

LOST CITY OF BURMA *by* EDMOND HAMILTON

fantastic

DECEMBER
25c

ADVENTURES

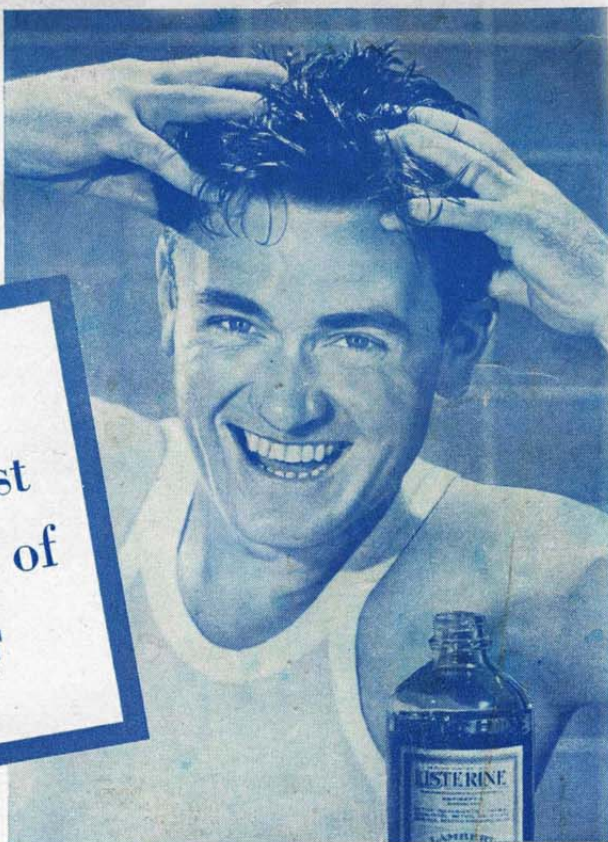


THE GHOST THAT
HAUNTED HITLER

By WILLIAM P. MCGIVERN

Washing
your hair?

LISTERINE
to guard against
infectious type of
DANDRUFF



HERE'S a tip from the lips of thousands of men and women who have been helped by the Listerine treatment:

As a part of every shampoo, either preceding or following it, as you prefer, use full strength Listerine Antiseptic, followed by vigorous and persistent massage.

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ADVENTURES

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Front cover painting by H. W. McCauley, illustrating a scene from "The Ghost that Haunted Hitler."

Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul, depicting "Apollo—God of Hygiene."

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VOLUME 4
NUMBER 12



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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THIS column has reported many fantastic true stories, but we think that the other day we ran into one of the most fantastic of them all. Anyway, it's worth reporting, if not for the sake of the fantastic, at least as good Americanism.

We visited Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on Saturday, September 19, and while there, picked up a copy of an evening paper. Conspicuously on the front page was the report of a "forum talk" at the Milwaukee Community Forum. The guest speaker was a German woman refugee who told of the cruelties and bestialities of the Nazi regime from its earliest days; its disastrous impact on morals, religion and education; its treachery and deceit, and its assault on the whole code of ethics. The speaker was Mrs. Ida Roetter.

WHAT'S fantastic about that, you ask? Nothing, certainly! It's something *all* Americans know and do not question. We've had those facts displayed before our horrified eyes until we have risen as one, determined to stamp their reality from the face of the earth forever. Or at least, that's what your editor *thought*, up to now. But as we read on, we entered a true world of fantasy, and we staggered out of it filled with confusion, and, we admit, a feeling of growing rage. Because the reaction to that refugee woman's tragic story was this:

HER talk was received coldly, except for occasional grunts of disbelief and incredulous laughter! And when she had finished, these questions were put to her. "Is there any evidence that Hitler ever intended to attack the United States and isn't that just clever propaganda such as directed against the Kaiser in the last war? . . . Are Germans fond of the Japanese and vice versa or is it just another temporary friendship such as between Russia and Germany? . . . Is Hitler a powerful speaker? . . . Aren't we defending Communism by helping Russia? . . . Isn't it true that the only country that has ever attacked the United States is England? . . . What else could Germany do than fight when England threatened to wipe her off the face of the earth? . . . Has any man in any country the right to freedom and the right to his life? . . .

THERE were other questions, all as incredible. Mrs. Roetter could not answer them, naturally. She had believed herself in America, among Ameri-

cans! But your editor intends to answer them! Right here!

IN THAT despicable book, *Mein Kampf*, Hitler declares his intentions against "democracies." We are a democracy. Hitler's own statement is not propaganda. But perhaps 500 or more of our merchant vessels sunk in the Atlantic is better proof of his intentions! And the attack on Greenland, and the attack on Iceland! As for the German friendship with Russia, we wonder if the questioner has heard of Moscow, of Leningrad, of Stalingrad, of 5,000,000 Russian casualties, of the most furious and bloody battles in history? No, Hitler is not a powerful speaker. He is the bellowing, hoarse-voiced, gesturing type that causes Americans to grin with amusement. In fact, we've heard Americans laugh right out loud when they first heard Hitler's voice on the radio. As for defending Communism by helping Russia, we certainly are not. We are defending Democracy. Russia fights—and *how!*—against our enemy. We would be fools not to make her effort even more effective. We damned well appreciate the existence of the Russians and whatever their political set-up is, has nothing to do with getting in there and helping do our share to make that Russian pile-driver even more mighty. As for the U. S. being attacked, has the questioner never heard of Pearl Harbor; of the Aleutians, of the Philippines, of Corregidor, of Bataan, of Wake Island, of Midway? Or to go back further, of the Spanish-American war?

WHEN we come to answering the question as to "what else could Germany do? . . ." we humbly suggest that she might have avoided murder, rape, ruthless destruction, tyranny, treachery, bestiality, and every other despicable thing she has done. She might have worked rather than fought; she might have dealt rather than destroyed; she might have nursed progress rather than killed it.

THE last question we cannot answer. It is too fantastic. Besides it has been answered, by the blood of millions of free men. It has been answered from the beginning of history. "Has any man in any country the right to freedom and the right to his life?" We can only *snort!*

OUR heart goes out to poor Mrs. Roetter. Where now will she flee for safety and freedom? She has come to the one country where

she believed such things existed, and to her horror and terror (as evidenced by her frightened, bewildered tears in that Milwaukee Forum) finds she has not escaped at all.

