent either of us from ever reaching the Beam."

There had fallen a strange silence, outside the palace. For the time, the Aztecs were too overwhelmed by the fall of Huitzil to resume their attacks upon our stronghold.

But we all knew that as soon as they recovered from the shock to their superstition, they would resume the siege with an even more fanatic frenzy. Our food and water were low, and our resistance could not long be maintained.

At the council of war that Cortez held with us captains an hour later, our leader unflinchingly admitted our dire predicament.

"GENTLEMEN, there is only one thing we can do," Cortez declared raspingly. "We must make all possible

preparations and then fight our way out of Tenochtitlan. If we can escape this cursed city, God will help us to gather new forces among the Tlascalans and return to conquer this realm."

"How can we get out of the city?" Alvarado asked gloomily. "The Aztecs have removed all the bridges of the causeways. We're trapped."

Cortez showed his resourcefulness and iron resolve. "Then we must construct a portable bridge and carry it with us. We'll use it to cross each of the gaps in the causeway, moving it from one to another."

I think that all of us quailed at the precarious and perilous method of escape he proposed. Yet none of us showed our dread, for all knew that we must make the attempt or perish in this place.

"We'll prepare the bridge as quickly as possible," Cortez went on, "and will sally forth at night. Then all will be in God's hands."

"At least," vowed Alvarado grimly, "we'll send a plenty of the heathen dogs to hell whether or not we get away."

Later, I told Kay of the decision and rapidly outlined to her the chance that it gave us two.

"If we can get across the causeway to the mainland shore of the lake," I said, "you and I can leave the others and make for Iztapalapa hill—can reach the Beam."

A pathetic eagerness was in her voice. "Nick, do you really think we have a chance to get back to our own time?"

I dared not tell her how slim that chance appeared to me. But the darkness of the outlook haunted me during the frenzied time of labor and preparation that now began.

Cortez had set every one of our force who could be spared from the walls to labor upon the construction of the light

portable wooden bridge upon which all depended. As the tense hours dragged past, there was still no resumption of the attack on us by the hordes of Aztecs in the surrounding city.

But our lookouts reported that great forces of Aztec warriors were gathering all around Tenochtitlan, coming in swarms of canoes across the lake. They were undoubtedly planning a final assault in force. And well I knew that Guatemozin would be in that attack—that Burke Ullman would be seeking out Kay and myself.

Night finally came—the night upon which we were to make our desperate attempt to crash out of the city. It was moonless, dark and windy as our forces gathered in the courtyard of the palace. All of us, even our fierce Tlascalans, were somber with fateful foreknowledge.

Cortez had led us captains and soldiers into a big chamber of the palace in which was stored all the gold he had collected so far.

"Gentlemen, we must abandon this gold for it is too heavy to take with us," he told us. "You may each take what you wish, but I advise you not to weigh yourselves down with it."

Heedless of his advice, many of my Spanish comrades stuffed their pockets with the heavy metal, their avidity conquering all caution.

"Now," declared Cortez, "we march. Each man keep to his place, strike hard, and with God's favor we shall win clear."

THE gates were opened and our column started out into the pitch darkness in rapid march. Cortez rode with the advanced guard of Sandoval's hundred picked soldiers, guarding those who carried the bridge.

I was with that party, and I had insisted on taking Atzala on my horse

with me. Behind us of the advance guard came Mesa's gunners with their little cannon, then our Tlascalans, and finally the rear guard under command of Alvarado.

Through the gusty darkness we pressed across the great square beneath the brooding shadow of the now dark Temple of Huitzil. We entered the street leading to the causeway, before a shrill alarm tore the night.

"Up, Tlateloco!" shrilled the dreaded cry. "The *teules* seek to escape the city!"

"Spur forward!" Cortez shouted. "The causeway is just ahead!"

Through the dark streets, Aztec warriors were now pouring to intercept us. Arrows and javelins were beginning to rattle among us.

But we reached the causeway itself before the whole horde was aroused. As we hurried forward, the lake was a black obscurity on either side of us.

"Out with your canoes!" yelled a fierce voice somewhere in the night. "Attack the *teules* at the bridge-gaps!"

Kay, who cried to me the meaning of those shouts as she clung behind my saddle, shuddered at that last yell.

"Nick, that was Guatemozin! Burke Ullman!"

"I'll kill that devil before this night is over, even if we die ourselves!" I swore.

Out of the blackness of the lake came swarming the dim shapes of hundreds upon hundreds of canoes crammed with Aztec warriors. The fiends discharged a rain of missiles that struck down men all around me, and at the same time they paddled forward toward the first bridge-gap.

We reached that deep gap in the causeway to find it already crowded with canoes. Upon the causeway itself, a mass of Aztecs opposed us.

"Clear the dogs out of the way so

that we can place the bridge!" Cortez' trumpet-voice ordered.

"St. Jago and at them!" flared Sandoval's clear voice, and we horsemen spurred forward and slashed and struck with sword and axe at the shadowy shapes of our enemies.

We drove them off the causeway and the panting men who carried the portable bridge dropped it into place in the gap. It sank downward a few inches and then stuck fast in the aperture.

Fighting off the Aztecs whose canoes crowded fiercely around the bridge, we got across it. But now there was a fatal hitch.

Cortez shouted to me, "Lopez, ride back and tell Alvarado to bring forward the bridge for the next gap."

I spurred back upon the errand, but when I shouted to Alvarado through the melee he answered with a cry of despair.

"We can't lift the bridge, Lopez! It's jammed tight in the gap!"

THAT information chilled my blood. There were two more gaps in the causeway ahead, which somehow must be crossed.

Confusion was growing in the wild darkness, more and more of the Aztecs clambering from the canoes onto the causeway to attack us directly.

Cortez' iron leadership showed itself at this desperate moment. "Forward, then, without the bridge!" he yelled. "We'll cross the gaps somehow!"

The struggle forward now became a nightmare to me. I was conscious only of the necessity of preserving the girl who clung behind my saddle, of somehow fighting through this hellish confusion to the Beam.

As we pressed forward, a dimly visible feathered shape darted up in front of me and a *maquahuil* grazed my arm. I struck down the Aztec with a

desperate blow of my axe and my horse plunged over him.

"Hold on, Kay!" I exclaimed hoarsely. "We'll get out of this somehow!"

The unforgettable voice of Guatemozin was yelling orders from one of the canoes in the darkness nearby.

"Find and seize Atzala and the *teule* with her!" Ullman was ordering his Aztecs. I did not need Kay's interpretation to understand.

We reached the second gap in the causeway. Here was a terrible scene of death and confusion. Our baggage, artillery, packs and everything else had been thrown into the water here in attempt to bridge the gap. Our advance guard was clambering over this improvised bridge, but the Aztec canoes clustered thick here, the horde attacking us fiercely.

"Ware that lance, Lopez!" yelled Bernal Diaz to me out of the wild confusion of darkness and battle.

Kay screamed, as shadowy Aztec figures darted up around us. My horse sank to his knees with a scream, his throat lanced through.

I flung myself out of the saddle, dropping the heavy battle-axe and slashing with my sword. My desperate strokes dropped two of the Aztecs and the other two fell back.

"Kay, this way!" I cried, helping her to her feet.

I dragged her through that hellish melee toward the gap in the causeway. We were clambering across the precarious improvised bridge, my sword stabbing at the Aztecs who sought to clutch us, when I glimpsed Guatemozin's fierce figure by the light of a torch in a nearby canoe.

Guatemozin pointed at us. "There are the princess and her *teule* lover! Seize them!"

The girl beside me was torn away from me suddenly. I whirled and saw

her being dragged into a canoe, by two Aztecs.

"Nick!" she screamed.

I plunged toward the craft before the other warriors seeking to seize me could do so. As I leaped into the little craft, my sword battered down the *maquahuittl* of the nearest of the two Aztecs in it, and sliced deeply into the yelling warrior's neck.

The other Aztec dropped the paddle he had snatched up and drew a flint-edged dagger but my bloody blade ran him through as he flung himself toward me.

"After them!" Guatemozin-Ullman's voice was raging somewhere near us.

THE main Spanish force, leaving its dead and dying behind, had crossed this fatal gap and was struggling on down the causeway. Alvarado, trapped on the wrong side of the gap by a group of Aztecs, snatched a long lance from one of them and vaulted across the wide gap as I looked.

"We can't get back to the others, Kay!" I cried. "Grab that paddle!"

It was our single remaining chance of escape—flight in the canoe. Snatching up one of the paddles and digging it deep into the water, I sent the slim craft flying out through the swarming Aztec canoes and over the dark lake.

We heard a babel of cries on the water behind us, and Guatemozin's raging voice shouting. Clash of blades and screams of wounded men came from the dark causeway where Cortez and his force were fighting doggedly on toward the mainland.

"Kay, paddle hard!" I cried. "If we can make the south shore of the lake at Iztapalapa, we can reach the Beam!"

I was steering south, keeping the torchlit city Tenochtitlan at my back. My hopes were again rising. It was only a couple of miles across the lake

to Iztapalapa and the hill of the Beam.

But as we shot on across the dark waters, I heard the sound of other paddles somewhere in the night behind us.

"That's Guatemozin following us!" I cried. "Only Burke Ullman would guess that we're making for the Beam!"

I tried to paddle harder—and couldn't. Even the iron strength of Pedro Lopez' body had been so depleted by recent experiences that it seemed impossible for me to continue my present effort.

I think that only the knowledge of the fate in store for Kay if we were caught nerved me to keep up the struggle. Drunken with overpowering fatigue, my arms feeling like nerveless wood, I forced the paddle again and again into the rippling waters.

The sound of pursuit was louder and closer behind us. The gusty winds had torn the cloud-veil from the stars, and their dim light showed the dark shape of the canoe that was rapidly overtaking us.

Then Kay cried out to me in accents of hope. I looked ahead and saw the dark south shore, and the black mass of a steep little hill against the stars. And from that hill's summit rose a vague, glimmering and ghostly pillar of light that was just barely visible.

"Nick, it's the Beam!" she cried.

THE Beam! It was like a fantastic beacon of life and hope beckoning me through the howling dark that threatened to overcome me.

A sudden shock threw me forward in the canoe. We had run aground upon a sandy beach.

I staggered and almost fell as I got out of the canoe with Kay. Wolfish howling came from Guatemozin's canoe, behind us.

"Go on, Kay!" I choked. "I can't make it—"

"I'll not leave you!" she flamed. "Nick, you must *try!*"

The agony of her appeal spurred my failing body to a final effort. I can remember little of our climbing of the hill, except that twice I tripped and fell and that Guatemozin and his warriors were shouting behind us.

We reached the bare summit of the hill. Even here, the Beam was hardly visible, and I doubt that anyone would have noticed that vague, faint flicker in the darkness had he not been seeking it.

We stumbled forward toward it, my legs buckling under me at each step. Raging shout of Guatemozin struck my ears and I turned drunkenly and saw his contorted face as he too gained the hilltop.

"*Nick!*" shouted Kay frantically, and pulled my reeling figure forward.

I was falling, as we two entered the vague glimmer of the Beam.

I felt a terrific psychic shock like an explosion of force inside my brain. I seemed hurtling again through a black, roaring abyss.

Then my eyes opened to a bewildering blaze of white light. The brilliant electric lights in the ceiling of Doctor Madison's laboratory!

I sat up dazedly. I was *myself* again—I was Nick Clark, young American, sitting in a glass coffin atop the quartz lens of Doctor Madison's dazzling projector, back in my own Twentieth Century. And Kay was sitting up in the coffin beside my own.

"Nick, we made it!" she cried wildly. "We came back—"

"Kay! Nick!" It was Doctor Madison, his aging face pale as death, who cried to us. He stood down on the floor near the projector.

Sudden memory flooded me. I remembered that as we two had entered the Beam, Guatemozin-Ullman had

been running closely after us.

"*Doctor Madison, turn off the Beam!*" I yelled.

Uncomprehending, dazed by the urgency of my cry, he started toward the switchboard. But it was too late.

In the third coffin, Burke Ullman was stirring and rising to his feet beside us.

Guatemozin had entered the Beam too, back in that time! Ullman too had come back to the Twentieth Century.

Kay screamed. Ullman's dark face was deadly as he plunged toward me.

"Yes, I came back too, Clark!" he rasped. "And now that Kay knows the treasure-secret—"

HE DID not need to finish. It was clear enough what was in his mind. He would dispose of myself and the scientist and torture the secret of the treasure out of Kay.

But I met his attack halfway. It was not the exhausted Pedro Lopez who gripped and struggled with Ullman there atop the projector—it was Nick Clark.

His fists smashed my face but I had got a grip upon his throat and I hung on. My purpose was as deadly as his own. And his face grew purple as I tightened my throttling hold.

We swayed back and forth there upon the top of the now-dark projector, our feet slipping on the smooth quartz of the giant lens. Ullman's smashing blows had not weakened my grip, and he grew desperate. He brought up his knee against my stomach in a powerful blow that tore him loose from my grip.

But from the impetus of his own thrust, he staggered backward. His foot slipped on the edge of the smooth quartz lens. He fell backward, and his head struck the stone floor below with a thudding impact.

I staggered to the edge of the projector and dropped to the floor. But as

I approached Ullman's prone figure, Doctor Madison looked up from it.

"He's dead, Nick."

It was true. Ullman had come back to his own time—but only to die.

Kay—the *real* Kay—was running toward me. I took her in my arms.

CHAPTER VIII

Epilogue

ALL the world has read of how three Americans found the long-sought treasure of Montezuma, by tunnelling down through the silt of centuries to a buried cavern in the slope of Popocatepetl. To the eager many who asked how we three found the hoard, we answered only that we were guided by certain clues.

How could we tell the truth? How could we tell them that Kay had learned the secret of the treasure from Montezuma's own dying lips? Our explanation satisfied the Mexican government, at any rate, for of course the major part of the treasure went to its national museum. The rest went to Kay and me, for Doctor Madison would not take any of it.

"Nick, I don't want it now," he told me. "I've given up all thought of using it to finance further encephalographic research. I'm convinced that there's something essentially wrong about such experiments."

He shivered, as he added, "My attempt at achieving mental time-travel nearly brought dreadful tragedy to me and to you. There'll be no more such tragedies. I'm filing away all my scheme, and forgetting it."

We did not stay long after that in

Mexico. Nether Kay nor I wished to linger in that land where the barbaric glories of the strange Aztec empire still brood like a shadowy presence.

But, after our return home and our marriage, I found myself hunting out all the historic narratives of the conquest written by Bernal Diaz and others of my old comrades. With intense eagerness, I read of how Cortez and his forces had escaped the Aztecs upon that dreadful night which they called *La Noche Triste*—"the night of sorrows."

I read of how my battered fellow-conquistadors had turned and smashed the pursuing horde, of how they had reached Tlascala and reformed their forces, and of how they had returned with indomitable resolution and finally had completed their conquest of the Aztec empire. And of how they had long sought for, but never had found, the royal treasure.

But one passage in one of the old chronicles was of most interest to Kay and myself. For it told of the two whose bodies we ourselves had dwelt in—of the fate of Captain Pedro Lopez and Atzala, daughter of Montezuma.

"These two," says the old chronicle, "escape together the perils of *La Noche Triste*. But they claimed they could remember nothing of the events before then, and declared they had been possessed by spirits or devils for many days. They did not even know each other, at first, though later Lopez and the princess Atzala loved and wed."

I am glad, somehow, that back in that far time the real Lopez and Atzala escaped and fell in love. I hope they were as happy together as Kay and I are now.

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TINK TAKES A FLING

(Concluded from page 149)

riedly, "you've promised not to start any trouble here."

"Bah!" Nastee said.

"Nastee," Jing said suddenly, "you *must* stay on this side of the podium with us. If you cross to the other you may cause trouble."

Nastee leered at her, then stood up and walked defiantly to the opposite side of the podium.

"I'll do what I like," he called back nastily.

"Jing," Tink sighed, "that's not the way to handle Nastee. When you tell him not to do anything, that's the first thing he'll do."

Jing smiled to herself.

"That's what I thought," she said.

A thunder of applause broke from the audience then as the conductor, a stocky, flowing haired genius, made his appearance and marched to the podium. He acknowledged the ovation with a brief bow. Turning, he faced the orchestra and drew himself up to his full height.

Then, with the traditional gesture for attention, he rapped sharply on the po-

dium with his baton.

All three of the sharp blows landed squarely on Nastee's head, knocking him flat on his stomach, dazed, breathless and aching all over like a sore tooth.

The sounds of his outraged, wailing shrieks were completely drowned out by the crashing chords of the overture.

Tink looked at Nastee's sprawled, dazed figure, and he began to laugh uncontrollably. He laughed until tears came to his eyes and then he turned weakly to Jing.

"You're wonderful," he said. "You knew what would happen to Nastee at the other end of the podium, didn't you?"

"That's why I told him *not* to go down there," Jing said primly. "Of course I wasn't *sure* he'd get hit, but the chance was too good to miss. I felt just a little bit guilty, but I'm sure the lesson will do him good."