THE most horrifying truth of all is that we have freedom of speech in this country, and yet, *no one* in Milwaukee, not even the paper which reported this "forum," exercised that glorious right and rose to answer those questioners! It is lucky (or unlucky!) that your editor has not the power of a Heydrich; for today those questioners would be dead, stood against a wall and shot—because it is impossible for us to believe that they are Americans. To assume so, would be to attribute to them an abysmal ignorance that is beyond comprehension.

PERHAPS all the foregoing is a fitting introduction to William P. McGivern's sensational story in this issue, "The Ghost That Haunted Hitler." We believe that we have a story here that will set you to thinking, and that will stir you deeply. Your editor has read it several times, and has wondered much about it, and has asked Mr. McGivern many questions about it. But he seems strangely reticent, especially as to its source, or inspiration. If Mr. McGivern has a secret here, we have failed to worm it from him. What do you think?

WHEN it comes to taking advantage of an existing situation, and turning it into a humor story with real punch, we think David Wright O'Brien has quite a knack. You'll like "Pegasus Play's Priorities" in this issue. No, it's not about a horse . . . just go ahead and read it for a real treat.

PERHAPS we've laughed so much at Lefty Feep that we've felt we just couldn't any more, but believe us, when the current Feep episode hit our desk, we were in for some sore ribs! "Lefty Feep and the Sleepy Time Gal" is right up our funny bone! It'll murder you!

RECENTLY married Dwight V. Swain has written a story around that old subject, the fabulous memory of elephants. Except that this story's about those little silver bells elephants wear. These particular bells had a strange power, and plenty happened when they came to Chicago. Plenty we say . . . so don't skip this one!

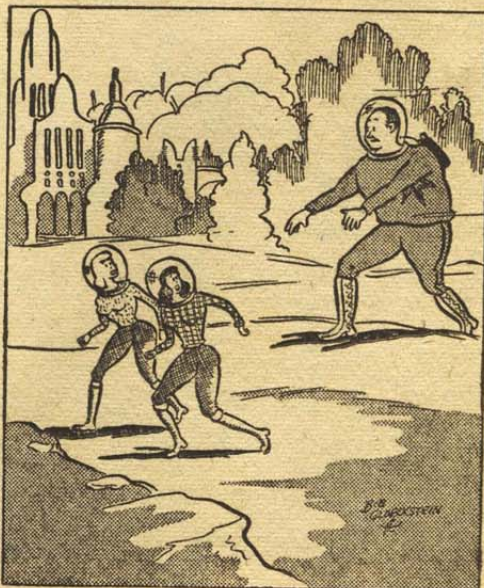
WE SENT an illustration to Edmond Hamilton and asked him to do a story around it. The result was "Lost City of Burma." We expect a lot of fan mail on this story, because it has some very unusual writing and plotting in it. We assure you it won't wind up where you might imagine it would. It has that old "surprise" sock. You'll enjoy it.

THERE are four stories in this issue which have some foundation in the war. "Madagascar Ghost" is one of them, written by Clee Garson. Recent headlines told of action in Madagascar by the British. This island has always been hooked up with weird tales of mysterious things that happen in its seas and its jungles, and here is one of them, related in a modern setting. It is calculated to chase little chills up and down your spine, and we believe it will!

YOU'LL note we have eleven complete stories in this issue. We haven't mentioned the others, but all are specially selected to make this issue one of the biggest and best you've ever had. We think we started this one off right by putting the Mac Girl on the cover, to illustrate McGivern's great story. Incidentally, a peculiar truth is given the example in this painting. Most painters find themselves painting their own likeness into their paintings, sometimes deliberately, but many times, unconsciously. McCauley has done this here. The shadowy figure is none other than the artist himself.

INCIDENTALLY, the other night your editor drove his secretary out to McCauley's studio, and we posed her for a cover which is now being painted. We'll let you know when it's to appear. We think that when it does, you'll agree that the most lovely Mac Girl of them all works right opposite our own desk! If you're ever in town, drop down and prove it to yourself! Incidentally, we'd be glad to show you around the office and demonstrate how your favorite magazines are put out.

(Continued on page 100)



"Maybe we're running too fast!"

*Terror walked out of Lidice on invisible feet,
and Heydrich, the Hangman died. From that day
on fear stalked the Gestapo, and a phantom of
vengeance became famed throughout Europe as...*



The guards yanked him forward roughly

The GHOST THAT HAUNTED HITLER

by

WILLIAM P. MCGIVERN*

A GUTTERING candle flamed in the dank darkness of the cellar casting grotesque shadows against the limestone walls.

Three men sat at a table in that cellar.

The man at the head of the table leaned forward and for an instant his face was strikingly lighted by the flickering candle.

His face was lean and pale. The jaw-line was sharp and hard. A thin nose jutted over a slight blonde mustache. The eyes of the man were only mirrored pools of blackness.

He glanced down at the map lying before him on the table.

"Every detail has been arranged," he said. His voice was softly cautious. "He will be here, in Prague, tomorrow."

The man on his left leaned forward tensely. The candle-light caught the blazing glints in his black eyes, the almost savage determination in his grimly clamped jaw. His thick fingers gripped the edge of the table.

"Are you sure?" he whispered. "Can we trust our information?"

The man opposite the speaker, a

heavy-shouldered, dark-browed giant, nodded thoughtfully.

"Can we be sure?" he growled. "We will have only one chance." His eyes turned to the man at the head of the table. "One slip now will ruin everything."

The man at the head of the table glanced briefly at the two men and a faint, ironic smile brushed his thin lips.

"Yes, we can trust this information."

He bent over the map deliberately. The candle light penetrated the shadowy caverns of his eyes as he leaned forward, transforming them into yellow pools of strange luminance. There was something haunting about those green-yellow eyes, something about their weird glow in the darkness that was chilling. They were the eyes of a

*Although this story is presented purely as fiction, author William P. McGivern displayed a strangely fervent eagerness that it be presented to the public at the earliest possible moment. "This story *must* be published!" he said forcefully. We, as editors, smiled, read the story, agreed that it was a good story. And we publish it here. But the other day we were introduced to a man who spoke with an accent. Later we discovered that this man had "sought out" McGivern. Now we wonder . . . —Ed.

creature of darkness, the eyes of a hunter.

"We can trust this information," he said. "Underground Intelligence from Berlin transmitted it to me. Heydrich will be in Prague tomorrow."

The dark-browed giant stood up suddenly, mighty fists clenching.

"The Hangman!" he grated. "His men took my wife, my child—"

The man at the head of the table took his arm and drew him back to his seat.

"I know," he said softly. "But the Hangman's hour of reckoning draws closer with each tick of the clock. Now you have both studied this map of the city, and the route Heydrich's car will take. Are you sure of what you must do?"

The two men nodded silently.

"Excellent. I will be on hand. When your—ah—errand is completed I will give you your instructions for leaving the city. I think that is all, gentlemen. Good luck."

The man on his left drummed his fingers nervously on the top of the table. His smouldering black eyes were worried.

"You say you will be there?"

"Yes."

"But you can't. The neighborhood will be alive with Gestapo police seconds after we have done our work. It will direct suspicion at you if you are discovered in the vicinity."

"I'm afraid that can't be helped."

"But you are one of our few links with the Reich authorities. You are worth a hundred of us. As long as they believe you a renegade American and admit you to their councils, you are invaluable to the underground movement. Nothing must happen to you."

"I don't intend letting anything happen to me," the man at the head of the table said. A whimsical smile touched

his face but his yellow-green eyes did not reflect that smile. "Even so, I'd risk quite a bit to be present at *Herr Heydrich's* final performance. When he departs for his eternal and—ah—warm reward I want to be there to raise a silent cheer."

He stood up slowly, a tall thin figure with the esthetic features of a scholar and the yellow-green eyes of a jungle hunter.

"I'm afraid we must consider the matter settled," he said gently. "Au revoir, until tomorrow, my comrades."

With a slight smile he turned and moved silently toward the cellar exit.

After a moment one of the men at the table pinched out the candle and darkness, close and final, settled pall-like over the damp cellar. . . .

AT FIVE o'clock on the afternoon of May twenty-eighth, a German staff car entered the outskirts of Prague and followed one of the main boulevards leading to the center of the city.

The car was driven by an impassive German officer and the sole occupant of the tonneau was a thin, loose-lipped man with pale, fretful features and cold shifting eyes. He wore the insignia of a Reich Upper Group Leader and his narrow chest was covered with medals and decorations.

As the car approached an intersection a stocky black-haired man on a bicycle swung out into the boulevard and pedaled leisurely along the street, directly in front of the staff car.

The chauffeur applied the brakes, slowing the car. He sounded the horn impatiently, swearing under his breath.

The man in the rear of the car looked up, his cold eyes snapping. A muscle twitched nervously in his cheek.

"What is the matter?" he barked.

The chauffeur gestured helplessly at the slowly moving bicyclist.

"I am sorry, sir, but this fool ahead on the cycle is blocking the street. Perhaps he is deaf." He sounded the horn again, pressing angrily with the flat of his hand.

The officer in the rear of the car leaned back against the cushioned seat. A smile played about his loose lips and his unnaturally pale face lighted with a strange eagerness.

"How unfortunate for him," he murmured. "Run him down."

"But, excellency—"

"*Silence!*" The single word cracked like a leash about the chauffeur's ears. "You have your orders!"

Red-faced, the chauffeur jammed his foot on the accelerator, but as the heavy car started to gain momentum, the bicyclist suddenly swerved to one side, leaving the road clear for the staff car.

The officer in the rear of the car cursed softly and his flabby lips twisted in a pout.

"The stupid fellow has saved his life," he muttered. He crossed his booted leg nervously. "And for what? I would have been doing him a favor by crushing him beneath the wheels of the car. What can life possibly mean to such a senseless, inferior clod? Only a succession of hungry days and miserable nights stretching on forever. He is helpless to help himself or to hurt others. He lives without power, without effect, without importance. Better not to live."

As the car drew abreast of the man on the bicycle he glanced idly at the rider. Boiling black eyes met his for one chilling instant. Eyes set in a hard, tensely determined face, eyes without fear, eyes that gleamed like flashing sword points.

The officer saw the man on the bicycle reach into the folds of his coarse jacket and draw out a round, black

object; and he suddenly screamed madly at his chauffeur.

A MAN on the opposite side of the street, a dark-browed giant of a man, stepped suddenly from between two buildings. He drew a gun from his pocket and sighted deliberately at the figure in the tonneau of the staff car.

His gun barked five times.

Almost at the same instant the arm of the cyclist flashed up and down, and a small black ball smashed against the hood of the car.

A reverberating explosion shattered the air.

The car rocked from the force of the blast. The chauffeur fell forward over the wheel and the machine careened madly over the sidewalk and smashed its hood into the glass showcase of a small shop.

The man on the bicycle pedaled swiftly across the street to the man who had fired the shots into the car.

"Did you get him?" he snapped.

"I think so. Come, we must hurry."

"Not yet." The man who had thrown the bomb shot an anxious glance up and down the street. "He said he would be here to give us directions."

"Maybe he has failed. Something might have happened to him."

"He will not fail us."

Already people were appearing on the quiet street, emerging from the neat homes and small shops that lined the boulevard. Two men were running toward the wreckage of the car.

A cart with a load of hay turned onto the boulevard from a side street and the driver stopped the horses near the wrecked car. The driver clambered down without haste. He was wearing frayed overalls and a straw hat and his thin features were set in dull, stoic lines.

The man with the bicycle gripped his huge companion's arm as the tall

figure of the driver strode toward them.

"He has not failed us!" he whispered tensely.

"What do you mean?"

The overalled figure stopped in front of them.

"Please accept my congratulations," he said. "You have done an excellent afternoon's work. As a reward I would suggest a quiet drive through the country. And—ah—I wouldn't let anything stop you from taking your reward immediately."

The speaker lifted his straw hat slowly and the last rays of the sun struck lights in his strange, yellow-green eyes.

The faces of the two men gleamed.

"We knew you'd come," the dark-featured giant said huskily. "Where shall we go?"

The man in overalls glanced lazily across the street at the wreckage of the car, noting the gathering of men and women and listening to the growing tumult spreading along the boulevard.

"If I were you," he said thoughtfully, "I'd drive slowly away from this turbulent place and find some quiet secluded village and remain there. You'll find the peace and quiet good for your souls. For that purpose I can't think of a better place than the lazy, pleasant village of Lidice."