Tink stared at the elfinly beautiful girl in helpless admiration.

"Gee," he said, "your wonderful."

Nastee raised his aching head weakly.

"Bah!" he said.

PLAYING DEAD

By A. MORRIS

A FAMOUS scientist has been experimenting for many years with the nerve reactions of various animals. His tests have produced some very interesting, as well as useful, knowledge for science.

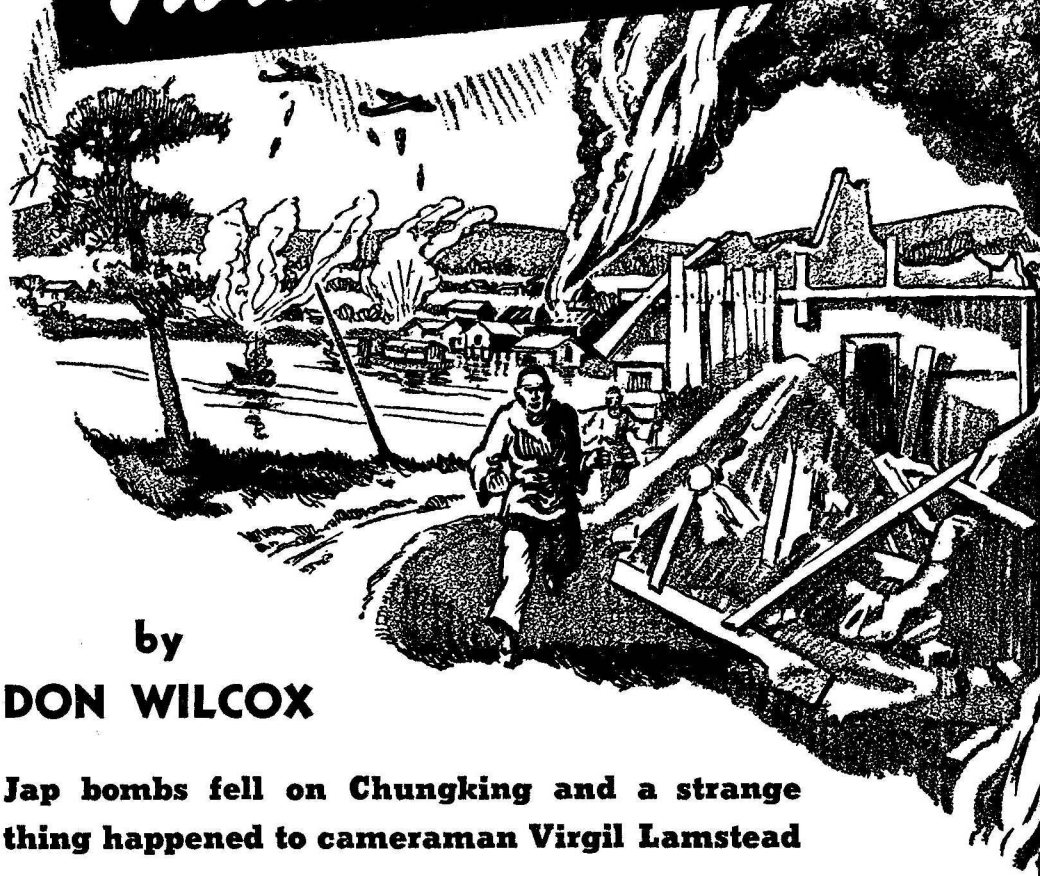
Experimenting with a hen, he found that she could be "hypnotized" by laying her on her side, touching her bill to the ground, and keeping her quiet. After a short time, he removed his hands and the hen retained her position. He found, moreover, that this state of rigidity could be produced in all insects, scorpions, crayfish, lobsters, and related species.

Animals often produce this state of rigidity themselves, some as a means of protection and others as a part of their deception in securing food.

The best position for "hypnotism" was found to be when the animal was on his back since an animal will resist as long as he is in an upright position. He also found after much research that the body of an animal is covered with very sensitive nerves. If he touched one type of nerves, the animal moved; touching another type of nerves caused the animal to stop. In general, the "moving" nerves are located in the back part of the animal while the "stop" nerves are located in the front part.

This scientist, after much experimentation, has developed such a fine skill that he can make an animal stone still by proper stroking. With a single stroke in another place, the animal is soon scampering about again.

THE MAN *Who* *Turned To Smoke*



by
DON WILCOX

Jap bombs fell on Chungking and a strange thing happened to cameraman Virgil Lamstead

BOMBS were dropping over Chungking. They were blasting yellow rocks up in fountains of death.

I, Virgil Lamstead, an American cameraman, stood near the entrance of a public bomb shelter. I saw the stream of explosions coming straight toward me. If I kept on taking pictures I would be blown to bits. I grabbed my

camera and the package of chemicals I had brought to leave at a laboratory. I ran down the shelter steps.

"Let me in!" I shouted in my best Chinese. Then I screamed it. "*Let me in!*"

An iron clank sounded against the din of bombs. The door was closed, locked. I was on the outside.

Then it happened, and there was no



It was Chestnut Eyes I saw crouched amid the debris
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escape. The bomb explosion blew me high into the air.

"So this is death!"

It would have been, under ordinary circumstances. But once in ten million—or maybe ten billion—times, the forces of nature conspire to do strange things. *I turned into living smoke.*

At first I couldn't believe it. I was shooting up through a smudgy cloud of smoke, dirt, and debris. Broken rocks were flying past my body. My camera had been knocked out of my hands.

The package of chemicals was gone too. In fact, the chemicals and I had gone together. They had saved me—or changed me—or *was* this death?

It was not. It was some new amazing form of life. I was endowed with a completely altered body. I had the most curious sensations of fluffiness and weightlessness.

Yes, I had turned into living smoke. I wasn't exactly breathing. I was just rolling and swelling in the air. The big smoke cloud from the bomb explosion pressed against me as lightly as a baby's kiss.

I was still rising.

The smoke thinned around me and began spreading in all directions. *I began to spread too.*

Horrors! My arms and legs—if such they were—were trailing after me like pipe smoke.

As I floated over the Yangtze River I looked down and saw my gray reflection in the muddy waters. That puffy blotch of cloud was me.

Then I saw something else. Another squadron of bombers was coming over. Soon bombs rained down. I squirmed to get out of their path. Yes, I could move!

Though I climbed around rather sluggishly, I gradually succeeded in drawing what I called my arms and legs closer together. Soon I was such

a compact wad of smoke that I felt crowded. I was no bigger than a ricksha.

Then a bomb dropped *through* me, squarely through what should have been my stomach.

"This ends me!" I thought.

FAR from it. The bomb made my smoky body spread out and I felt better, actually. What strange sensations of breeziness.

In a few minutes I learned. When the winds spread me too thin I could easily draw myself together. By growing smaller I changed my specific gravity. Then by taking advantage of the air currents I could move anywhere I desired.

By this time the raid was over, and people were filtering out of the hundreds of bombshelters, bringing back their valuables and office supplies and shopping bags, to resume their day.

In many places over the city the fire fighters were working like Trojans to get the blazes under control. The helmeted firemen were still tearing through the streets aboard motors cars, and everywhere were volunteer bands of coolies. I floated over to see how they were doing.

I sifted down between some buildings to watch.

A Chinese boy who was on fire guard duty saw me. He jumped over a pile of rubbish and streaked down the hillside. I couldn't think what was wrong with him until I heard him whooping a fire alarm.

Some civilian firefighters heard him and came racing up the hillside carrying buckets of water. They manned a hand pump and turned a hose on me.

The cool water felt wonderful while it lasted, and I mentioned to myself then and there that I was going to spend my idle hours right down on the

surface of the Yangtze to take advantage of those cool soothing sensations.

But now—well, I couldn't stand to see those people work so hard for nothing. I rose into the air and spread myself thin. The fire fighters muttered with grim satisfaction that they had made short work of that one. They ran on the other blazes.

Now I felt very despondent.

Anyone would feel the same way if he found himself in my plight. For as matters appeared, I was doomed to a lonely life. If I'd try to mix with people I'd be sure to cause a fire alarm.

For awhile I was very blue smoke.

I watched the other smoke clouds melting into the sky. I did some heavy thinking. Was there anything in the world I could do besides making a nuisance of myself? Did I have any chance to be useful?

I remembered what George Leahman had said after the first Chungking bombing we took in together. "Where there's smoke, there's waste."

I turned that over in my thoughts and grew bluer. "But at least I'm alive," I said to myself. "Not even a bomb could kill me now."

I was sure of that much, because one had gone through me. What a state to be in. Half dead, you might say. In fact, to all the people I had known I would be dead and gone. And still, I might be doomed to live forever, since bullets couldn't—

I heard the cry of a girl beside a wrecked and burning building.

I knew that cry. It was the little nineteen-year-old Chinese girl that George Leahman and I had called Chestnut Eyes. She was an errand girl for the medical supplies department.

I swooped down to her.

should mention a sensation of new powers at this particular juncture. But you can scarcely conceive of the extreme helplessness and clumsiness that had at first possessed me upon my transformation to smoke. And now, for the first



Chestnut Eyes

time, I had a purpose looming vaguely before me, urging me to try my new capacities to the limit.

Yes, gradually I was gaining a much stronger control of my faculties of twisting and squirming and combating air currents.

Coming closer, I saw the dangerous situation that surrounded Chestnut Eyes. The sight made me turn into little whirling eddies of smoke. She had been wounded. She lay near the burning house, sobbing with pain.

I swept down as swiftly as I could. The breeze I created only fanned the flames. That would never do.

I crowded close to the girl trying to blanket her with protection. Her clothes had been partially torn from her body, her left foot was losing blood from an ugly gash. Her eyes were nearly closed. Obviously she did not

IN THAT moment I felt new powers. You will doubtless smile that I

know the danger she was in.

The flames licked the air within a few inches of her head.

Now I drew part of my smoky body over her face. I cut off her breathing. She fought for air. I hovered as tightly as I could between her and the fire. And then success began to reward my efforts. She turned instinctively away from the blaze.

I followed. I forced her to keep turning for air. Soon she was well away from the flames, breathing easily.

In a few moments the firemen came running up. The sight of smoke near her—for in my sympathy, I had lingered near her—had attracted them. They called for a stretcher. And so as I thinned into the upper air I knew she was being cared for, I had found one way, at least, of being useful.

Darkness came over Chungking.

Most of the fires had been soaked into smoldering heaps. The job of searching the wreckage for salvage and dead bodies would go on all night. I drifted back to the bomb shelter where I had been blown to smoke.

George Leahman was there. So was Bill Washmore. And several coolies *were there looking for me.*

Now I felt more helpless than at any time since the change.

"Don't be troubled about me!" I shouted it—but my shout was nothing they could hear. My efforts at speech didn't carry to them in the slightest. I wasted my smoky breath.

"Here's some scraps of his camera," Washmore said.

"I don't think so," said George. "He wouldn't run off from his camera."

"He might get blown off. Look."

"You're right, Bill. That was his camera. He's been blown to hell."

THEY kicked around over the stones and rubbish. They decided I might

be under it. They got shovels and started digging. I tried to stop them. I coiled around them and threatened their eyes and nostrils with smoke.

"Can you imagine it? There's fire under this rock," George said. "What could it be?"

"We won't find Lam alive," said Bill. "But we'll keep looking. Anyway I've got nothing better to do. If it takes all day tomorrow what's the difference?"

"We'll find him," said George.

The way they said it tore my spirit to shreds. It's an awful thing to have to see a fellow's friends fighting for him that way, digging and sweating all the night through, even when they know he can't possibly be alive. I couldn't endure it. I drifted away.

The raids on Chunking came and went, and the millions of people that were threatened everytime the planes hummed high, higher and higher over the city established themselves in the routine. It took a lot of courage to defy those savage air-birds.

Take Chestnut Eyes, for instance. She was a regular little dynamo of courage. When she wasn't busy on errands she would get groups of children together and teach them patriotic songs.

She made up a little catchy melody about the whistles that blew after the air-raid alarms were over. The tune began to spread, and soon thousands of people were singing it.

"Whooo—OOO—ooo—we're still fighting!"

That was the way it started, opening like the after-raid whistle. And when raids were over you would hear it all up and down the streets. Children would sing it, and so would the shopkeepers and merchants trudging back from their shelters, and the civilian street menders as they went to work clearing debris.

But Chestnut Eyes' most urgent job

was to keep the medical supplies moving to all the branch stations. Before her foot had healed she was back at work, sometimes using children to help her, but more often accepting the good-natured assistance of George Leahman and Bill Washmore. The three of them were often together after George and Bill had finished their news reports for the day.

Then came a fatal night when everything changed. Bill and George were to be transferred. They packed their goods, they said their farewells to Chestnut Eyes. And the three of them talked of me.

I had thought I was best forgotten; but now, as I listened, I knew my supposed tragedy had always been close to the surface.

"Virgil Lamstead left a few things," George said to Chestnut Eyes. "They're still in that shaky old stone laboratory, and now—they're yours—if you want them."

"He was a bit goofy about you, you know," Bill added.

The two newsmen got away safely, but that evening the bombings came. And Chestnut Eyes, who had gone straight to the old stone laboratory building, fell into a trap.

Or to be more accurate, the trap fell upon her. For she had failed to heed the warnings of a coming air raid. When a shower of bombs began dropping in that vicinity the jolt loosened the seams of the building and shook its walls and ceilings like an earthquake.

A WINDOW frame caught her, and a ton of debris rolled down to fasten her under it.

I tried to blow the dust away so she could breathe. It was awful to see her there trapped. What could I do? Nothing—not unless I could somehow at-

tract some rescue workers.

She put up a valiant struggle until she succeeded in freeing herself, all except her ankle. But there she was caught in an unbreakable vise.

At that moment the fuller peril became evident. The wall hung above her like a tower of blocks. With every distant bomb-jolt it swayed. She saw, and then her eyes closed. Her lips were tight together and her fingers crushed into her cheeks.

The blasts were coming closer again. Inch by inch that shuddering wall was bending over. The countless tons of stone were actually swaying at the slightest pressure of the wind. Death was a certainty now, for I saw that this section of the city was completely deserted, and the vibrations of bombs were striding toward us.

Yes, death was a certainty. But there was something in the room where Chestnut Eyes was trapped that jolted me to attention. My laboratory properties—*that package of chemicals*—that was it. It was my only chance.

For I remembered that these chemicals were the same as the ones I had had on that fatal day—

I rushed like a hurricane, hurled myself down the street toward a burning house. Here were flaming timbers and paper, caught by the first bombs of the evening. I hurled myself in a gust of wind against the burning papers.

My excitement proved costly, for I extinguished three scraps of blazing debris before I succeeded. But in a few more seconds I managed to edge a few burning papers along the street and into the open door under the swaying wall.

And then, just as those tons of cold death spilled down toward Chestnut Eyes I did it. I touched the burning papers to the chemicals.

There was an explosive *pwoof!*—

then the hard crash of avalanching stones.

It was done now.

The impact of the falling wall shot me outward in all directions. Then everything was quiet, and the jolts of falling bombs had passed. I disentangled myself from a mass of bluish smoke—*smoke that was not me*.

"Are you there, Chestnut Eyes?" I asked in my own way of speaking.

"I—I seem to be *alive*. . . . Yes, I'm still alive. . . . And yet, I *can't* be. That wall fell on me. I must still be in there—dead. These words I'm saying aren't real words. . . . I'm only thinking—in another world. I didn't really hear someone call me Chestnut Eyes. I'm just—"

"Do you see another world around you?"

"I only see the same world—but through different eyes."

FOR moments she murmured bewilderedly, wafting along in a bluish smoky form, and I knew she was experiencing strange bodily sensations. Her emotions and thoughts, too, were possessed with an oozy feeling.

"What has happened to me?" she cried. "Who am I? What am I?"

Then I whispered to her that her life had been changed, that it had been the only way to save her.

I could sense that woeful feeling that enshrouded her. She spread her smoky arms over her head and face—or perhaps that was only as it seemed to me, for her cloudy fluffiness was in a constant state of movement.

"You were about to be killed, Chestnut Eyes," I said to her over and over. "I couldn't let it happen. There were the chemicals—and I remembered how they had mixed with fire to change me. . . . I hope you won't be too angry. Tell me, Chestnut Eyes, that you be-

lieve this will be better than final death."

On that point she made no response, as I was to remember long afterwards, wondering if my action would prove an unkindness.

But now she began to exclaim in a lively manner, and her spirits lifted.

"You are Virgil Lamstead! I know you, of course—your manners, your voice—or do I *hear* a voice?" She added anxiously. "I'm not dreaming, am I? You are listening?"

"Every word is music, Chestnut Eyes."

"But you were killed. Bill and George, your American friends, told me—many days ago."

"Not killed—changed—transformed to smoke—*living* smoke—the same as you."

"Please, Virgil, if that were true—" She broke off and her confusion held her in silence for a moment. Then with a burst of eagerness she exclaimed, "But it is true. It was you that caused me to roll away from the flames—"

"Yes."