"Lidice?"

"Yes, they're expecting you. Now get started. At any moment the genial gentlemen from the Gestapo will arrive and in their charming fashion begin the questioning of witnesses."

"But you?"

The yellow-green eyes glinted with amusement.

"When the Gestapo police arrive I shall be the only one present with an accurate description of the assassins, who, I shall swear, were eight in number and possessed of hairy, ringed tails. Now, go quickly. God be with you."

CHAPTER II

ON THE morning of June fifth, there was an undercurrent of suppressed excitement and tension in the offices of the Reich's Minister of Occupation, Marshal Wilhelm von Bock.

The tension was not localized however, in the imposing white-facaded building that Marshal von Bock had appropriated from the Czech government, but it was evident in all parts of Prague, reflected in the submissive eyes of women and the sullen, bitter eyes of men.

The death of Reinhardt Heydrich, the protector of Czechoslovakia, had been announced the day before, and already three hundred and fifty innocent men and women of Prague had been executed in wholesale retaliation.

In the imposing inner sanctum of Reich's Minister von Bock, far from the bloody street scenes, far from the tragic-eyed men and women of Prague, this matter of reprisal was being discussed coldly, deliberately.

Marshal von Bock was pacing slowly in front of his magnificent mahogany desk. On the wall behind the desk an immense swastika flag hung from the ceiling to the floor. The marshal was a short, gross man with a distended stomach and heavy, oily jowls. In his elaborately emblazoned uniform he looked ridiculously like a strutting pigeon; but there was nothing ridiculous about the marshal's pale, ruthless eyes and thick, cruel lips.

"This affair," he was saying in his soft, slightly lisping voice, "presents an interesting psychological problem, do you not agree Herr Faber?"

He paused, hands clasped behind his back, and peered down at the figure sprawled comfortably in one of the room's thickly padded leather chairs.

Michael Faber glanced up at the

marshal and smiled faintly. His lean face was tranquilly relaxed and his yellow-green eyes were sleepily veiled.

"But, of course, *Herr Minister*," he drawled. "If you continue the execution of innocent citizens we shall soon know exactly how far a people may be goaded. That should be valuable clinical information if any of us are here to appreciate it."

Marshal von Bock folded his pudgy arms and shook his head despairingly.

"My good *Herr Faber*," he said woe-fully, "you still have your curious American respect for the common people, do you not? After the things you have seen in Nazi countries you should realize that the people are but a helpless, unimportant mass of atoms. Those who guide and direct that mass of atoms are the only important human beings. You worry about the people of Prague, of Czechoslovakia revolting? Bah! That is ridiculous. We can grind them to powder under our heels and they will only whine for pity."

MICHAEL FABER lit his pipe and stared thoughtfully at the glowing match as smoke swirled around his head. His hunter's eyes caught the reflection of the match and gleamed warmly under lowered lids.

"What you say, marshal," he said, "is undoubtedly true. But what happened to Heydrich can happen, one day, to any of us."

A flicker of amusement touched his face as Marshal von Bock suddenly mopped his damp brow.

"Bah!" the Minister said sharply. "That was an accident." He glanced nervously over his shoulder and resumed his slow pacing. "That was only an accident," he repeated. "When we have completed our reprisals against these swine they will know better than

to try a thing like that again."

"Will the reprisals consist simply of murdering more Czechs?" Michael Faber asked.

Marshal von Bock stopped pacing and regarded Faber thoughtfully.

"The word, *Herr Faber*, is not 'murder'," he said softly.

"A slip of the tongue," Michael said lazily.

"Your tongue seems to be in the habit of slipping, *Herr Faber*," von Bock said. He folded his arms carefully. "You have been helpful to us in numerous ways, but please remember that we could, if necessary, do without you, *Herr Faber*. In Nazi Germany no one man is important!"

Michael raised his right arm languidly.

"Heil Hitler!" he murmured.

Minister von Bock flushed and glanced nervously about.

"I did not of course mean to include our Fuehrer in my statement," he said weakly. "I meant that only the Fuehrer is important in Nazi Germany. It was a slip of the tongue."

Michael's eyes glinted with amusement.

"Bad habit," he observed.

Marshal von Bock glared sharply at him, and then he resumed his pacing, mopping his perspiring brow as he padded back and forth in front of his desk.

"Let us forget this conversation," he said. "We were discussing reprisals. What our future policy will be I do not know. That is a matter for the Reich State to decide. I am expecting word from them any day now as to how to proceed. When a man as important as Heydrich is assassinated, the means of reprisal is for the Fuehrer to decide. Do you realize that this assassination has given encouragement to all enemies of the Reich in Europe? If drastic and

effective reprisals are not instantly undertaken a wave of this type of revolt might sweep the continent. And our enemies abroad are mocking us. We must show them, too, what happens to all enemies of the Reich, whether in Europe or across the seas."

As the marshal finished speaking the heavy double doors of the office opened and an under-officer entered and saluted.

"Someone to see you, *Herr Minister*," he said.

"Who is it?" Marshal von Bock said. "If he does not have an appointment send him away."

"It is a woman, *Herr Minister*. She asked me to give you this." The under-officer handed the minister a card.

Marshal von Bock glanced at the card and his eyes narrowed.

"Send her in immediately," he said. When the under-officer left he turned to Michael and his fat oily face was agleam with excitement. "She is from Berlin, from the office of Heinrich Himmler."

THE door opened again and a tall, red-haired girl entered the room. Her features were as cold and white as marble, and her cool gray eyes were without expression. She was beautiful, Michael noticed, with an imperious, regal beauty that was without warmth or appeal.

She walked slowly toward von Bock and her slender legs and body moved in a flowing poem of motion.

The minister drew in his paunch and snapped to attention. His right arm shot out.

"Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler!" the girl answered.

"Heil Hitler," murmured Michael, around the stem of his pipe.

The girl glanced down, seeing him for the first time. Her cool gray eyes

studied him carefully, deliberately, then she turned her gaze back to von Bock.

"You are Reich's Minister von Bock?" she asked. Her voice was clear and firm, with just the faintest trace of an accent.

"That is right," von Bock answered. "Won't you be seated?"

"I prefer to stand. I am Marie Kahn, from the office of Reich's Deputy, Heinrich Himmler. I have an important communication for you in relation to the assassination of Upper Group Leader Heydrich. Who is this man?"

She gestured sharply toward Michael, without looking at him.

"He is the American, Michael Faber. He has done much to help us in the past two years. You may speak before him."

The girl glanced down at Michael and studied him coolly. A faint sneer touched her thin, finely molded lips.

"The American renegade, eh?" She turned back to von Bock. "How can you be sure of a man who is a traitor to his country?"

Michael Faber looked up at the girl and his thin, scholarly face was cynically amused. But as he studied her there was no amusement in swirling depths of his hunter's eyes.

"You are an Austrian, are you not?" he asked. His keen ear had placed her faint accent.

A spot of color appeared in the girl's marble-white cheeks.

"What concern is that of yours?"

Michael spread his hands in a careless gesture.

"None at all," he smiled lazily. "But how, my dear *Fraulein*, can the Nazis be sure of your fealty, since you are admittedly an Austrian."

The girl turned furiously to von Bock. Every line of her slim body was rigid with anger.

"This I will not stand. He has questioned my loyalty to the Reich, to

our Fuehrer. I will make a report of this incident, *Herr Minister*."

"Now, now," von Bock said soothingly, "we must not lose our tempers and fight among ourselves. The loyalty of both of you is unquestioned." He rubbed his pudgy hands together. "You have orders for me, Fraulein Kahn, and here we stand, wasting time in bickering."

THE girl squared her slim shoulders. Her gray eyes were alive against the whiteness of her face.

"Yes, *Herr Minister*," she said. Her voice was even and cold. "You are right. My message to you is this: In reprisal for the cowardly assassination of our beloved Reinhardt Heydrich, the village of Lidice will be reduced to dust. The men will be immediately executed, the women sent to concentration camps and the children will become wards of the Third Reich. That is all. The details and arrangements are completely in your hands, *Herr Minister*."

Michael Faber lit his pipe thoughtfully and his lean fingers were as steady as rocks.

"Why Lidice?" he asked, squinting upwards through the smoke at the girl. "It's such a pleasant little town, I've always rather liked it."

"Our Intelligence has discovered that the assassins took refuge there," the girl answered coldly. "They may still be hiding in the village."

"They might at that," Michael said thoughtfully.

"This is delightful," von Bock said musingly. "This is a fitting reprisal. We will erase the name of Lidice from the rolls of history and from the memory of man. Our dive bombers will leave nothing but a black scar in the earth as a reminder to our enemies of the fate of those who would stand against us. You may take back my

message, Fraulein. I will carry out the orders of my Fuehrer to the last detail. Lidice shall avenge the death of Heydrich."

"Heil Hitler!" Marie Kahn said.

"Heil Hitler!" barked von Bock.

Michael Faber tapped his pipe thoughtfully against his teeth. There was no expression on his lean face but there was a chilling light in the depths of his smouldering, yellow-green eyes.

"Heil Lidice!" he murmured softly under his breath.

CHAPTER III

ON JUNE tenth a strong motorized column roared along the concrete strip of road leading to the village of Lidice. In the lorries were scores of expectantly grinning Nazi storm troopers. Several light tanks brought up the rear of the procession. Above, a V-shaped flight of planes circled lazily against the blue of the late afternoon sky.

At the head of the swiftly moving column in the tonneau of an armored car rode Marshal von Bock and Michael Faber.

"You will see today a practical example of Nazi reprisals," von Bock said to Michael. "You will see what we can do when our anger is aroused." The marshal's hands were clasped comfortably over his protruding stomach and he surveyed the passing countryside with placid, contented eyes. "I think it would be a good idea, *Herr Faber*, if you would broadcast to the people of America what you will see today. Yes, I think that would be a very good idea." He turned to the young party Leader seated to his right. "Do you not think that would be a good idea, Captain Mueller?"

Captain Mueller was a heavily built young man with stone-hard features

and cropped blond hair. He sat forward on the edge of the seat, his strong brown fingers gripped tightly together.

"Why tell them about it?" he said harshly. His voice was thickly guttural. "They will have first hand experience with our methods very soon."

"You disagree with me then?" von Bock said mildly.

"And what is your opinion, *Herr* Faber? After all you are the propaganda expert."

Michael glanced sideways at the tensely set face of the young captain. There was an amused glint in his eyes.

"I'm afraid I must disagree with our young Captain," he said. "A thing like the annihilation of Lidice will make a deep impression on our enemies. They will never, never forget it, you may count on that."

"That is good," Captain Mueller said.

"That is wonderful," Michael said quietly.

The motorized column reached the quiet village of Lidice within the half hour. Marshal von Bock's car rolled through the single main street scattering chickens and occasional live-stock. The remainder of the column stopped at intervals along the dusty road and grim-jawed, heavily armed storm troopers spilled out eagerly.

A child ran screaming into a small cottage and the door was hastily slammed. Frightened, despairing faces were visible occasionally at windows of homes and shops.

"It will soon be over," von Bock said. He was picking his teeth contentedly. "The *roastbrauten* was underdone today," he observed thoughtfully.

Captain Mueller clambered from the car and soon his young strident voice could be heard bawling orders down the line of stopped vehicles.

"I think I'll take a look," Michael

said. "If I'm to tell the American public about this I shall want to be accurate."

Von Bock chuckled appreciatively.

MICHAEL stepped from the car and glanced swiftly down the line of lorries. The troopers were entering the houses at the far end of the village; already he could hear the tortured screams of women and children and occasionally the hoarse tragic shout of a man.

His lean face hardened and a merciless light flickered in his strange eyes. This was one more score to settle, one more crime to avenge.

With quick strides he crossed the dusty street and ducked between two buildings. The storm troopers were at the opposite end of the street, working down in his direction.

He ran along the path between the buildings. When he reached the rear of the building he vaulted a fence and climbed the rickety stairs built against the back of the flimsy wooden structure.

At the second landing he paused before a weather-beaten door and knocked rapidly three times. He paused and then knocked twice slowly.

There was silence beyond the door, then a cautious, shuffling step and the door opened a crack. The door was flung open then and Michael stepped quickly into a small room fitted as a laboratory.

A bent, white-haired man sat at a table littered with papers on which designs and mathematical symbols were scrawled. There was dazed, pathetic bewilderment in his mild blue eyes.