"You've been watching over me. I remember seeing you, and wondering about such a curious cloud of smoke. It was you that brought the firemen—"

"Of course. There, you do believe in me. You see, we are not dead. We live! We are still able to help! This is our world—our civilization. It's turning to smoke, and we've turned with it. But even in the form of smoke we'll go on fighting. Won't we?"

"It's all so bewildering," Chestnut Eyes said plaintively. We had drifted over rooftops and were floating downward toward the surface of the river. It was so easy to float downgrade.

THE water's surface was so inviting. And Chestnut Eyes did look so relaxed, coasting along beside me, as if

this new steamy amorphous existence was the very self her war-weary soul craved.

I talked on, challenging her to see this new outlook on life as I saw it.

"We're the fumes of a great fight, Chestnut Eyes. We still have a part to play."

She was silent.

Then the whistle for all-clear sounded and in a moment Chinese children were bobbing out of shelters, singing their all-clear song.

"Whoooo! We're still fighting!"

Chestnut Eyes gathered into a tighter knot of smoke, as if summoning her strength.

"Yes, Virgil," she said. "We have a part to play. Lead me on." . . .

IT was several days later that we began to get wind of a spy ring operating on the outskirts of the city.

We had been able to rise above the hills at night and see the hidden signal lights that directed Japanese scouts to this spy ring.

By daylight we followed the devious courses of those spies who were bold enough to show their faces.

Among them was the traitorous Kong Wah, who appeared to be an armless beggar.

He carried a straw basket on his chest and went about pleading passionately for bread and gold. The sight of him wrung pity from many, who supposed him a war victim.

The stumps of arms that hung from Kong Wah's broad shoulders were covered with closed sleeves. No one actually saw those stumps of arms.

We followed Kong Wah. It was interesting to see what pains he took to make sure no one was following him. We were right over his head, close enough to see the wicked light shining in his eyes.

He led us up the hillside, past the toiling gardeners tending their little two-by-four patches of beans on the terrace; past the plodding carpenters trying to make two damaged houses into one good one. Then we followed him across the heaps of rock that had separated that edge of Chungking from an ancient retreat of legendary Chinese gamblers.

We watched Kong Wah cross a perilously narrow ledge where one misstep would have sent him over a three-hundred-foot drop. But Kong Wah knew his way.

In a moment we were in the cave of Ho Lo and his spy ring. The legendary cave of gamblers was now a link in the Japanese gamble for empires.

We spread ourselves too thin to be noticed. Chestnut Eyes kept reminding herself that we were in no danger. There was already some smoke in the cave. Yellow oil lamps were burning in an inner room.

From a farther room came the intermittent screams of a boy being tortured.

A gang of eleven men—most of them Japanese—were lounging on benches or on the damp floor apparently paying no attention to the screaming of the boy. The baseness of the scene made Chestnut Eyes recoil.

THIS man without arms made the twelfth. Presently a comrade removed his catch-basket, together with his outer shirt and the stubs of arms. Then Kong Wah's real arms were revealed, strapped tight to his body. The men unbound them.

"How have you fared?" Ho Lo asked, reaching into the basket.

The fakir laughed cynically. "I have wrung tears to flood the rivers."

"It's a pity you can't collect more gold and less tears."

"He's losing his touch," someone mocked. "We should chop his legs off." Everyone laughed.

The cry of the boy ceased.

"What's happened to our music? Didn't you have a torture record on?" This from Kong Wah.

"He's been on the frying pan long enough," said Ho Lo. "He ought to be ready to turn."

They brought the boy in, wired to the cross-bar of a frame of timbers. His fingers and toes were knotted together with wire behind his back, and a single strand of wire suspended him from the frame.

"Into their eyes and nostrils," I whispered to Chestnut Eyes.

We kept our snaky bodies spread thin, but drew our smoky fingers thick and hard into the eyes of the ring-leaders.

Ho Lo was shouting at the boy as they unwired him and set him on his feet. "Now, you turtle's egg, you son of a rich father, maybe you will go and find us the thousand gems we demand."

The wild eyed boy shook his head.

"Then you'll be tied up as before. And this time we'll hang weights to your belly. . . . Or have you changed your mind?"

The boy's pain-racked face twitched. The tall Japanese leader, Jokolo, a confederate of the Chinese traitors, moved toward him with the wires, and the boy uttered no protest.

Then someone said to the Japanese, "What's the matter, Jokolo? Is this business getting your gall?"

"There's nothing the matter."

"Your eyes are pouring tears, you fool. What's happened to your heart of steel?" the speaker accused.

"Smoke in my eyes," said Jokolo.

And the traitorous Ho Lo echoed, "Smoke! I've got it too."

"Neither of you are the men you

used to be," Kong Wah muttered. "Tears never—"

"Stop your nonsense. Give the boy some more—oooh!" Jokolo wailed and clawed at his eyes. "Where's the damn smoke coming from?"

"There's no smoke in here—no more than—eeegh!"

In a moment we had four of them fighting at the air like wild men. They darted for the entrance tunnel.

"So you fellows can't stand it," someone taunted. "You're walking out—"

The accused didn't wait to reply. They were out in the open air, and by this time Jokolo was shrieking, "I'm going blind. Blind, I tell you!"

Chestnut Eyes and I didn't let up the pressure for an instant.

Jokolo ran out into the open and stumbled over the cliff and went down—down—

THE three who had followed him were more careful. They stopped at the cliff's edge and looked down in awe. We released our grips on their eyes momentarily. They began to mumble superstitious sayings, and the rest of the gang, having followed to the door, wondered what dreadful mysteries were at work.

Together we suddenly renewed our attack on the traitorous Ho Lo. In a dizzy terrified instant he reeled to the cliff's edge. Three men tried to drag him back—and two of those three went over with him. Their cries faded into sickening whines as they fell—cut off by a dull *crush* on the rocks far below.

In that moment the boy who had been tortured slipped out of the cave and raced off to freedom.

Immense relief was in the whisper of Chestnut Eyes.

"We've done it. He's away. And they'll never dare touch him again."

"They'll never have a chance," I re-

plied. I sent her on down to the Yangtze to wait for me on the cool waters. I would finish this house-cleaning before joining her . . .

Some days later I began to brood over the quietness of Chestnut Eyes.

She continued to help me with the weird tasks that befell us through the stricken city. But I sometimes felt that I was losing touch with her. I began to ask myself again whether I had been cruel to spare her the relief of death.

I said to myself, "That spy ring was too much for her."

What might happen to her? Through long afternoons, floating high above the city, I would look down on Chungking funerals, wondering about my own existence—and hers. Whether we were slated for some death as strange as our new life I could not know.

It might be that a creature of smoke was destined to be wafted away on the breezes, diffusing into the air a little at a time, so gradually that not even his daydreams would be disturbed. When he became too scattered ever to collect himself together, that would be death. Or would it?

There was no one to ask, no books to consult, only a puzzle to leave hanging in the winds until the fatal time might come.

THESE thoughts made me wad myself into such a tense, tight cloud of smoke that I must have frightened Chestnut Eyes, as I floated down toward her.

She was hovering close to the ground at the edge of a rolling field of hay, and appeared to be preoccupied with chasing wisps of hollow straws. I must confess I was amazed to find her so far from the city and in such a state of idleness. The fact is, I had been looking for her for many hours. She observed my approach in startled manner.

"Is it you? Why are you that way?"
"What way?"

"All bound up so tightly, as if a hurricane wind were threatening you. Are you trying to turn into stone to resist some danger?"

"Precisely my feelings, Chestnut Eyes," I said. "These strange disconcerting feelings must have carried over from my old life, I think."

"I don't understand." She waved a gesture for me to settle down beside her.

"I used to wonder, in my philosophical hours, whether people don't live and have their being by virtue of a host of anxieties. The stronger and tenser the nerves, the surer the grip on life."

"Surely you don't mean that anxiety and nerve strain are good?"

"But they *are* good—at least within limits. Look over there and you'll see an example."

We watched an overzealous farmer driving four pigs down the road. "Is that man under any tension?"

"I don't know. He seems to be trying to keep the pigs in the road. Why?"

"The harder the job, the more his nerves have to exert. It's that exertion of his nerves that keeps him from being a scatter-brained fool."

"I don't know what you're driving at," said Chestnut Eyes.

"If someone tried to take those pigs away from him, he'd fight like a demon."

"That would be too bad," said Chestnut Eyes. "It would be like China's having to fight for what is already her own."

"Too bad, perhaps," I agreed, "but his life would suddenly have a lot more meaning. But suppose he were to go to the other extreme?"

"And refuse to fight?"

"Yes. Suppose *nothing* ever confronted him to make him pull his nerves together. Suppose he slipped into a

state where he never had to exert himself."

"Then he would be delightfully relaxed," said Chestnut Eyes.

"Precisely like his pigs," I said. "There would be no difference."

"Virgil, I've had enough of your supposings," said Chestnut Eyes. "If you want to talk about nerves, talk about nerves. If you want to talk about pigs, talk about pigs. But don't mix the two together."

"But the point is, here we are, you and I, turned into forms that don't have to eat, or fear the cold, or endure pain, or drive pigs—"

I WAS interrupted by some specks of color appearing on conspicuous points along Chungking's hill tops. The triangular lanterns were being hung on the crosspoles. That meant that a new Japanese air raid was on the way. It meant that the Jap planes had taken off from their bases far down the Yangtze.

"Lanterns, Chestnut Eyes."

She made no answer. Again she was chasing hollow straws along the ground playfully, forcing her smoky breath through them to hear them sing.

Her whimsies had never been more disturbing. Death was riding the skies. Tomorrow there would be more burials.

"Won't you come with me?" I asked.

"Where are you going?"

I summoned a determination that had been growing in me for many days. "I'm going *up*."

"I'll stay—this time," she replied in a soft child-like manner.

I drifted away from her, and every whimsical word she had said clung to my thoughts. Had my warning struck home? Had I found her on the point of letting go, drifting away from it all? These reflections stung me and I coiled and humped into a smoky knot as I climbed into the skies. It was late af-

ternoon. The city below me was winding up its day's trade before gathering up for a visit to the shelters.

I attained a high altitude by the time the lanterns on the hilltops changed.

Now they were round lanterns—the second warning. The bombers, though still many miles away, were speeding onward.

The network of Chinese communication was at work, reporting every move, and Chungking was making ready. I could see the people hurrying like thousands of little ants, carrying huge baskets and bundles on their backs, moving in orderly lines to the cavern shelters of the hills.

In my own way, I was quivering, setting up a series of air currents around me. This was going to be a new test for me.

Now the planes came into view like little arrowheads of gnats so insignificant they appeared against the vast sky.

Again I climbed until at last I was nearly on a level with the leader of the squadron.

NOW it was a matter of seconds. My filmy body stretched out in two thin, almost transparent ribbons. The first big bomber plowed straight toward my station. I struggled to gain speed, as a man runs before leaping at a passing train.

The roaring air vibrated through me. I had the sensation of being drawn into humming strings of a vast musical instrument. Propellers cut through me, but somehow I caught on, even though I was spreading into countless tapering shreds.

Now I was speeding with the squadron and I seized to the bellies of a whole line of planes and clung like a long gaseous octopus. Through the tornado of whipping winds I rode, an invisible passenger.

I curled my myriads of tentacles around the planes in vain for an entrance. There was none. Not until the bomb hatches began to open.

That was the instant that my dangling branches folded, hissed up into the bombers' bellies. Was this a last *tour de force* that would amount to no more than a mad gesture? Was I pulling apart to be torn into nothingness?

Ah, but already I was achieving. In five different planes at once I succeeded in thrusting bunches of my smoky form past the line of bombs, up to the controls to gouge the eyes of the pilots.

I gouged. At once the pilots in the several planes began to slap at their eyes. They snarled and cursed this strange something they couldn't understand. Two of them shot out of formation and swung through sharp curves.

Men with beastly faces were going mad from tortured eyes. And though my pressure against those orbs seemed an attack against stony, merciless things, I was getting results.

Two planes, cavorting as if piloted by blind men, came into a mid-air crash, then hurtled down, screaming through the air, leaving a comet-trail of flames behind them.

And they left me behind them, freeing my ribbon-like branches to slither into other bomb hatches.

Now I found eyes wild with fear. And I combed them mercilessly. The unaccountable crash of my first two victims had created a panic among the followers. By this time bombs were being dumped indiscriminately. And blinded pilots were shooting out in tangents heedless of their directions.

I slithered out of two planes in order to stay with the third. I rode it doggedly for an hour, far across the land, before I at last succeeded in achieving a crash into a mountainside.

Most of the night was gone before I

found my way back. There was more tragic smoke over Chungking, but the tragedy was not unmixed. Around the wreckage of Japanese planes an assorted lot of Chinese had gathered, frankly mystified over why the planes had fallen, but nevertheless jubilant. It was good to see those grizzled old Chinese coolies, fire fighters with sinews of steel, standing around smiling through their sweat and grime.

Where was Chestnut Eyes?

ON EVERY clear day for the next two weeks I rose high above the city to gaze over the countryside. I wanted to go searching, but I couldn't possibly search in all directions at once. My mood grew heavy.

And yet, I told myself, if it was her preference to spend her days idly chasing straws over the field, forgetting the turmoil of her past, that was surely her privilege.

And then one day I ventured into a so-called hospital—the hall of a once-wealthy home that was now lined with beds for the wounded.

I drifted in stealthily, for smoke is no welcome guest in such a place.

The doors at both ends of the hall were open. The attendants were trying to ventilate the place. Strangely, there was a thin little layer of smoke clinging to the floor and walls like the haze of a mirage.

Blue smoke—coiling, twisting, swirling in curious little eddies. A little yellow straw drifted along the floor, spun upward, and alighted on the bed of a patient. The injured man was no one I had ever seen before, apparently a patrolman who had weathered many raids, and taken a wound on the recent one.

The straw that lighted on his bedside caught his attention. The smoke-laden breezes seemed to be playing curious

(Concluded on page 217)

Cassius Siddle's Great Illusion

by YALE KENNY

Twenty-four hours of real legerdemain was in Siddle's power; but its use led to a murder!

"LADIES and gentlemen," said Cassius Siddle, unaware that he was on the brink of fame and fortune, "I will now undertake the most difficult and amazing feat ever before attempted in the annals of legerdemain."

That patter was a lot of bunk, of course. He was billed as "Cassius the Great—Illusionist Extraordinary." But that "Great" part of it didn't fool any-

body—neither the audiences nor the managers of the third-rate shows where he performed. Least of all did it fool Cassius, himself. He knew, better than anyone else, that he was a flop and a stinkeroo as a magician.

The moment had finally arrived for the penultimate illusion of his act—"The Money Trick." His patter finished, Fleurette stepped upon the stage with a reed hamper. Fleurette was his





Mysteriously Fleurette's figure began to glow with strange radiance

assistant and, on the word of an unbiased critic, an eye-dazzling knock-out! Young, lovely, with dark flashing eyes, she had a figure that enhanced the costumes that were a part of the act.

Cassius looked down upon a confederate seated in the front row and said:

"Won't you kindly come upon the stage and assist me, sir?"

The man rose with alacrity and joined him before the footlights. Fleurette stepped into the wings and returned, a moment later, with a pile of old newspapers.

Cassius told his confederate to examine the papers to make sure there was nothing unusual about them.

"Now, sir," he continued, "kindly help me tear them into small pieces—about the size of five dollar bills."

The man obeyed. Soon, the newspapers had been reduced to a mass of torn pieces which Cassius casually tossed into the hamper.

"Look at the cover of the hamper, please," he said to his confederate. "Convince yourself that it has no hidden springs or other deceptive devices."

The man examined it and seemed to be satisfied. But therein lay the solution to the trick. Because the cover *did* have hidden springs *and* a false tray.

Cassius accepted the cover back from the man and placed it on top of the hamper. Closing his eyes, he waved his arms, muttered an untelligible incantation and clapped his hands loudly.

"*Presto! Zesto! Zam!*" he exclaimed.

Taking firm hold of the cover, he started to lift it. But the hidden springs refused to work! The tray, instead of being released so that it might conceal the paper at the bottom of the basket,

stuck to the cover. Cassius struggled with it frantically but it resisted all his efforts.

A snicker came from the audience—then a laugh—and finally a roar. Cassius stood helplessly, his face a vivid scarlet, the cover partly raised.

"Something has gone wrong," he faltered. "I—I'm afraid—"

Then, accidentally, he glanced into the hamper—and was startled by what he saw. The pieces of torn paper had disappeared. The hamper was now filled with five dollar bills! Real bills! Filled to overflowing!

Skating the cover aside, he dug down into the money, raised handfuls of it into the air and let it flutter back again. The audience stopped laughing and stared at him unbelievably!

"It's quite simple—when you know how to do it!" he cried in triumph.

Then, ignoring the amazed stares of his confederate and Fleurette, he grasped the hamper and, amid thunderous applause, rushed off the stage.