The man who had opened the door gripped Michael by the arm. Hot black eyes blazed in his tense face.

"For God's sake, Michael," he said,

"what is it? The shouts, the screams, the truck loads of troopers. What are the devils up to, now?"

"Their usual trade," Michael said bitterly. "Murder." He took the man's arm. "Paul, I have failed you. I wasn't able to get here to warn you. Von Bock has stuck to me like a postage stamp this last week. The Nazis are here now to annihilate Lidice in retaliation for that bomb that blew Reinhardt Heydrich to hell."

"I threw that bomb," the man said simply. "I am sorry that innocents must suffer, but throwing that bomb was the finest thing I have ever done. My bomb and Henri's bullets sent a monster out of this world. For that I am proud."

"Where is Henri?" Michael asked.

"He went to the other end of the village to get some tobacco." Swift alarm flickered in his eyes. "Is he—"

"I'm afraid he is in their hands," Michael said. "They started at the opposite end of the street. They will be here in a very short while. I am afraid that this is the end, Paul. There is no escape."

Paul glanced at the white-haired man sitting at the table.

"Doctor Schultz and I are ready to go," he said, "but you must not be found here. Go back and join von Bock. There is work yet for you to do. And you must remain alive to do that work. It is the most important work in the world. Go, quickly. When they find us—it will be all over in an instant."

"**WAIT,**" the white-haired man said quietly. He stood up slowly and his knees trembled under the burden of his frail, undernourished frame. There were grooved lines of suffering in the doctors' face but there was a dignity and nobility in his eyes that was as

clear as a beacon light over lashing waves.

"What is it, Doctor Schultz?" Michael asked gently.

"I can save one of you. In my last experiments with electrical dissemination of matter. I developed a device which renders opaque substances practically invisible to the naked eye." The old doctor paused thoughtfully. "I did not disclose the results of my experiments because I knew the Nazi regime would subvert my invention and use it for their own brutal ends."

"Do you mean," Michael asked tensely, "that you have a device that will make a physical substance invisible? Such as a human body?"

"Precisely," the doctor nodded.

"It seems incredible," Michael breathed.

The doctor peered over his spectacles.

"There was a time," he said, "when I was considered as a rather good scientist, you know. That seems a long time ago."

"Not long enough for the world to have forgotten your work in electrotherapy, Doctor," Michael said. "Crippled children who have been restored to health through your genius will never forget you."

"I am glad," the doctor said simply. "But there is not time to talk of such things now. We must work quickly."

"But you?" Paul said. "You could save yourself with this device."

"Save myself for what?" the doctor smiled gently. "There is no place for me in Nazi Germany. I am a healer. In Nazi Europe we need bomb-throwers, pistol-shooters, men of courage and strength. You two are such men."

"Thank you, Doctor," Michael said simply. He turned to Paul. "There is no time to lose. You must take this chance."

A sudden staccato burst of machine gun fire sounded from the street. A woman's scream, clear and terrible, pierced through the ugly roar of coughing death.

"They will soon be here," the doctor said quietly.

The eyes of Paul were boiling pools of rage and his hands were clenching and unclenching spasmodically.

"I must live," he whispered. "I must live. I must strike again and again at these swaggering swine. Nothing must stop me. That, I swear by my mother's cross."

The doctor hurried to a small closet and returned in an instant with a small compact device to which a metal head-band was attached. He slipped it down over Paul's head, adjusted the band firmly. There were two dials on the face of the small mechanism.

"The operation is simple, but there are not a half dozen men in the world today who could understand the principle," the doctor said quietly. "The dial on the left turns the mechanism on, the right turns it off."

The tumult in the street was growing louder by the second.

"There is little time left," Michael said.

The doctor snapped the left dial into position and a faint humming noise gradually sounded in the room.

MICHAEL watched tensely but there was no visible change in Paul's appearance. He forced his nerves into calmness. His ears heard the shouts and running steps of men alongside the building. There was so little time left. . . .

Suddenly the faint humming noise stopped. Michael looked sharply at the doctor. Had something gone wrong?

He swung about to Paul and an electric thrill shot through him.

Paul had disappeared!

No! His straining eyes made out a faint outline, a shadowy suggestion of a human form where Paul had stood.

"Can you hear me?" he asked quickly.

"Yes," Paul answered. "I feel no change."

Michael tensed suddenly as he heard booted feet pounding on the steps at the back of the building.

"Back into the corner," he hissed to Paul. "If I can I will get rid of them."

"There is no chance," the doctor said.

Michael saw that the doctor was holding a small revolver in his hands. There was a sad, slow smile on his seamed face.

"How a man lives is not always important," the doctor murmured, "but how a man dies is always important. Au revoir, my friend. The world is in your hands. May God give you strength and wisdom."

Without haste the white-haired doctor placed the gun against his side and pulled the trigger. He was smiling as he fell to the floor.

An instant later there was a clamor outside and a heavy fist pounded mightily against the door.

"Open, dogs!" a guttural voice snarled. "Open in the name of the Fuehrer."

Michael bent and took the gun from the doctor's hand. He wheeled toward the corner where Paul crouched, a faint, barely discernible shadow in the gloom of the room.

"Paul!" he whispered.

"Yes."

"The underground pass-word has been changed. It is now 'The time is near at hand.' Do you hear?"

"Yes. 'The time is near at hand.' I will not forget."

The door was trembling under the shattering impact of a heavy fist. A

hoarse, bestial voice cried:

"Smash it down!"

Michael shot a quick look at the door. It would hold for another few seconds but that was all.

"Meet me tonight at the transmitter," he whispered to Paul. "Luck!"

He stepped quickly to the door, gun in hand, and threw back the bolt. The door crashed inward and a gray-clad storm trooper lunged into the room, tripped and fell forward on his face.

"Ah! Impetuous youth," Michael murmured.

THE stocky, hard-faced Captain Mueller strode into the room, followed by three soldiers with drawn Lugers. The storm trooper who had lunged through the door was picking himself sheepishly from the floor.

Captain Mueller glared about the room, his pale eyes sweeping from the doctor's huddled figure to the gun in Michael's hand.

"What is the meaning of this?" he snapped. "You are getting yourself into trouble, *Herr* Faber.

"Trouble?" Michael said, raising one eyebrow. "For shooting enemies of the Reich? I hardly think so, my young Captain. I would suggest that you read again the Fuehrer's *Mein Kampf* and stop making ridiculous speeches."

A hot angry flush stained the thick neck of the captain. He glared savagely at Michael, then shifted his gaze to the body on the floor.

"Who is this man?" he snapped.

Michael shook his head sadly.

"I am surprised at you, Captain," he said. "This was the *Herr* Doctor Schultz. He wrote and lectured incessantly against the doctrines of the Nazi State."

Captain Mueller looked slowly about the room.

"Was he the only one here? I am

looking for a Paul Cheval. Our Intelligence reported that he was hiding here in Lidice." His pale eyes fastened on Michael.

"You haven't seen Paul Cheval, have you, *Herr* Faber?" he asked.

"That name is a familiar one," Michael said thoughtfully. "But I haven't seen the man. Possibly he slipped through your ranks and made an escape."

"Impossible!" Captain Mueller retorted. He glared about the room and there was a puzzled, suspicious expression on his hard features.

"Strange," he said. "I feel that he is here now."

"Disguised as one of your soldiers?" Michael suggested sarcastically.

Captain Mueller glared at him in rage.

"That tongue of yours will get you in trouble yet," he stormed. He wheeled to his men. "Come! We are wasting our time here." He gestured to Michael. "You had better come with us. Marshal von Bock will want an explanation for this matter."

Michael followed Captain Mueller to the street. He noticed that soldiers were pouring gasoline about the wooden bases of the buildings. A worried line creased his forehead. Paul was still in the doctor's laboratory and these buildings were veritable tinder boxes of combustion. . . .

Marshal von Bock was standing beside his car a pleased, relaxed expression on his swarthy oily face.

Captain Mueller saluted.

"Marshal, there is something—"

Marshal von Bock waved him away carelessly.

"Another time. Do not bother me with details." He took Michael by the arm and pointed down the street. "Is not that a pretty scene, my American friend?"

MICHAEL had steeled his nerves for the sight but an involuntary shudder shook him as his eyes moved over the spectacle of human savagery.

Hundreds of machine-gunned bodies were sprawled in the dust of the street like tragic, broken dolls. Storm troopers walked among the pile of human debris with fixed bayonets, the blades stained a dripping crimson red. Blood was everywhere, splashed on store fronts, sidewalks and street.

The women of the village were being herded into trucks like cattle; their children were stripped brutally from their arms and sent stumbling to the outskirts of the village.

Michael had seen ugly brutality every day he had spent in Nazi-dominated lands. But nothing he had seen equaled this barbarous spectacle. There was something cold-blooded and unclean about this wanton butchery of innocents, this savage despoiling of homes and children, the lusting, inhuman cruelty of this scene that brought the blood pounding to his temples.

Marshal von Bock was watching him carefully.

"You do not seem particularly impressed," he said.

Michael fought back his feelings, forced a mask of indifference over his face. He shrugged.

"It is simply a job well done," he said.

"That is right," von Bock said delightedly. "It is a job well done. The village of Lidice will be but a memory in a few hours. Not one man escaped and not one building will be left standing."

Captain Mueller said, "I am not so sure that no men escaped. I am afraid that one did."

"Who?" von Bock said sharply.

"Paul Cheval, a notorious saboteur and underground worker," Captain

Mueller answered.

"What makes you think he escaped?"

Captain Mueller looked uncomfortable. "It is just a feeling I have."

"Bah!" von Bock shorted. "You and your feelings. There is no place for mysticism in your work, Captain."

Michael was watching the wooden structure from which they had just emerged. Flames were licking up the wooden sides in greedy haste. The entire village would be a vast pyre for the men whose lives had been sacrificed in the name of the Third Reich.

Suddenly, through the curtain of smoke and flame that obscured the building, he saw a faint shadowy figure emerge. The faintly visible form paused for an instant, and Michael saw a shadowy arm raised in salute, then the vague shape moved rapidly away, disappearing around the corner of the flaming building.

"What are you looking at?" von Bock asked.

Michael smiled but his cat-like yellow eyes were as sharp and hard as pieces of flint.

"Nothing," he said, "nothing at all."

Captain Mueller ran a puzzled hand through his cropped hair. His thick face wore a bewildered scowl.

"There is something funny here," he said. "I still think the man we want has made an escape."

Michael smiled and patted the captain's beefy shoulder.

"Wouldn't surprise me if you were right," he said.

Captain Mueller ran a hand over his jaw and there was a thoughtful gleam in his eyes as he studied Michael Faber.

CHAPTER IV

THE dark of late evening had settled over the city of Prague. The guard in front of the Nazi Propaganda build-

ing was leaning against his rifle when Michael Faber arrived at the main entrance.

The guard saluted hesitantly.

"I thought you had gone for the day, *Herr Faber*," he said.

"Did you, now?" Michael said. "That proves that the best of us can be wrong, doesn't it? Will you open up, please?"

"But *Herr Faber*," the guard protested, "I have received very strict orders to leave no one in the building after hours unless accompanied by the *Herr Minister*."

"My dear fellow," Michael said, "the B.B.C. is at this moment broadcasting information which is vital to our armies. Are you going to stand in the way of the Third Reich's securing that information?"

"But no—"

"Then kindly open the door. You are a good fellow, Henry, but you must be careful about thinking too much. The Fuehrer you know doesn't like people who think. Thank you."

Michael paused in the doorway.

"By the way, Henry, who gave you the orders not to leave anyone into the broadcasting offices after hours?"

"Captain Mueller, sir. He brought an order signed by Marshal von Bock."

"I see. Excellent men, both. Good night."

Michael strode briskly through the darkened corridors of the building until he came to a small office on the first floor. He opened the door, snapped on a light and entered.

The small room was completely fitted as a sending and receiving radio station. Michael tossed his hat on his desk and sat down, frowning.

It was two o'clock in the morning. The previous afternoon he had witnessed the destruction of Lidice. Now, in a few minutes, he would receive a

code message, intermingled with a regular B.B.C. broadcast, giving him his next instructions.

The order of von Bock delivered by Captain Mueller, bothered him. He could easily enough arrange to have the B.B.C. messages sent in at another time, but the order might be an indication that he was no longer trusted. There had been definite suspicion in Captain Mueller's eyes and voice the previous day, and if he had communicated his suspicions to von Bock, there might be trouble. And that was putting it mildly.