SEVERAL minutes later, Fleurette came running to his dressing room.

"Aren't you going to finish your act, Mr. Cassius?" she asked anxiously. "You still have the Glass Cage trick, you know."

He had dumped the contents of the hamper on the floor and was excitedly running his hands through the money.

"Look, Fleurette," he exclaimed. "Real money! I don't know how I did it—but here's the proof that it was done! I went through the same motions—said the same words as any other time. Only, tonight, it was genuine magic. Look!"

Fleurette was unconvinced. "It's wonderful, Mr. Cassius!" she replied. "Wonderful! But the Glass Cage trick. After that, you can come back here."

The audience is waiting—"

Finally, she succeeded in getting him out of his dressing room but, upon leaving, he locked the door carefully. As they stepped upon the stage again, the audience greeted them enthusiastically.

The Glass Cage trick was the *pièce de résistance* of his act. This evening it was due to be an electrifying event, even to Cassius, himself.

Taking sheets of clear plate glass, he set them into the simple framework of the "Cage." A square of heavier glass served as flooring and another square as a top. With one panel still unset, he helped Fleurette enter it.

When the last panel was slid into place, a steel hook, attached to a metal cable, hoisted the Cage upward and suspended it in space.

"Usually, the Cage is covered by a black hood and the stage is darkened," he explained to the audience. "But tonight I will change my procedure. The lights will remain on—and nothing will conceal the Cage or Fleurette."

Refusing to be influenced by Fleurette's stare of surprise and concern, he signaled the electricians and stage hands to be guided accordingly. A strange tingling in his spine told him the experiment would be a success.

A speculative murmur ran through the audience, but Cassius held up his hand for silence. Turning toward the Cage, he raised both arms above his head and waved grotesque designs in the air with them, mumbling the incantation which always accompanied the feat. Then—

"*Presto! Zesto! Zam!*" he cried, clapping his hands.

Fleurette's figure began to grow hazy. Fainter and fainter it became until she could be seen no longer. Within a few seconds the Cage was empty!

The Cage was lowered and Cassius

removed the glass panels, showing the audience that Fleurette was no longer there.

The curtain descended amid deafening applause. He took nine curtain calls but still the audience was not satisfied. The tenth time, he kept the curtain raised—and stepped to the footlights.

"My friends, you will now witness something that has never before been a part of my act," he declared. "Tonight, I will make Fleurette materialize again and you will see her *return* to the Glass Cage!"

Deftly, he reassembled the Cage and had it hoisted aloft for the second time. In the hushed silence that followed, he bowed his head and mumbled mysteriously. Then, he stopped, pronounced the three magic words and pointed upward dramatically—confident of results.

Fleurette's figure started to materialize slowly. At first, all that could be seen was a faint mist. Then, gradually gathering form and substance, the girl was again standing there, perfect in every detail.

At his command, the Cage was lowered. Removing one of the panels, he helped Fleurette to step out and she joined him in his final bow to the audience.

The applause became even louder and more insistent than before. But Cassius refused to respond.

"How did you feel when you disappeared?" he asked Fleurette.

"Did I really disappear?" she asked in surprise. "I didn't know *what* happened to me. My mind went sort of blank and stayed that way until you brought me back."

"There was no—pain connected with it?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she assured him. "It was a—nice feeling. Like I was floating

through space. I was afraid it would be a flop when you kept the lights on and didn't use the hood."

Cassius smiled. "On the contrary, it was a monumental success, *Fleur-ette*," he declared. "Now, run along like a good girl. I have a lot of *counting* to do in my dressing room."

CAREFULLY, almost stealthily, Cassius entered the cheap little hotel room where he and Clara were living that week.

However careful he was, Clara heard him the instant he tried to cross the room.

"Don't sneak around like that," she cried testily. "I'm awake. Wide awake! This is a swell time of night for you to be rolling in!"

Sighing resignedly, Cassius turned on the light. One of the twin beds was filled with a mountain of flesh that bulged and billowed beneath the disorderly covers. That mountain was Clara. Clara the shrew. Clara the termagant. Clara—alas!—his wife.

A decade ago, Clara had been sweet-tempered, svelt and snazzy. But during the ensuing years, the sweet temper had yielded to dictatorial malevolence, the slender lines to fatty protuberances and the snaziness to sloppy, slovenly unconcern that made Cassius shudder whenever he gazed upon it.

"You finished your last show hours ago," she exclaimed, heaving and struggling in bed until she raised herself to a seated posture. "What do you mean by sneaking in at this time, you ham magician?"

The surest way of stabbing Cassius to the quick was to call him that. And Clara knew it, of course. He had planned to tell her about his amazing good fortune and the abundance of money in his pockets. But that "ham magician" insult made him clamp his

jaws tight and remain silent.

"Where have you been?" Clara continued. "I'll bet you were carrying on with that *Fleurette* woman, again."

"I've never 'carried on' with *Fleurette*," he replied. "There never was anything between her and me."

"Then why do you keep her in your act?" Clara demanded.

"Because she dresses it up," he said. "Gives it a little 'flash.'"

"That's the right word for her," Clara agreed. "Cheap and flashy! Now, I could do something for your act. Why don't you use me in it?"

He felt like telling her that the answer would be obvious if she would take a good look at herself in a mirror. The only thing she could do for the act would be to provide comedy relief!

"I suppose you wish you weren't married to me so that you could run around with her all the time," Clara sneered. "You'd even do away with me, if you had the nerve. I wouldn't put anything above you, Cassius Siddle."

"Nonsense, Clara," he said wearily. "You're just letting your imagination run wild again."

"Well, don't let *your* imagination run wild, Sonny Boy," she advised him. "Just remember that I'll always be one step ahead of you in the figuring—"

He didn't even trouble to answer her. Instead, he undressed for bed while Clara continued to lash him with her tongue.

Undressed at last, he pecked her dutifully on the forehead, snapped off the light and retired into his own twin bed. Getting nowhere with her tirade, Clara laid down again and eventually was silent.

CASSIUS closed his eyes but sleep evaded him. Remarkable as his success of that evening had been, for

some reason his possession of such unusual powers had not surprised him. He had felt merely that it was a natural circumstance—something he had been expecting for some time.

And suddenly he remembered that he *had* been expecting it!

"This is what the Hindu fortune teller predicted years ago," he told himself. "*This is my day of supernatural powers!*"

His mind flashed back to that day, in his childhood, when his mother had taken him to the Hindu for a reading. The swarthy seer had recited his fortune in verse and, throughout the intervening years, his mind had retained at least one part of it vividly, since the prediction had been burned there with letters of fire:

"When Cassius the child becomes a man

A part will he play in the Divine Plan.

Then will he have for but twenty-four hours

The fullest possession of supernatural powers.

But after this all-too-brief sojourn His power will leave him—ne'er to return."

And this, he told himself, was it! The "twenty-four hour sojourn" had already begun! And here he was in bed, trying to sleep some of it away!

As well as he could remember, he had started the Money Trick about ten o'clock. Prior to that, his performance had been cut-and-dried—routine—stale. But from then on, he had felt a surge of power within himself—the ability to achieve things which previously were beyond his reach.

"Then my 'day' began at ten o'clock," he said. "Which means that I have until tomorrow night at ten o'clock to enjoy my destiny of greatness."

Listening, he caught the sound of Clara's steady breathing, punctuated occasionally by faint whistles and unmelodious snores. Slipping quietly out of bed, he reached for his clothes and started to dress . . .

THE registration clerk at the expensive and fashionable Parkway Arms Hotel glanced up to find a mildly unobtrusive man standing across the desk from him.

"I'd like a suite of rooms," the man told him. "Something rather fancy. Price doesn't matter. I haven't any baggage with me. But I *do* have the money to pay—in advance, if necessary."

Digging down in his right trouser pocket he produced a gigantic roll of five dollar bills.

"If these aren't enough—"

Then, digging down in his left trouser pocket, he pulled out a second roll.

"And if neither of these are enough," he continued, when the clerk interrupted him hastily.

"They're quite enough, sir. Quite enough. And it won't be necessary for you to pay in advance. Will you kindly sign the register?"

The man accepted the pen which the clerk handed him and signed the name, "Cassius Siddle," to the register painstakingly.

He startled the bell boy who showed him to his room by making a rather unusual request.

"Could you buy a number of newspapers for me?" he asked. "Evening or morning papers will do. You could mix them—if that would help any. But I want as many as you can get—two or three hundred, at least."

The boy jerked with surprise. "Two or three—*what?*" he exclaimed.

"Hundred," Cassius repeated quietly.

"Oh, not to read. I merely want to tear them up."

The boy eyed him apprehensively and started edging towards the door.

Cassius laughed softly. "Just bring me all the papers you can buy," he said, giving the other two five dollar bills. "Remember, I'll be waiting for them."

The boy left, scratching his head in perplexity. But he returned shortly with four other bell boys. Each of them had an armful of newspapers.

"Fine," Cassius exclaimed. "Now you can help me by tearing them up. About the size of five dollar bills, if you please."

It was evident they were convinced he was a lunatic but they did as he had ordered them, grinning amusedly over their task.

When the last paper was torn, Cassius tipped the boys liberally and sent them upon their way. Locking the door, he pulled a sheet off his bed and covered the mound of torn paper on the floor. He stood above the sheet-covered pile, extended his hands over it and started murmuring an incantation. . . .

About five minutes later he telephoned the desk.

"Could you send your cashier to my room?" he asked. "I have some money up here that I want him to count. Quite a lot of it. Five dollar bills. I want to be sure the count is accurate and have the money placed in your vault for a day or two—until I have time to get around to it again—"

AFTER the money was safely stored in the hotel's deposit vault, and a receipt in his possession, Cassius decided the time had arrived for a little liquid refreshment. Although it was after three o'clock when he entered the bar, he found more than a sprinkling of patrons there.

"Old Knowelson—straight," he ordered.

The bartender shook his head regretfully. "Sorry, mister—there's none on the market," he said. "They stopped making it years ago."

He was an old timer and the mention of a classic brand like Old Knowelson, once beloved by connoisseurs, seemed to send a pang of sorrow into his heart.

Cassius pointed out that he still had a bottle of it on his shelf.

"Oh, that!" The bartender made a deprecatory gesture. "It's empty. I just keep it for sentimental reasons."

Cassius was struck by an idea. "Fill it with water and bring it to me," he ordered. "I want to try something."

Filling an Old Knowelson bottle with water obviously savored of sacrilege to the bartender; yet he did as he was told and placed it on the bar.

"Now, cover it with a clean cloth," Cassius told him.

By this time, the attention of several other patrons had been attracted and they were staring at Cassius to see what other inanity he would conceive next.

When the bottle was covered, he held his hands over it in the manner of a high priest invoking a blessing. Bending his head, he mumbled a series of mystical words, ending by clapping his hands and exclaiming:

"Presto! Zestol! Zam!"

Lowering his hands, he said cheerfully, "All right! Serve me a drink of —Old Knowelson."

The bartender grinned and shook his head. "It's no use, mister," he declared patiently. "There's only water in that bottle."

"Please do what I told you," Cassius insisted firmly.

The group of curious on-lookers had increased by now and they all strained forward to be eye witnesses of whatever might happen.

The bartender shot Cassius a querulous look but evidently decided to humor him. Shrugging his shoulders to imply that he had nothing to lose, he produced a glass from under the bar, removed the cloth from the bottle and started to pour Cassius a drink.

Instead of a trickle of clear water, as he had plainly expected, the liquid which flowed from the bottle had a deep rich amber shade. He stared at it—raised the glass and sniffed at its contents. Then he gazed at Cassius, speechless with amazement.

"Go ahead—taste it," Cassius invited him.

This time, the bartender eagerly obeyed—sipped the contents of the glass critically. The next moment, an expression of unalloyed ecstasy spread over his face.

"How did you do it?" he asked hoarsely. "You didn't even touch the bottle after I filled it with water."

Cassius shrugged. "Are you convinced it's the genuine article?" he inquired.

"I'd take a solemn oath on that," the bartender assured him. He faced the ring of other patrons who were crowding around Cassius. "That's Old Knowelson," he declared in reverent wonder. "*Real* Old Knowelson!"

"Now serve drinks to everyone present," Cassius instructed him. "And by all means, don't forget me. The curtain is just rising on a glorious time for me, and I am going to enjoy every minute of it—"

A PHANTASMAGORIA of events followed, starting at the Parkway Arms bar and continuing through a vast series of similar dispensaries, night clubs and divers other establishments defying description.

Cassius enjoyed the greater part of it—but not every minute, as he had pre-

dicted. He awoke in his suite at the Parkway Arms—fully dressed—stretched across his bed. Outside, the sky was dark and instinctively he knew that an entire day had passed and another night had begun.

Gradually, he began to piece out what had happened during his celebration. His recollection of the beginning was fairly clear. He was pretty hazy about the events that occurred after daybreak. However, he seemed to remember a business transaction some time during the morning or early afternoon but could not, for the life of him, decide what the nature of it had been.

Although his head throbbed excruciatingly, he swung his feet to the floor and sat upright on the edge of the bed.

"Maybe there's something in my pockets that might give me a clue," he said.

He started rummaging through his suit. In his inner coat pocket he found two legal-looking documents. They proved to be property deeds—one for the largest office building in town—the other for a ten-room residence and estate in Hazelhurst, the swankiest suburb in that locality.

"Ye, gods!" he exclaimed. "I *did* spread myself!"

In another pocket, he found a receipt, signed by Horace L. Whipplewhit, for the payment of \$80,000 in cash.

Reaching for the telephone directory, he thumbed through its pages until he came to the name of Whipplewhit and found that Horace L. was a realtor. He grabbed up the phone and told the hotel operator to get Mr. Whipplewhit for him.

"Try his office and then his home," he instructed her. "Just locate him—that's all. It's very important."

Several moments later, the jangling of the telephone bell preceded the announcement of the operator that she

had succeeded in contacting his party.

"Mr. Siddle?" Whipplewhit exclaimed. "Mr. Cassius Siddle? Well, well! How are you feeling—now?"

"Terrible!" Cassius groaned. "Listen. Those pieces of property that I—"

"You're to be complimented," Whipplewhit interrupted him. "They were two good buys, if I do say so myself. Why, the revenue from the office building, alone, will *net* you more than twenty-five hundred dollars a month."

"That—that's fine," Cassius agreed. "But the price—"

Whipplewhit laughed moderately. "Why worry about that? You paid for both properties in full," he said. "A remarkable deal, too! You know, it's unusual to receive such a large sum in cash—and in five dollar bills, to boot."

Cassius' senses reeled. Five dollar bills? The Money Trick, again!

"Then everything is clear?" he asked. "Everybody is satisfied?"

"Everything is *absolutely* clear," Whipplewhit assured him. "And everybody is *thoroughly* satisfied."

UPON leaving the phone, Cassius went into the bathroom for a drink of ice water.

"If only I had an aspirin," he moaned—and then was struck by the absurdity of the idea. With his amazing power, he merely had to *will* himself into a state of well-being. "And I do will it!" he declared aloud. "*Presto! Zesto! Zam!*"

Instantly, his headache disappeared and he was left feeling remarkably fit. But a moment later, he received a terrific mental shock.

"The theater!" he exclaimed aghast.

In his befuddled state of mind he had forgotten that he was still Cassius the Great—with an unfulfilled contract. Glancing at his watch he saw it was eight o'clock—which meant that not

only had he missed two afternoon performances but one evening performance as well.

Hurriedly straightening his clothes, he rushed out of his room. On his way through the lobby, he paused briefly in the hotel restaurant to gulp down a little food and then raced out to the taxicab stand. . . .

As he stepped from the cab in front of the theater, the manager came rushing towards him, with murder in his eye.

"At last you show up!" he exclaimed angrily. "You certainly put me and the theater in a lovely jam!"

"I'm sorry," Cassius said contritely. "If I can make any reparation—"

"What reparation can you make?" the manager howled. "Those people came here to see you, and they had to sit through performances by your assistant."

His assistant? Then Fleurette had stepped into the gap and carried on.

"Good girl!" he said gratefully. Then, "How did she do?"

"Swell—considering," the manager replied. "Being as pretty as she is helped her to get away with it. Now, rush back stage and get ready for your act. I'll put it on ahead of time—right after the feature picture. But get this! After tonight, you're through! This is your last performance!"

Cassius listened to this dictum without comment—even without regret.

Dashing around the side of the theater to the stage door, he hurried into his dressing room—and received another shock. Clara was there, seated facing the door with folded arms and a grimly determined look upon her face.

"So there you are!" she cried. "I've been waiting for you since two o'clock. Why did you sneak away from our room, last night, after I had fallen asleep?"

"Well, darling, I'll tell—you see, it was like—anyway—"

"Where did you go?" Clara snapped. "I'll bet you met that cheap, flashy—"

"Wait a minute, Clara," he interrupted her. "I haven't seen or heard from Fleurette since I left the theater, last night."

"You should have seen the way that woman carried on today, when you weren't around," Clara fumed.

"Thank goodness she did," Cassius replied. "Heaven only knows what would have happened if she hadn't—as you said—carried on."

Clara rose decisively. "Well, that's the end of her," she declared. "I brought a costume with me and I intend to be your assistant, from now on."

Cassius stared at her in horror. Clara in costume, on the stage, as a part of his act? He shuddered at the idea.

"Oh, no!" he protested. "No, Clara! Not that!"

"My mind is made up," she said flatly. "Don't waste time trying to argue with me. I'll be dressed by the time you're ready."

Cassius realized that a plea for reason would be without avail—that nothing could budge Clara in her determination. After the door closed upon her, he settled down before his dressing table and morosely started to prepare for his last performance.

WHEN he finally stepped from his dressing room, he caught sight of Fleurette standing alone in the wings, and he hurried over to her.

"I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am for what you did this afternoon, Fleurette," he said.

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Cassius," she replied. "I only wish I could have done more."

He hesitated a moment and then forced himself to add, "There's some-

thing else I have to tell you. It embarrasses me very much—"

"Is it about Mrs. Siddle helping you in the act?" she asked quickly. "Because I know about that already. She told me and—well, I understand."

It was plain she was trying to make the ordeal as easy as possible for him. "You're a swell girl, Fleurette!" he exclaimed gratefully. "Of course, your pay goes on, the same as usual. Just stick around—in case I need you unexpectedly."

"I'll *always* be on hand—whenever you need me," she told him, with a depth of meaning. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, she placed her hand on his arm. "I hope you realize how much I sympathize with you—Cassius," she hurried on. "It's a shame, too, that you have to stand so much! If I were married to a wonderful man like you, I'd make his life a whole lot more pleasant than yours has been."

"I'm sure you would, Fleurette," he exclaimed. "I'm quite sure you would!"

DESPITE Clara's clownish presence on the stage, that last performance of Cassius was one of the highest spots in his career. He showed the audience, with keen delight, the finished artistry of a genuine magician—worked on a brightly lighted stage, disdaining all other deceptive devices ordinarily employed by run-of-the-mill prestidigitators.

For added thrills, he made impromptu amplifications in his act—elaborated every illusion to its utmost—improvised new feats for himself and brought them to triumphant conclusions. The audience's amazement and spontaneous bursts of applause were to him as food and drink are to a parched and starving man.

"This might be my last performance," he told himself, "but I am going

out in a blaze of glory."

When he arrived at the ultimate illusion, the Glass Cage, he called his wife to one side.

"Clara, please let Fleurette assist me in this last trick," he begged.

She bristled at his request. "Why should I let her start now?" she demanded. "I've been working with you during the whole performance and I think I did very well indeed."

Deliberately, Cassius refused to remember the many errors she had committed and the untimely laughs she had earned from the audience by her unconsciously funny antics. "You did splendidly," he lied. "But the Cage isn't very large, you know, and I'm afraid you might not be able to—fit into it."

"I'll fit into it as well as *she* does," Clara said indignantly. "Remember this—she's *out* of the act and I'm *in* it, from now on."

"Isn't there *anything* that can make you change your mind?" he asked.

"Nothing whatever," she asserted.

His shoulders drooped with despondent resignation. "Then, let's get on with the show," he sighed.

Stepping to the footlights, he assembled the Glass Cage in view of the audience. Everything went along fine until Clara had to enter it. Then his fears were realized.

Bulging parts of her, fore and aft, refused to be wedged into place. The audience, thinking it was a deliberate comedy note, laughed uproariously. Clara flushed with anger and shot a suspicious look at him. Obviously, she thought he had excited that laughter with a surreptitious gesture. He was sure he would hear more about it after the show when they were alone—plenty more.

At last, however, by holding her breath until her face was purple, she managed to squeeze into the narrow

confines of the Cage. Cassius slid the last panel into place. At his signal, the Cage was hoisted on its metal cable, while he prayed that the glass flooring would not break from the strain of her weight.

A hush fell upon the audience as Cassius mumbled the incantation. Finally he clapped his hands and exclaimed:

"Presto! Zesto! Zam!"

Almost instantly, Clara started to fade from view. Her bulging figure grew fainter and fainter—objects in the background became visible *through* her bulk—and then she was gone completely.

CASSIUS had the Cage lowered and showed the audience that it was quite empty. A roar of applause reached him as he stood in the center of the stage bowing repeatedly while the curtain descended.

Fleurette ran out to him and took both his hands in hers. "You were wonderful this evening," she cried. "If only I could have been out here with you!"

To their ears came the noise of clapping hands and stamping feet.

Cassius sighed. "I'm almost tempted not to make Clara materialize," he said.

The curtain was raised again and, after a brief announcement, he quickly reassembled the Cage. It was hoisted above his head. Raising his arms high, he recited the incantation, clapped his hands and exclaimed:

"Presto! Zesto! Zam!"

He pointed dramatically to the Cage and waited, expecting to see the mist appear within it. But nothing happened; not even the faintest suggestion of mist manifested itself.

Worried, he tried again—going through the entire incantation—clap-

ping his hands—and exclaiming:

"PRESTO! ZESTO! ZAM!"

Again he waited, but still nothing happened—still Clara failed to materialize. He saw Fleurette watching him anxiously from the wings—knew she was aware of his apprehension. The fickle audience that had applauded and cheered him only a few moments before, now began to hoot and jeer.

Keeping his presence of mind, Cassius raced through an apology to the audience and ordered the curtain lowered.

Instantly, Fleurette was at his side. "What happened, Cassius?" she cried.

"I—I don't know," he said dazedly.

"I—I can't imagine—"

But then a terrible, soul-shaking explanation occurred to him. His legs became weak and the pit of his stomach turned a somersault. A glance at his watch confirmed his worst fears. It was five minutes *past* ten o'clock!

In consternation, he realized that his day of supernatural powers had ended. At ten, sharp! Clara had already disappeared by then. And when he had tried to make her materialize, he had once more resumed his status of—

"Ham magician!" he exclaimed bitterly. "She used to call me that to make me mad."

Even his words shocked him! *Used* to call? Already he was speaking of her in the past tense! Well, why not face facts? His power was gone—"ne'er to return." And so was Clara!

"Fleurette, are you sure it isn't painful to—disappear?" he asked her anxiously.

"Positive," she replied. "Don't you remember? I said it felt nice—"

His fingers tightened on her hand. "Let's clear out of here," he said quickly. "I have plenty to tell you—plenty to explain—"

A gruff voice behind him cut in, "I'll

say you have, buddy. First of all, what happened to your wife?"

WHEELING around, Cassius found himself facing a heavy man on whose thick lips a sneer seemed to have been permanently chiseled. Flipping the lapel of his coat, the man displayed the authoritative shield of a private detective.

"Mrs. Siddle was suspicious of you," he went on. "Figured you would try to pull a fast one and hired me to keep an eye on things. I've been sitting out there watching you all evening. After that Bird Cage, disappearing act, I came back here to see if she was all right. But I can't find her—not in her dressing room or anywhere else. So where is she?"

Nervously, Cassius cleared his throat. "Well, you see—" He paused and extended his hands in a helpless gesture. "I'm afraid you wouldn't understand," he said.

The sneer was etched deeper around the man's mouth. "I guess not," he agreed cryptically. Turning, he allowed his eyes to range over Fleurette. "Or maybe I do," he added. "This ain't the first time something like this happened, you know. It's old stuff, buddy, and I wasn't born yesterday. Come on, what did you do with your wife?"

In desperation, Cassius replied, "If you were sitting out front, you *saw* what happened to her. She entered the Glass Cage and—just disappeared. That's all there is to it."

"Oh, no, it ain't!" the man asserted. "That's where you're wrong. When a murder's been committed—"

"A murder?" Cassius cried aghast. "Don't be absurd!"

"Well, if she's okay—show her to me," the other demanded. "I'll be satisfied with that. Just show her to me."

"I—I'm sorry but I can't," Cassius

admitted. "I don't know where she is any more than you do. She simply—disappeared in the Cage. When I tried to make her return, I couldn't. I had lost my s-supernatural powers in the meantime."

The detective sneered openly. "Now, ain't that just too bad," he remarked.

Fleurette cut in. "Mr. Siddle is telling you the truth," she declared. And then, to explain her own status, she added, "I'm his assistant—"

"I know, sister," the man interrupted. "Mrs. Siddle told me *all* about you."

"Whatever she said about Fleurette, it was a pack of lies," Cassius exclaimed. "She didn't like Fleurette and imagined all sorts of things."

"Well, it's too bad you can't produce Mrs. Siddle," the detective said. "I'm sure glad I made her pay me in advance. I guess it'll be up to the police to produce the body—"

"Don't let him frighten you, Cassius," Fleurette said. "They won't be able to charge you with murder unless they have a *corpus delicti*."

"Maybe not, darling," Cassius granted. "But until they decide there isn't any *corpus delicti* they can make me feel very uncomfortable. . . ."

AND they did, too! They seated him under a blindingly brilliant light and let hours pass without feeding or giving him a drink. His inquisitors, themselves, remained in the darkness beyond the circle of light and fired question after question at him, trying to break down his resistance—to wring a confession of guilt from him.

From remarks dropped and questions asked, Cassius realized that the police had searched the theater, his room and Fleurette's room. Their purpose, no doubt, had been to find Clara's body or any evidence that would point conclusively to a murder.

Cassius repeated his explanation of Clara's disappearance during the Glass Cage illusion but they dismissed it as unworthy of consideration. All of them believed firmly that a murder had been committed. Apparently, what puzzled them the most was how he could have disposed of the body so quickly.

At last, someone announced that Cassius was wanted in District Attorney Sylvester's office. Wearily he rose from his chair and followed one of the policemen from the room.

When he arrived in the District Attorney's office, it was obvious that Sylvester was not in a good humor.

"Something ought to be done about such crazy laws," the District Attorney grumbled. "It's the height of stupidity to allow a red-handed murderer to be released just because a crooked lawyer files a writ of *habeas corpus*!"

Cassius listened with interest. Lawyer? *Habeas corpus*? Evidently Fleurette hadn't been idle during his inquisition.

Sylvester looked sourly at Cassius. "Well, since the laws are what they are," he said, "I suppose you're free to go. But get this. Don't leave town without my permission. I'll want you for further questioning."

A uniformed sergeant of police entered the office and whispered in Sylvester's ear for several minutes. The District Attorney hesitated and then nodded his head—reluctantly. The sergeant hurriedly left the office.

"Wait a while," Sylvester ordered Cassius. "You have a visitor."

A moment later, the door was opened again and Fleurette burst into the office. Her face was flushed and her eyes were sparkling with excitement.

"Cassius, a cable arrived for you at the theater," she cried. "It's from Chungking, China. I simply *had* to open it. Do you mind?"

"No," said Cassius. "But where is it?"

She thrust an envelope into his hand and he withdrew the folded paper it contained. The message read:

**"YOU'LL REGRET THIS
DIRTY TRICK. SEND MONEY
IMMEDIATELY. INTEND TO
TOUR THE WORLD, YOUR
EXPENSE."**

It was signed—"Clara."

With reeling senses, Cassius reread the cable. Then he threw it upon the desk in front of the District Attorney.

"There's your '*corpus delicti*,'" he announced. "Running true to form."

Sylvester read the message. His eyes almost popped out of his head as he read the signature and he gave a visible start as he glanced at the dateline.

"This is the screwiest case I've ever handled!" he yelled. "A woman disappears last night and today she cables you from China! How do you know this is really from your wife?"

"That 'Send money immediately' removes all doubt," Cassius replied. "Personally, I'm convinced Clara sent that cable. If you don't believe it, just cable the United States consul at Chungking for confirmation."

"Are you going to send her money?"

Sylvester demanded.

"No," Cassius said. "And I'll even let you read my reply."

With paper and pencil furnished by the District Attorney, he sat down at the desk and started to write an answer to Clara's cable. Standing at his side, Fleurette read the message as it was being written:

**"GO AHEAD AND TOUR.
AM TAKING TRIP MYSELF.
TO RENO, FOR DIVORCE."**

He passed the sheet of paper to Sylvester who read the message in silence and then started to return it. Reconsidering, however, he placed the paper on the desk before him.

"Better let me send it," he said. "If she answers I'll know she's alive. But before I do, just one more question; on what grounds do you intend to divorce her?" The District Attorney's voice held sarcasm.

Cassius grinned.

"Desertion," he said. "And I'll leave the proof to you—when the answer to that cable comes through. If lighting out to Chungking, China, isn't desertion, then I'm not Cassius Siddle—*ham magician*, retired!"

He linked his arm with Fleurette's and walked from the room.

THE MAN WHO TURNED TO SMOKE

(Concluded from page 203)

tricks for his amusement.

By this time I knew. And I too, had spread myself thin along the floors and walls. Chestnut Eyes whispered to me to listen. And so I heard the little song that vibrated through that bit of straw.

"*Whoo-OOO-ooo! We're still fighting!*"

The whistled bit of melody was not as distinct as one might have sung it, but it was unmistakable, for the straw was a flexible whistle capable of cun-

ning effects when skilfully blown.

Again the little melodic message sounded.

The face of the Chinese fire-fighter lighted with hope. Perhaps he thought he was dreaming. But the bit of song—the melody that Chestnut Eyes had begun—was the music of courage in his ears.

The straw spun to the floor, swept along in what appeared to be an aimless course, and suddenly whirled upward again to alight beside the ear of another patient.

"*Whoo-OOO-ooo! We're still fighting!*"

EBBTIDE JONES ON

Hitler was producing so much scrap in Europe, Ebbtide Jones, junkman, figured it was the place for him to go!

EBBTIDE JONES looked down from the cab window at the two Nazi policemen. His sleepy eyes widened. He removed his long bony fingers from the steering wheel of the gigantic *atom-constrictor* and scratched his head solemnly.

"It vas about time you halted," the Nazi with the beet-red face yelled up at him. "Vat iss der idea? An American invasion?"

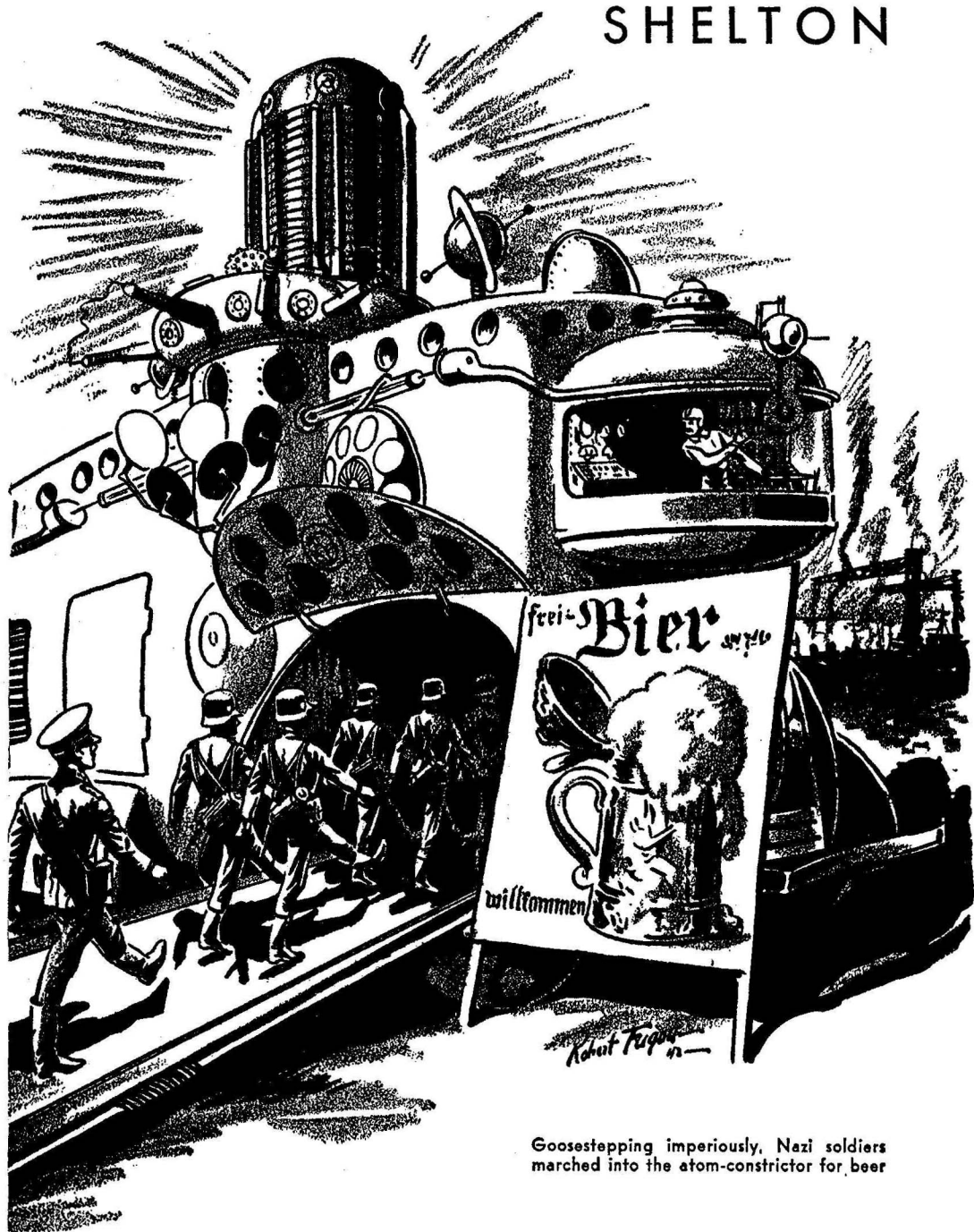
Ebbtide scowled. He believed in giving respect where respect was due. The only thing about either of these bellowing policemen that called for respect was their pistols. Ebbtide grabbed the wheel, stepped on the gas, and turned the monster *atom-constrictor* down the road.

The two policemen jumped on their motorcycles and sped after him. One of them leaped to catch the steel ladder



THE WARPATH ★

by MILES
SHELTON



Goosestepping imperiously, Nazi soldiers
marched into the atom-constructor for beer

that led up to the driver's cab. He scrambled up and poked his head through the open window.

"Stop or ve'll shoot!"

Ebbtide jerked a lever. Tons of caterpillar links clanked to a standstill.

"Now. Vot you come here for? Speak up."

"Great jumpin' oysters," said Ebbtide. "You're the fussiest cops I ever run into. I never come here lookin' for trouble."

"Vat you doing here? Tell us first and ve'll shoot you afterwards."

"I'm lookin' for junk," said Ebbtide.

"Looking for junk? Dot's a junky excuse." The red-faced Nazi turned to the second policeman, an owl-eyed, sharp-beaked little man who now thrust his head into the cab window. "He said he was looking for junk."

"He's lying. Vat he's running iss a tank," Owl-eyes put the charge squarely at Ebbtide. "Aindt it a tank?"

"It ain't," said Ebbtide.

"Vat iss it?"

"It's an *atom-constrictor*. It knocks the third dimension out of things. It collapses them so their atoms lie down an' sleep together—"

"You'll lie down und sleep if you giff us any more lies. Come. Let's haff a look."

The Nazis followed Ebbtide down the steel ladder. Together they took a walk around the huge steel caterpillar. Ebbtide hooked his thumbs through his red suspenders proudly.

"She's bigger'n a locomotive, boys. It was some job shippin' her over here to Europe, but it'll be worth it, I reckon. You see, I'm in the junk business. I buy and sell, collect, transport and store. Back in America they know me as the junk king."

THE two Nazi police exchanged suspicious whispers.

"Ve don't vant no kings around here," Red-face barked. He flourished his pistol.

"No kings!" Owl-eyes shouted. "Heil, Hitler!"

Ebbtide knitted his brows. "Great spoutin' whales, you guys have got me all wrong. I'm no empire king or nothin' like that. I'm all business. I heard about all the junk that was bein' made over here by a feller named Hitler—"

"Heil, Hitler!" both the Nazis shouted.

"Oh, you birds know him, do you? Well, I ain't never met the lad, but seein' as how he's in the junk business, the same as me—"

"Shut up!" Owl-eyes shrieked. "You can't talk dot vay."

"Vun more vord," Red-face snapped, "und ve'll smash you. Ve know vat you're plotting. You tink you'll blow up Hitler. You've got der bombs hid in dis tank—"

"What do I want with bombs?" said Ebbtide. He narrowed his eyes. These two goofs didn't know the first thing about business. "I come here for junk. I used to be a beachcomber. I reckon I'll always be one at heart. I've had a fling at space-combin' too, an' I married a gal from a secondhand store family, and we've set up the world's biggest junk business right in the heart of New York City. I can smell junk halfway around the world. I've come here lookin' for it. Now what you got to say?"

The two Nazi policemen made wry faces. But neither spoke—not until they had led Ebbtide around the big machine again for another puzzled inspection.

Then one of them growled. "You von't vin der var. Dis tank iss too clumsy."

"Listen, shark bait," said Ebbtide, "I'm not interested in no war. War's

somethin' I don't know nothin' about. It's outa my line, see?"

"You lie," said Red-face. "You haf come here to pick quarrels against Hitler."

"Well, maybe so, maybe not. That's somethin' else again," said Ebbtide. "Now that you've brought it up, I'll tell you somethin' about this lad Hitler. He's breakin' the junkman's code of ethics. It's only fair to *collect* junk. It ain't fair to *create* junk."

"Iss dot so?"

"It's so. Somebody oughta warn him. He's bustin' the rules. The international junkmen's executive committee is apt to call him on the carpet—"

"So you threaten to haf him executed!" Owl-eyes roared.

"I didn't threaten nothin'. I just said—"

"Shut up! Vun more vord about Hitler and I'll—"

"Look here vunce," Red-face interrupted, pointing up to the rows of transparent pipes which comprised the rear half of the atom-constrictor. "See it?"

"Vot? . . . You mean dot disc?"

EBBTIDE looked where the police were pointing. There *was* a disc. He tried to think *what* it was. He had meant to bring the atom-constrictor over empty, and take it back to America full.

In the dozens of transparent pipes, built into the atom-constrictor like a huge truckload of gas pipes, there was room for hundreds of thousands of "discs," that is, articles of junk. This machine was capable of picking up articles of any shape or material and knocking the third dimension out of them, thereby reducing them to small uniform discs convenient for storing and carrying. A temperature near absolute zero in the pipes made this possible.

"Iss it a bomb?" Owl-eyes asked, climbing up the catwalk to examine the single disc visible through the transparent pipe. "Or iss it a silver phonograph record?"

"If it's a secret message, bring it oudt so ve can play it."

"It's no message," said Ebbtide. "It's not silver—"

"Ve'll see about dot. Bring it oudt."

"I can't think *what* it is," said Ebbtide thoughtfully. "I never meant to bring anything—"

"More lies. You know vat it iss."

"Honest, I don't," said Ebbtide. "I reckon the only way to find out is to *change it back*."

"Back to *vot*?"

"To whatever it *was*—that's what I don't know." Ebbtide drew a deep breath. "Maybe you lads have heard tell of atoms before. If you ever get in the junk business you'll need to know about things like that. You see, all solid matter is mostly just energy whirling in space. And if you wanta take the third dimension outa somethin'—"

"Stop dot crazy jaw vorking and show us!" Owl-eyes shrieked.

Ebbtide pressed a lever. The silver disc emerged from the cylinder, slid down a chute along the side of the mammoth machine, and stopped with a clang.

Next he attached an electrical connection to the handle that was clamped on it. The disc began to expand. The two Nazi policemen shrank back and held their ears.

But no explosion came. Not unless the swelling of a silver disc into a pretty girl with yellow hair and snappy eyes and saucy lips could be called an explosion.

The electric handle jumped off as soon as the disc had completed its change. There she stood, complete to the last stitch of her green housecoat

and yellow anklets. Her eyelids fluttered, she looked up and said, "Hi, Ebb. Glad to see Trixie again?"

"Well, nibble my bait," Ebbtide gasped. "If it ain't my wife!"

"I DON'T believe it," said one of the Nazis.

"You want to see our marriage license?" Trixie snapped angrily.

"Ssssh," said Ebbtide. "They mean they don't believe you coulda come outa that disc."

"They saw me, didn't they?"

"Yes, I reckon they did. But they're suspicious of everything. They're Nazi police."

"Ye gods!" Trixie did an ungraceful jump and came down running. There was an open park at the left side of the road and she cut straight across it full speed. A village lay beyond. Ebbtide's long legs went into action. He took five long bounds after her, then decided to change his strategy. He leaped back into the atom-constrictor and stepped on the gas.

The big caterpillar clanked around the corner of the village street just in time to head off the runaway wife.

"Come back, you!" Ebbtide called.

Trixie saw the two Nazi police were on the trail with motorcycles, so she stopped and looked up to Ebbtide to be saved.

"What's happened, Ebb?" she cried. "An invasion?"

"Climb up in the cab," Ebbtide retorted. "What are you talkin' about—*invasion?*"

"Well, I've been cooped up in the atom-constrictor for the last two weeks," Trixie said. "A lot can happen in two weeks."

"A lot has," said Ebbtide. "I heard there was a mess of junk bein' made over here in Europe so I made up my mind to come over—"

"Are we in Europe?" Trixie cried, halfway up the ladder to the cab.

"Sure. I heard there's a junk king named Hitler, and I—"

"Put me back into the atom-constrictor, Ebb." Trixie fainted and fell to the ground.

Ebbtide looked down at her and scowled. There was something disturbingly discolored about her face. But for the present the thing that bothered him was having his business interfered with by his wife. He didn't believe in letting family matters interfere with the junk business.

But she had fainted, and any woman who has the presence of mind to faint deserves a little attention. He crawled down from the cab and dipped a bucket of cold water out of a nearby horse trough and dashed it in her face.

Again the color of her face disturbed him: those red dots . . . But now the two Nazi cops had parked their motorcycles and were glowering like two ugly storm clouds.

Ebbtide helped Trixie to her seat in the atom-constrictor cab and returned for a showdown with Red-face and Owl-eyes.

"Which way, gents, will I find some of Hitler's junk? . . . Huh? . . . This is Holland, ain't it? . . . If it's all been cleaned up around here, maybe you lads can tell me which way to Russia. Seems to me I've heard—"

THE two Nazis weren't hearing a word. They were both staring at the atom-constrictor in blank puzzlement. Finally Red-face spoke up.

"Ve've got orders to smash anything dot ve don't understand."

"Vait," said Owl-eyes. "Dot's a leedle too beeg to smash. Ve could better capture it und take it back to Hitler and we show heem how it vorks."

"Dot's it. Ve'll be heroes." Then

Red-face continued to gaze. "But how does it vork?"

"It's a secret," said Ebbtide.

"Secrets—dot's vot ve want to know." The Nazis toyed with their guns. "Show us."

"Okay, okay. Only I oughta have someone to work it on." Ebbtide lifted an eyebrow. There was a skinny little Frenchman painting a sign on a store window across the street. "Could we borrow that fellow?"

"Dot's perfect," said one of the Nazis. "Ve'll turn him into der silver disc."

A bellowed order brought the Frenchman over, paint, brush and all, on the double quick.

"Park your paints up there in the cab, Frenchy," said Ebbtide. "We need a little bait for this atom-constrictor. You see, I'm givin' a free demonstration. Ever heard of the third dimension, Frenchy?"

Before the skinny little sign painter had a chance to answer, the two Nazis growled impatiently. They didn't want a lecture, they wanted action.

"You needn't be so hard-boiled about it," said Trixie, showing her saucy red-blotched face at the cab window.

"Keep your voman oudt of this," Owl-eyes snarled.

"Shut your trap," said Ebbtide. "My wife's got a right to talk whenever she wants to, an' I'll be soaked in salt water if any stooge of a Nazi junk-maker is gonna stop her."

"That's tellin' 'em, Ebb!" Trixie cheered. "You guys had better take warnin'—Ebb's a good guy till someone starts gettin' mean with him. Then—well, you'd better lookout. If he ever goes on the warpath—"

"Stop dot talk!" Owl-eyes shrieked. "I'fe shot vimmen for less—"

"Hsssh!" said Red-face. "You're stopping der vorks. I vant to see dis

Frenchman get demonstrated."

Ebbtide proceeded with the preparations. "Don't be scared, Frenchy. It'll all be over in a minute. Just climb that ladder and walk to the front end of the catwalk."

"Yah, all ofer in a minute." The Nazis nudged each other. "Lucky dot Frenchy got no kids."

"Hass he got a vife?"

"Nein," said Red-face.

"Nine?" said Ebbtide, blinking his sleepy eyes with curiosity. "If he's got that many wives we'll never coax him outa the atom-constrictor."

"Of ze wives," Frenchy spoke up sharply, "I have exactlee none."

Ebbtide turned to the two Nazis. "Now, gents, if you wanta see just how this machine turns a man into a metal disc—"

"Heil, Hitler, dot's vot ve want."

"Okay. You two lads walk right in through this big open door here in front, an' turn to your right, an' snap on the light."

The two Nazi police pranced into the giant scoop that formed the front of the machine.

Ebbtide shot a wink at Trixie and she pressed a lever.

Clink. Clink.

Two silvery discs appeared instantly in one of the big transparent pipes.

"Come down, feller," Ebbtide called to the Frenchman waiting on the catwalk, "and stop chattering your teeth. Those two guys have seen everything."

NAZI officers and Dutch civilians stood by open-mouthed along the streets of Rotterdam as Ebbtide gunned the enormous atom-constrictor through the city. There was a bright light in his normally sleepy eyes. He was on the lookout for junk.

In the cab beside him sat Trixie and the Frenchman. Trixie chewed gum in

time with the clank of caterpillar treads. She was on the lookout for stoplights, but before she saw any the atom-constrictor dodged out of the busy streets and sought the city's outskirts.

The Frenchman had become absorbed with interest in Trixie's face, partly because it was pretty and partly because it was covered with red dots that were neither lipstick nor candy stains.

"You have ze measles!" Frenchy suddenly exploded.

"S-s-sh," said Trixie. "I've just come out of two weeks' quarantine."

Ebbtide scowled at her. "So that's it. Remind me to put you back."

Then the junk king resumed his observations about business prospects.

"These Rotterdam people have got plenty of order and system. All their junk is stacked in neat piles. It reminds me of how I classified my haul when I was combin' the spaceways. . . . Frenchy?"

"Oui, Monsieur Jones?"

"Is it true that this gink Hitler has got a claim on all the junk in Europe?"

"Directless or indirectless, monsieur, he eez reesponsible for all."

"He's a hog," said Ebbtide. "There oughta be a law against these monopolies. I'd like to see that guy Hitler."

"Eempossible, Monsieur Jones."

"Call me Ebb and be democratic," said Ebbtide. "Why can't I see him?"

"Ze protection she eez too great."

"Protection. Ugh. So he's a gangster, huh?"

"Ze worst gangster in ze world," said Frenchy. "Zat eez his verree own gangland straight ahead."

"Gee whillikins," said Trixie. "We'd better turn back."

"Do you reckon?" said Ebbtide, his little eyes gazing moodily across the open country.

"Ze poleece of Rotterdam have by

zees time sent ze warnings ahead. Soon zay will stop us, kerpoof!"

"Kerpoof, huh?" said Ebbtide. "Great spoutin' whales, can't a man even drive across the country peaceable?"

"Look out, Ebb!" Trixie squealed. "Here comes a tank. It's gonna smack us square! *Look out!*"

"Ze Nazis! *Zay'll crash us—*"

"Let *them* look out!" Ebbtide snapped. He pressed a lever. *Clink!*

A NEW silvery disc appeared in one of the transparent pipes. The Nazi tank had rolled into the wide-open giant scoop without a jolt.

"That'll learn 'em," Ebbtide said with righteous indignation, "to stick to their own side of the road. I wasn't crowdin' 'em none."

"But zees ees war," said Frenchy. "Zay meant to smash us, kerpoof."

"Durn the war," Ebbtide said, becoming a trifle nettled. "Don't they know I'm peaceable? I only want to bargain for some junk. I'm willin' to bargain fair."

"In ze fair bargains zay are not interested," said Frenchy. "Zat ze whole world should know."

"Ebbtide never reads about the war," said Trixie. "He's only interested in business as usual. But if they get him riled—*Look out, Ebb! Dodge 'em!*"

Clink. Clink. Clink.

Three more Nazi tanks were swallowed up by the hungry mouth of the atom-constrictor. Frenchy's eyes almost popped out. Trixie swallowed her chewing gum. And even Ebbtide hunched his shoulders with a hint of uneasiness.

"Maybe we *are* goin' the wrong way," he said presently. "I'd hate to have this machine bite off more'n it could chew. I reckon there are limits. That giant scoop ain't big enough to

swallow a battleship, and it's just possible we might run onto an impolite tank that'd be too sizeable."

"Turn around, Ebb, before we get into any more trouble."

"I'm doin' it," said Ebbtide, yanking the steering wheel. "But I'll tell you this. I'm beginnin' to get mad."

Trixie whispered to Frenchy, "He's beginnin' to get mad."

"Me, I beegen to geet seek," said Frenchy. "But now ze air she is better while we go zees way."

Again Frenchy began to be concerned over Trixie's well-being—and his own. He wasn't too comfortable sitting in the presence of measles.

Trixie found another stick of gum and resumed chewing and enjoying the scenery.

But Ebbtide paid no attention to either of his companions for he was considerably disconcerted over having to change his course, and over having had to absorb some items of military power. He hated to see any proposed business deal go to pot.

Presently he parked the atom-constrictor by the side of the road and took a memo book from his pocket.

"I'd better stop right now," he said, "and set down a record of our catch so I won't get things mixed."

HE numbered the six items. 1. Nazi policeman. 2. Ditto. 3. Nazi tank. 4. Ditto. 5. Ditto. 6. Ditto.

"I got the stuff all mixed one time," Trixie explained to Frenchy. "That's why he's so particular. You see, after things turn into frozen discs inside the atom-constrictor storage tubes, one disc looks just like another. To look at them, you couldn't tell an army tank from a Nazi policeman. And you couldn't tell either of 'em from a sack of rotten turnips—no reflection on the turnips, you understand."

To illustrate her point she led Frenchy along the catwalk past the pyramid of transparent storage tubes.

"Zay are all ze same, I see," Frenchy flashed a grin as he looked at the six silvery discs. "But what becomes of zem?"

"Haven't you heard?" said Trixie. "We simply shoot electric power into any disc. It swells up and turns back into whatever it was before."

"Not really? On ze level?"

"Of course. Ebb's used atom-constrictors to haul tons and tons of junk—and to store it too. Things that are too big and expensive to bring into our junk headquarters in New York can be carted around this way as easy as a sack of magic beans."

She gave Frenchy a thorough one-lesson course in operating atom-constrictors, and by that time Ebbtide called to them to get in. It was time to be on their way.

"Those Nazis have made me mad," said Ebbtide. "They ain't decent." He stepped on the gas and headed back toward the channel coast.

"Gee," Trixie whispered to Frenchy. "When he gets in that mood anything can happen."

"So you don't like zem, Meester Ebb?" the Frenchman smiled as if he had a green persimmon held in his mouth. "Zay will be vairy upzet."

"Oh, oh. Great spoutin' blue-bellied whales. Look ahead. What in the name of floodin' comets?"

"That ees a Nazi army."

"Thousands of 'em. Where do they think they're goin'?"

"Zay are ze invasion army, bound for England."

"England, huh?" Ebbtide blinked four slow even blinks. The head of the moving columns was only two miles distant.

From this hilltop the pattern of roadways could be seen leading toward the coast. If the atom-constrictor didn't dodge out of its course it would be rubbing elbows with this Nazi army within ten minutes.

"If they're headin' for England, we might give 'em a lift," Ebbtide grunted.

"Mercy, zat would be fatal!" the Frenchman squealed. "Zat would be ze final end of England."

"Control yourself, Frenchy," Trixie hissed in his ear. "Don't start crossing Ebb when he's on the warpath."

"But ze army, she'll cross his warpath. Zen what?"

"You've got me, pal. Gee—look! We're taking a short-cut."

EBB stepped on it. He rambled over two forests and jumped a river that brought the big galloping machine to the edge of the coast road, a mile ahead of the advancing columns. He wedged the big machine into a natural nook close against the hill cliff, and stopped it between two trees that furnished a landscaping effect.

"I am zat scared," the Frenchman gulped, "zat I could stick my head in ze bank of ze hill."

"Stick your hand in your paint bucket," Ebbtide ordered. "Get your brush and go to work. Paint a big picture of a stein of beer and some steaming frankfurters."

"Paint eet? Vare?"

"All over the front of the atom constrictor . . . and make it snappy. If it ain't done before that army comes in sight, you go *into* the atom-constrictor."

Frenchy climbed down and started slapping paint.

"Now, you, Trixie." Ebb scowled at her. "Hell, you're speckleder than a trout. Measles is measles. I better put you back under quarantine."

"Please, Ebb, I don't wanna. I'm

feeling swell, honest."

Ebb was being mysterious. He seemed to be holding back a grin. "Come on. We'll see how swell you're feelin'."

By the time they reached the giant entrance the columns of Nazis were rounding the corner only fifty yards away.

"Now, Trixie," said Ebbtide, stationing her at the entrance. "If you're feelin' swell, *dance*."

The mysterious glint in Ebb's eyes meant business. Trixie did a jitterbug. Her heels made the metal entrance rattle like a syncopated machine gun.

The first columns of Nazis halted even with the atom-constrictor. The big officer raised his eyebrows to take in the whole landscape. He licked his lips. The picture of beer and frankfurters, together with Trixie's dancing, must have appealed to him. He made a greedy smile.

Then he turned to his soldiers.

"Recess vor twendy minutes. Heil frankfur—er—Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler!" his troops shouted.

Then the officer came straight toward the atom-constrictor, and the dismissed troops trooped after him.

"Gee, Ebb," Trixie squealed, freezing in the middle of a dance contortion. "What are they going to do to us?"

"Git back into quarantine, quick," said Ebb, springing back to the cab.

Trixie gave a little gulp of exasperation. Frenchy was climbing out of sight on the farther side of the big machine. She hissed a reminder to him. She'd be turning back into a silver disc now. "But you remember my number, Frenchy, and let me out as soon as Ebb gets in a better humor."

Then she disappeared into the giant scoop.

Clink. Silvery disc number seven.

The Nazi officer was only two paces

behind her. *Clink*. Number eight. *Clink-Clink-Clink-Clink*. . . .

Forty-nine thousand clicks later Ebbtide and Frenchy were still counting.

AFTER a swift voyage across the Channel, Ebbtide wasted no time finding some one to talk business with.

"We're in need of all sorts of scrap metal," said a purchasing agent for the British Navy. "Those are nice bright discs."

Ebb removed disc number 50,007 from the storage cylinders, spun it on the paved street and noted the rich metallic clang that it made. The purchasing agent leaned it against a stone wall and had his test men try its resistance against machine-guns and anti-tank fire.

"Very good," said the purchasing agent. "How many of those discs do you have on hand?"

"Fifty thousand. Sellin' 'em dirt cheap. Four bits apiece. Twenty-five thousand smackers buys the lot."

"We've no time to haggle over prices. Maybe you're profiteering, maybe not."

"I'm not," said Ebbtide. He shot a glance at Frenchy, who added, "He ees not, I assure you."

The purchasing agent paused a moment for calculations. "Yes, fifty thousand discs would finish the armor on some fighting boats—and barely in time."

"Een time for what?" Frenchy broke in.

"In time to turn back a channel invasion," said the purchasing agent. "If we can get these fifty thousand metal plates riveted onto a few old wooden hulls, that invasion will be stymied."

"You never spoke a truer word," Ebbtide said. Frenchy nodded with his eyebrows.

Ebb pocketed the purchasing agent's

check and went to work dumping the silvery discs at the shipbuilding yards. Franchy helped him. As fast as the discs rolled out, the shipbuilders riveted them into sea armor, in patterns that resembled the scales of fish.

When the last disc had been riveted into place and Ebbtide had mounted to the cab to be on his way, the purchasing agent came running up.

"One moment, Mr. Jones."

"Well?"

"We need one more disc. Don't you have one more for us?"

"Hell, I threw in seven extras already."

"Six," said the purchasing agent.

"My automatic counter says seven," Ebb declared stubbornly.

The purchasing agent didn't care to argue. His point was that he needed one more. Ebb scowled. Then Trixie peeked in at the opposite window of the cab.

"Hi, Ebb. Remember me?"

TRIX!" Ebb gasped. "I forgot about you. Say, how in the name of numerical navigation did you git out? You were supposed to be in quarantine."

"You can't quarantine me with fifty thousand Nazis," Trixie snapped. "Get back to business, Ebb. The man wants another disc."

"Yeah, the man wants another disc." Ebb turned to look for Frenchy, who had taken a strange notion to chase himself halfway down the block. Ebb shouted after him. "Hey, Frenchy, hey! Come back. You've been exposed—you ought to be quarantined fer—"

Ebbtide broke off with yelling in order to concentrate on gazing and blinking his eyes. The Frenchman, halfway down the street, bent down and picked up a steel manhole lid from the pave-

ment and came running back with it.

"Here ees ze one more disc," said Frenchy, handing it over to the purchasing agent. Then he turned to Ebb. "May I have ze job to work for you?"

"Ze job is yours," said Ebb. "Get in. We're cruising back to the continent."

"One more moment," said the purchasing agent. "If I take this steel lid what about that open manhole? We can't have a sewer left open—"

"Put a box over it till I get back," said Ebbitide. "I know exactly where to pick up a new sewer lid. There's a chap over on the continent named Hit-

ler — you wouldn't understand — but I'll be back with a new lid."

Ebbitide stepped on the gas and the atom-constrictor roared on its way. Frenchy, sitting on the other side of Trixie, whistled softly to himself. But Ebb's expression became an accusing scowl aimed at his wife.

"I still can't figure it, Trixie. The last time I saw you, you danced into the atom-constrictor and turned into a disc. How in thunder'd you get out?"

"Very simple," said Trixie, slipping Frenchy a wink on the sly. "I broke out with the measles."

Trixie wasn't telling all her secrets.

THE BATTLE OF MANETONG

(Concluded from page 93)

Jehovah has been felt, I find my moment. Here, where the command of the Lord has been violated, I depart. That much has been written. Good-bye, my friend."

"Please," Major Archibald Douglass leaned forward and gripped the old patriarch's arm, "you mustn't go. I mean—I mean without explaining what you've said. About the wrath of the Lord, I mean. I must know."

He leaned forward as the old man's lips fluttered laboriously. The major heard three words, three strange, unbelievable words.

The last word was followed by a gasping choke, and before it had ceased to sound, Mosoch was dead.

Shaken, the major returned to his tent. He smoked three cigarettes nervously trying to decide what to write in his official report of the action. Through the flap of the tent he could see the looming bulk of the artillery structure the Germans had built.

What a good joke on them.

After a while Major Douglass wrote his report.

He wrote: "*In a skirmish at the*

bridge head of the Nile tributary, our force was able to capture the personnel and equipment of an ambushing German camp. Our success was due primarily to the bad judgment of the enemies' selection of artillery positions."

He smiled as he wrote that last line.

The report was rather inadequate but, after all, what else could he say?

In a military report he couldn't point out the significance of a fact that had only occurred to him a few moments ago. Namely, that the Manetong plateau derived its name from a contraction of two English words, "many" and "tongue."

Nor could he relate the incident of a feverish, dying Hebrew who had whispered to him that the curse of the Lord lay over this ground because on it presumptuous man had attempted to erect a structure into heaven.

For adding all this together, his superior officers would decide that he was trying to imply that the Germans had accidentally built an artillery structure on the foundation of the ancient, almost legendary Tower of Babel.

Which was perfectly silly, of course.

ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS—ACTINIUM

HOW DID LIFE START?



ALTHOUGH DISCOVERED ABOUT 1899 IN PITCHBLende, ACTINIUM HAS NEVER BEEN ISOLATED. PROTACTINIUM, "MOTHER" OF ACTINIUM, IS ONE OF THE RAREST OF EARTH'S METALS; BUT ITS CHILD, ACTINIUM, IS 2000 TIMES RARER!



WAS LIFE CREATED BY

EXTREMELY "YOUNG" VIGOROUS RADIOACTIVE ELEMENTS ACTING UPON A MYSTERIOUS COMBINATION OF SUBSTANCES THAT EXISTED MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO IN PRIMAEVAL OCEANS? SOME SCIENTISTS BELIEVE THAT LOWLY PROTOPLASMS, REMOTE ANCESTORS OF MAN, SPRANG UP FOLLOWING SOME SUCH ACTION...



ACTINIUM IS

RADIOACTIVE; IT GIVES OFF RAYS THAT PENETRATE OPAQUE OBJECTS. SO POWERFUL ARE ITS RAYS THAT, LIKE THOSE OF RADIUM, THEY AFFECT A PHOTOGRAPHIC PLATE!



ACTINIUM EMANATES A GAS CALLED "ACTON" THAT CAN BE CAPTURED AND ANALYSED; BUT IT LOSES HALF-EFFICIENCY IN SOME 3.8 SECONDS. RADON, FROM RADIUM, LASTS ABOUT 3.8 DAYS.



RADIOACTIVE ELEMENTS RESULT WHEN CERTAIN HEAVY ELEMENTS BREAK DOWN. EVENTUALLY ACTINIUM, LIKE RADIUM DISINTEGRATES INTO HELIUM AND LEAD. A RADIUM ATOM BORN WHEN HANNIBAL CROSSED THE ALPS, WOULD JUST ABOUT NOW BE DYING OUT!

ACTINIUM is number 89 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Ac and its atomic weight is probably 230. It has never been isolated, and its presence has been detected in pitchblende and other radioactive minerals, by isolation of a gas that emanates from it. It is probably the rarest of all Earth elements, because of its short life, in contrast to the centuries-long life of radium.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Iron

READER'S PAGE

HOW LONG?

Sirs:

240 pages, eh? How long can you keep this up? And, to top it off, the first five stories in the mag are four-unit stories. A story has to be good to drag a four-unit rating out of me, but look, "Mademoiselle Butterfly" captures a five-unit rating! The highest, as yet, rating I have given a fantasy story. "The Magic Flute" is good for a three-unit rating. The next two are fair and get a two-unit rating. Derleth's story—I don't care for witchcraft—one-unit. For O'Brien's story I don't know what to say. Somebody double-crossed me on that one, so I won't talk. Let someone else rate it, then tell me its score. I won't even stick my neck out far enough to say whether I liked it or not.

Y'know, Ed? I very greatly enjoy seeing a contents page with no Burroughs and no St. John. I never did like Burroughs, and don't expect to. Does *everybody* else actually like him? I hate to be alone like this. But I still sure as the X5\$#70**5 hate to see space wasted that could more profitably be put into reader's letters. Six columns this month. Three pages. One and one-half sheets. Cripes, I am—I should say we are—more interested in a few pages of reader's letters than in some of those hack stories you air.

411 West Howard Street,
LYNN H. BENHAM,
Crothersville, Ind.

There's no telling how long we can keep it up. But our intentions are to keep on trying to please you with good stories and lots of 'em! Thanks for your praise.—Ed.

EVEN "WESTERN" TALES!

Sirs:

I have just finished reading your 240-page issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. It was a very fine issue, and although I do not enjoy the "fantasy" type of story as much as science fiction, any issue with such notables as Wilcox, Bob Williams, Norman, Wellman, and Cabot is bound to be good, even if it were just "love stories," or "western tales." Some of the stories, it seems to me, could qualify for *Amazing Stories* as they were not so much on the fantastic side. For example, the "Hok" story and Norman's "Oscar," and the two novels by Wilcox.

Incidentally, did Krupa read the story "Oscar and the Talking Totems"? His illustration went haywire somewhere.

A. G. JARRETT, JR.,
131 Brucemont Circle,
West Asheville, N. C.

Mr. Krupa, who now is serving in the U. S. Marine Corps, had no opportunity to read the story, and since these illustrations are his farewell contributions to his fans, we had no opportunity to make them check in every detail. It's really your editor's fault, because he made changes in the story at the last minute. But we know you'll forgive us.—Ed.

HAIL ALABAMA!

Sirs:

"Too much iss enough," as Mama Katzenjammer says. I have read your Reader's Page for about as long as I've read your magazine, and not *once* have I seen a fan letter from my state. S'outrageous. I am overwhelmed with disgust at the thought that there are either none in Alabama or they are too timid to write (like I was). After reading the May issue of FA I immediately decided to put a stop to the horrible situation and you see before you the horrible result.

This issue of FA was beeyootiful, and I do mean the cover. . . ! The story I enjoyed most was "The Magic Flute" because I love stories like that. Spooks 'n stuff, you know.

JULIAN WILLIAMSON,
501 North Court Street,
Talladega, Alabama.

Thanks, Julian. But really, Alabama is not being left out. We have many readers, and very loyal, too, in your state. As for your question about writing stories yourself, the water's fine; come on in. We won't promise, but we sure will read! No harm in trying.—Ed.

HOK—VERSUS BEARD

Sirs:

I just got a copy of the April FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Looking through it, I discovered "Hok Visits the Land of Legends." "Ah, beauty in distress," say I, seeing a clean-shaven Hok pushing a beautiful girl behind him as he leaps to do battle for her. I read the story. The

girl is mentioned once. But there is plenty of mention of Hok's beautiful beard. And I was always led to believe a beard grew on a chin!

I hate to be picky, but I hate to be misled on stories. Oh, I liked the stories all right. I enjoy most of your magazine. But methinks that the two that enjoyed your farewell party was two screwball artists, instead of writers (I'm including Krupa too).

One more thing, don't make any more cracks about Chicago. It is not a small town. Other than that I think your magazine is tops and so are you.

Rita C. Carmelle,
6659 S. Ingleside Ave.,
Chicago, Illinois.

Your editors frequently ask artists to change a drawing, when the hero is not handsome enough, and thus, Hok's beard came off. And then, to our horror, we discovered that we had forgotten to send Hok to the barber, in the story, and we now cower in shame. Which goes to prove your editor needs a vacation! But with these big issues, it looks like we're going to be out of luck. By the way, Rita, why don't you drop down to the office some day? At least Chicago hospitality is the biggest in the world. And maybe you'll see we were only kidding. We don't really mean it. Chicago is OUR big town too!—Ed.

SHOT WITH A THOMPSON GUN!

Sirs:

I've read your *Fantastic Adventures* since it first came out in 1939. In most respects you have a really excellent magazine. The cartoons are especially good, with the articles coming in close behind. The Reader's Page could be made the best part of the magazine, but you insist on printing a conglomeration of sloppy letters informing you on how much the readers "love" your magazine. The only letters that I really looked at in the March issue were Mr. Lesser's and Harry Schuster's. I agree 500% with Mr. Schuster and here's my vote to boot the Mac Girl off the cover. The poorly drawn female on the February cover successfully ruined what could have been an excellent cover illustration.

I also agree with Mr. Lesser. Rod Ruth's pictures aren't worth the paper they're printed on. Jay Jackson's are almost as bad. Magarian, Fuqua, and Ned Hadley are all right, but thank God you've got Finlay now.

Get a couple of pictures from Bok. Paul is swell on the outside, but what's wrong with putting him inside? If you want to get some other artists, what about Morey?

Now for your stories:

1. The longer ones are for the most part very good even if they are mainly—

2. Adventure stories with very little basis in science fiction or even fantasy.

3. Kick out most of the short stories and run a really long feature story once in a while.

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4. More serials!!!
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6. Why, by the way, did you ever change from the old large size? In the first issue of FA you stated that you had a new companion to *Amazing Stories* with everything that "we" had been asking for. These things included, prominently, the large size. Why the change?
7. Back to the old large size!
8. Put some really scientific science fiction stories in *Amazing*.

Yours for many reforms,
Jim Thompson,
Montclair, N. J.

All right, turn off the "tommy" gun, Thompson! We'll try to answer your questions. First, if you were an editor, would you ignore the letters which stated a liking for the magazine? Especially if they outnumbered the dislikes by 100 to 1?

Next, the Mac Girl question was certainly de-

cided by the readers! Boy, do they like her! But you and Mr. Schuster, by some strange fate, are the only readers who are going to get their wish. We hereby boot the Mac Girl off the cover! (just as soon as we use up three we have on hand) and after that, no more.

And for you vast-majority readers, we pass on the sad information that H. W. McCauley has now become a member of Uncle Sam's armed forces, and there will be no more "painting" for the duration.

We'll get Paul on the inside (and a lot of other new artists—we'd be tickled to death!). Morey and Bok too. In fact, we welcome every artist in the field, just so long as they give you readers what you want.

As for longer stories, it's entirely up to the readers. Do you want them much longer than they are now? We'd welcome letters from everybody on this subject.

We changed to present size simply because



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your letters convinced us, after a year's fair trial, that you actually didn't want the large size magazine. Now we give you twice as much wordage as the old "large" magazine, and in a more easily handled format.

And thanks for your letter!—Ed.

MAC GIRL AND THE ARMY MAN

Sirs:

In answer to Mr. Harry Schuster's letter in the March issue of FA, condemning McCauley's girl covers . . .

First refer Mr. Schuster to Mrs. Sousa's letter in the same issue to Mr. Lesser. Then tell him that anybody who looks at him and says "aha, so that's the kind of a guy he is," is probably one of the hypocrites that write and ask for more Mac Girl covers but are too damn ignorant to realize that it boosts the morale of the soldiers who save the pictures and hang them over their bunks or in their lockers. I have a brother at Hickam Field, Hawaii, who would tell him off! It was my brother who started me reading FA and AS and I enjoy those "lousay and stinking" covers.

While writing, I do wish you would make FA the same size as AS (PERMANENTLY).

Buddy Mittelman,
1018 Park Place,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

We know you are right about the Mac Girl. Many a soldier has a Mac Girl hanging right up beside Petty and Varga—and we're mighty proud to know it!—Ed.

HIS FAVORITE STORIES

Sirs:

I have read FANTASTIC ADVENTURES since it first started. Your stories are all very good, but I'm sure many of your readers would enjoy it much more if you would print a really long and good science fiction story once in a while. Since you started, your best story by far has been "The Man From Hell," in Nov. '39. The two next best have been "The Robot Peril," and "The Whispering Gorilla." You should at least have a long serial. Three parts. I'm glad to see that you are having a two-part serial in *Amazing Stories*.

J. K.
Montclair, N. J.

LIKES BIG ISSUE

Sirs:

I have just finished reading the April issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Congratulations on the big issue. I finished the night I bought it. My friends say I read too fast, but who wouldn't with a copy of FA to read from? I rank the stories in this issue as follows:

- ***** Bull Moose of Babylon (Wilcox).
- ***** Crime Clean-up in Center City (Williams).
- ****½ The Eternal Priestess (Lawlor).

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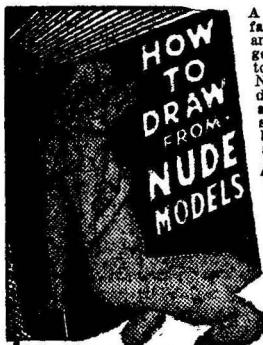
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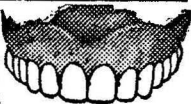
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- ****1/4 Dwellers in the Deep (Wilcox).
- ****1/2 Time Wounds All Heels (Bloch).
- *** The Legend of Mark Shayne (Cabot).
- *** Oscar and the Talking Totems (Norman).
- ** Bertie and the Black Arts (McGivern).
- ** Double in Death (Vance).

I am glad to see Krupa back after a long absence. The cover by Malcolm Smith was the best in quite a while. You have a fine new author in Harold Lawlor. I liked his story a lot.

EDWIN CARTON,
205 Mill Street,
Cambridge, Md.

Krupa's current illustrations are his last. He joined the Marines on March 31st. We are gradually building up enough hate for the Japs to buy a gun, declare ourselves a country, and declare a private war on them. Certainly we have a reason to!

Lawlor will be back again, we're sure.—Ed.

DOORWAY TO HELL

Sirs:

In regards to your March issue of **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES**, I've got a couple of brickbats to toss through ye ed's window. To wit: "Afraid to Live," by D. Farnsworth was the worst story in the issue. If "Sergi" was so perfectly immunized to the fear ray, how is it that he succumbed to it only after hundreds of doses? He should have been affected less and less each time.

"The Electrical Butterflies," and "Later Than You Think," tied for 5th place.

Now the bouquets. "The Fantastic Twins" was both interesting and funny. Congratulations to Cabot, although on first reading of the title, I thought perhaps the *real* fantastic twins were *Amazing* and *Fantastic*.

E. R. Burroughs writes another beautiful yarn. "War on Venus" was darn good, and cops 2nd place.

Trumpets sound "the charge." Drums beat. Cheers are heard. The war? Heck no! They've just read "Doorway to Hell," by F. Patton. I missed the first instalment, but not the second! **PLEASE**, ed., let's have lots more of Wilcox, Burroughs, Bond, Binder and **PATTON**.

Now in the field of art. Get rid of St. John; more of Finlay (hurrah); Rod Ruth is getting good too—his illustration for "The Fantastic Twins" was swell; get more by Paul, Krupa, Magarian. By all means let Fuqua do more covers!

Editor's Notebook is swell; keeps us tipped off about coming attractions.

I particularly liked "Gas Attack," as it cleared up a couple of points for me. Thanks.

"Romance of the Elements" (as usual) is good, educational, and interesting, but doesn't give enough details. More data on the element itself, please.

CLAY ROBERTS,
3937 S. Ellis Ave.,
Chicago, Illinois.

You assume that repetition lessens susceptibility (obviously from legends that repeated bites from rattlers make a victim immune—and such similar instances). But remember the old saying "tiny drops of water can wear away the largest stone."

We're trying to get Patton to do more stories for us, but we understand he's quite busy these days. However, he loves to do this sort of thing, as well as read *Amazing Stories* and *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES* regularly, and we feel sure he'll be back—we don't know when, but we're hoping.

You'd be surprised how little science knows about some of the elements. For instance, the current one, in this issue. Actinium is simply known to exist, and belongs to the radioactive family. The rest is complete mystery.—Ed.

A SOLDIER WRITES

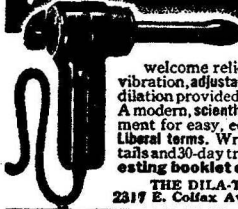
Sirs:

I have just finished reading the April issue of *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES* and must admit that I enjoyed every story in it. I've been a reader of *Amazing* and many others until recently, when I ran across a copy of *FA*, in the canteen.

Yes, I'm a soldier in Camp Shelby, formerly of Camp Blanding, Fla., veteran of two maneuvers—Louisiana and the Carolinas. I would like to correspond with your readers, and would appreciate your mentioning it. In the army a year, 25 years old, interested in most anything.

(Concluded on page 237)

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CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Miss Jeanne Scott, G. D., Sedalia, Missouri, would like to hear from soldiers, marines, sailors and anyone else in Uncle Sam's armed forces. She has brown hair, green eyes, is 5 ft. 4 inches tall, weighs 99½ lbs., is peppy, likes to dance and read. . . . Jack Fortado, Box 314, Rodeo, Calif., will exchange other sci-fi magazines or pay for the first three issues of AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY, providing they are still in good condition. . . . Richard L. Hiatt, 1823 Highland Ave., Portsmouth, Ohio, would like stamp collecting correspondents in South America and Africa. He also has five Burroughs' and two Balmer & Wylie books to trade or sell. He wants late Burroughs', S.F. magazines and "Skylark 111." . . . Alfred Novak, Sunny Acres, Warrensville, Ohio, is a collector of U. S. and foreign stamps and also collects stamps on envelopes from foreign countries. He would like to correspond with people of the same interests, with a view to exchanging duplicates. . . . Tom Brackett, Box 214, Winnsboro, La., wishes to buy the 1938 Yearbook of Science, Weird and Fantasy Fiction. Anyone interested please send him price list. . . . All editors of scientific magazines who would welcome better and closer relations between pro and fan mags, write to F. Edward Murphy, 26 Horatio Street, New York City, giving full particulars about their publication, including its policy. . . . Tom Ludowitz, 2310 Virginia, Everett, Wash., wants fans in the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming to get in touch with him about joining the Northwest Fantasy Society. He also wants any fans who can write articles or stories, draw cartoons and SF pictures to get in touch with him about publishing them in an amateur fantasy magazine. . . . Thomas Regan, Jr., 138 Townsend St., New Brunswick, N. J., would like to trade three books: "By Space Ship to Saturn," "Lost on the Moon," and "Through Space to Mars" for three old AMAZING STORIES or other science fiction mags published before 1934. . . . Herbert Womaski, 1988 E. Hyacinth St., St. Paul, Minn., 20 years old, would like to hear from pen pals of either sex, any age. His hobbies are poetry, singing and drawing. . . . Donal Piek, 3705 N. Port Washington Rd., Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is interested in obtaining pen pals, age 16 to 18, interested in human anatomy and physiology. . . . Miss Barbara Jacobs, 8708 First Avenue, North Bergen, New Jersey, would like to correspond with young men in the service of our country. She will answer at once. . . . Franklin Kushner, Gen. Del., Haines City, Fla., would like to obtain a good, intact issue of FLYING AND POPULAR AVIATION for September. . . . Stanley Amisjes, R.F.D. No. 1, Pelham, N. H., has the complete works of A. Merritt, R. M. Farley, O. A. Kline, Ray Cummings, etc., in magazine form. . . . William J. Schott, 5247 Ludlow St., Philadelphia, Pa., has 200 magazines and books, which he will sell or trade for camera equipment.

(Concluded from page 235)

Trusting I'll hear some reply in a very short time, I will continue reading FANTASTIC ADVENTURES in the future.

Private Stanley Abrams,
Co. "M," 169th Inf.,
Camp Shelby, Miss.

Okay, Stan. We're sure you'll get letters. And we're putting you square in the Reader's Page which is top-kick rating in our book!—Ed.

Sirs:

"WANTS"

I would like: More "bug-eyed" monsters on the cover. Less of Fuqua, none of Ruth, all of Paul, more of McCauley, and Malcolm Smith SHOT. In the interior I would like: more stories by Gilford, Wilcox, Kummer, Repp, Schachner, Binder, Farley, and Millard. More, lots more, of the following kind of stories: "The Blue Tropics,"

"The Robot Peril," "Death Over Chicago," "Hell in Eden," "The Whispering Gorilla," "The Golden Amazon," "The Floating Robot," and "The Liquid Man."

PLEASE: Another cover by Paul. Like the unforgettable one he did for "The Blue Tropics" in the April, 1940 issue. No more of "Oscar of Mars." Please send a list of back issues of *Amazing Stories*.

Warren K. Fields,
P. O. Box 331,
Avon Park, Fla.

We'll certainly fill a lot of your requests before very long. How do you like the idea of a new series of back covers on FA by Paul? It starts next month! As for back issues, we have copies for sale only of issues from April, 1938, to date. Write our circulation department listing your wants.—Ed.

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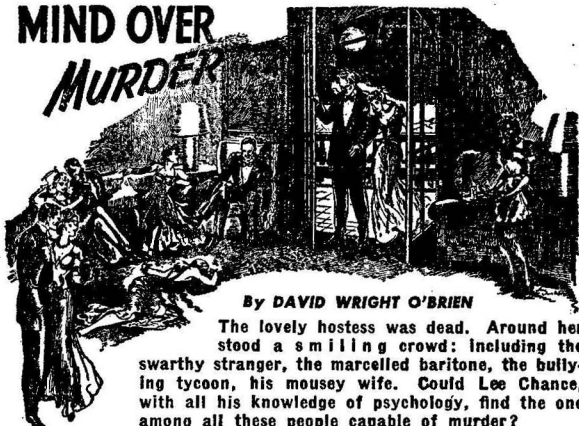
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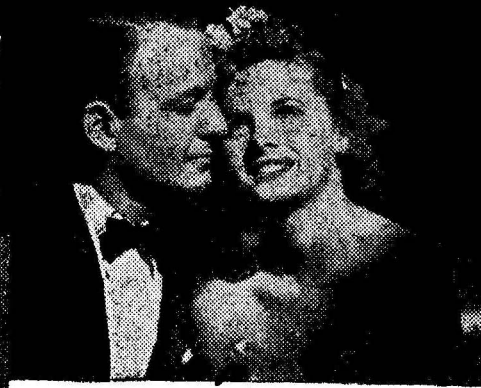
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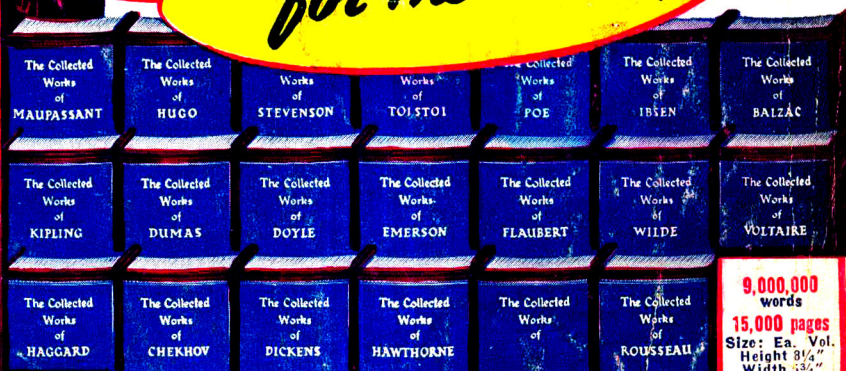
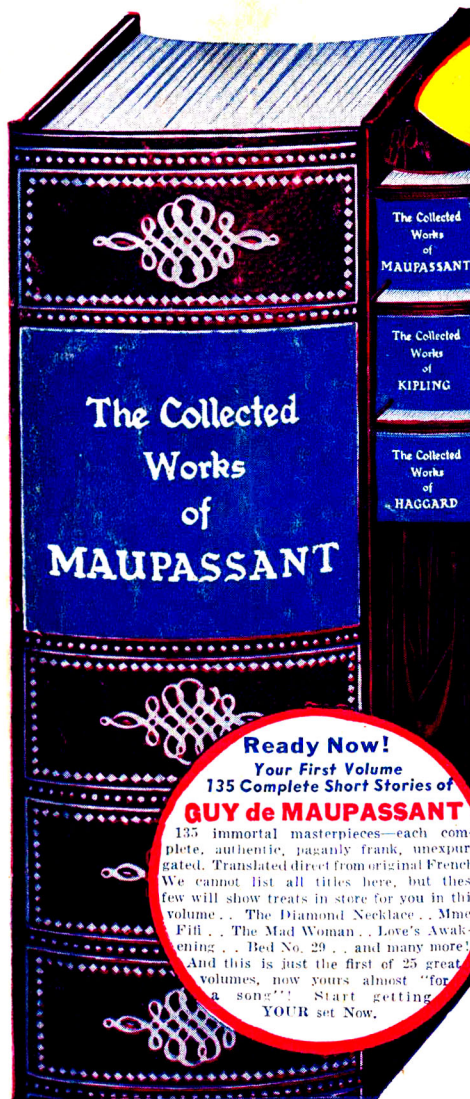
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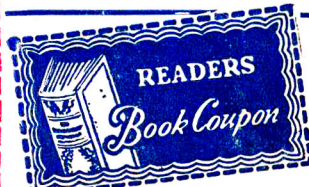
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