Michael stood up and closed the door, then he switched on the powerful receiving set and adjusted the delicate instruments. In a moment the voice of the English announcer flooded through the room. It was a standard broadcast to the peoples of Europe telling the truth of what was happening on the major battle fronts, and Michael knew that hundreds of forbidden radio sets were transmitting those truths to thousands of tense, hopeful men and women on the continent of Europe.

HE GLANCED at his watch. When the hands stood exactly at 2:08 he leaned forward, and began scribbling furiously on a pad on the desk. He took the message down in English, a risky procedure, but knew he might not have time to code and decode it later. The only key to the code used by the B.B.C. was in Michael's head, and this single fact had been responsible, largely, for his success.

He covered several sheets with his fast scrawl. At 2:10 the code message stopped abruptly. Michael turned down the volume of the receiver and then carefully studied the message he had received from London Intelligence.

Hunched over his desk, he was so absorbed in his task, that he didn't hear

the slight creak as the door behind him slowly opened. But he felt the light draft on the back of his neck and his muscles tensed. One hand closed slowly over the scrawled sheets of paper he'd been reading. The scrawled sheet that bore the message from London Intelligence.

"Late hours you're keeping, *Herr* Faber," a cool clear voice said behind him.

Michael turned slowly in his chair, his face and eyes expressionless.

Marie Kahn stood in the doorway, a queer smile on her lips. She was wearing a crimson evening gown and red sandals. Her flaming hair fell to her bare white shoulders, framing the exquisite perfection of her classically molded features.

There was no expression on her marble-white face and her cool gray eyes studied Michael with an impassive, inscrutable regard.

"Your devotion to your work is very commendable," she said quietly. Her glance moved to the paper in Michael's hand. "That must be a very important communication, *Herr* Faber. You hold it as though your life depended on it. May I see it? Or is it confidential?"

"It's nothing important," Michael said. "Just a dull summary of the last B.B.C. report. Nothing that would interest a beautiful girl in a new evening gown, at least. But you shouldn't be thinking of tiresome details on a night like this. Dressed as you are your thoughts should be of moonlight and music and the lucky young man who should be holding you in his arms. Don't you agree, *Fraulein*?"

"A pretty speech," the girl murmured. "Something I hardly expected to hear from you. One good surprise deserves another, *Herr* Faber." She paused and said softly, "The time is near at hand."

Michael remained perfectly still; not a muscle moved in his lean face; but his brain was racing feverishly.

She had said, "*The time is near at hand!*"

And that phrase was the pass word of the underground fighters in Nazi-dominated Europe!

The words seemed to linger in the room beating against his ears. The girl was studying him impassively, but there was a faint smile curving her lips.

"I don't understand," Michael said. "Did you say that the time was near at hand?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry if I seem stupid," Michael said, smiling, "but I don't follow you. The time is near at hand for what?"

"I'm not sure," the girl said. Her eyes dropped again to the papers in his hand. "Perhaps that information is on those sheets of paper in your hand."

MICHAEL stood up suddenly, crossed the room and closed the door. He took the girl by the shoulders and stared deep into her gray eyes.

"I can't believe it," he said softly. "I'd have sworn you were with those devils, heart and soul. My congratulations. You are an excellent actress. But how did you know me?"

"One of our men in Berlin told me to see you," the girl said. "Your position is becoming very dangerous. Several officials have become suspicious of your work. There is the possibility of an investigation."

"I have been expecting that," Michael said. "But I still have a few weeks. And that's all the time I need."

"No," the girl said quickly, "the situation is more serious than that. That is why I came tonight to warn you."

Michael noticed that the girl's cheeks were tinted with warm color and there was fire and spirit in her deep gray eyes.

She was a woman, alive and glowing, and the mantle of glacial hardness had fallen from her, revealing a vital beauty that was thrilling in its perfection.

"I have been with Captain Mueller tonight," she said. "I left him a few moments ago at a cafe. He is bitterly suspicious of you and he has talked to von Bock. I think he has half convinced him that you should be jailed until an investigation is made. He told me that much tonight. I slipped away from him to warn you."

Michael's face hardened.

"I can't let anything stop me now," he said. "I've just received an order from London Intelligence. Probably the most important assignment I've ever gotten. I can't fail. I have to go to Berlin immediately."

"But how?" Marie demanded. "It is suicide now."

"Not quite," Michael said grimly. His yellow eyes were savagely gleaming. "I have had arrangements made for a plane for several days. I've been expecting this job. You've got to throw Mueller off my trail for a few hours at least. That will give me time to clear out of here. Can you do it?"

"I don't know," the girl said. "I will try."

"Good. It will take me only a few moments to destroy everything of importance here. Then I'll leave for the air-port. Where did you say you left Captain Mueller?"

The girl was opening her mouth to answer, when the door behind her opened suddenly.

"I hope I'm not intruding," a harsh, guttural voice said.

The owner of the voice was Captain Mueller. He stood in the doorway, filling it with his solid bulk. His hard, chiseled face was alight with sadistic amusement. He looked from Michael to the girl, and his pale eyes were sus-

piciously narrowed.

"You both seem nervous," he said slowly. "What is there to be nervous about?"

THE girl stepped suddenly away from Michael and placed herself beside the captain.

"Your suspicions were correct, Captain Mueller," she said coldly. "Let me congratulate you." Her eyes were expressionlessly cold as she regarded Michael. "This American is a spy. He has admitted it to me. He has just received a code message from the British broadcast. The message is in his hand right now."

"So," Captain Mueller said softly, "I was right." His eyes met Michael's in mocking triumph. "American swine," he said harshly, "you will pay for this treachery with your life." His hand closed over the butt of the Luger strapped to his side.

Michael said nothing and his lean face was bleak and hard. The girl met his smouldering gaze defiantly.

"It would be pleasant to meet you again," he said quietly.

"*Fraulein* Kahn," Captain Mueller said, suddenly. "Why did you come here to this American?"

"It was my duty as a member of the Reich," the girl said coldly. "You said that you were suspicious of him and I felt I could trick him into betraying himself more easily than you."

Captain Mueller grinned softly.

"You are very clever, *Fraulein*. I will see that your superior officer hears of your good work." His grin broadened. "I can admit now that at one time I was suspicious even of you."

"Such caution is commendable," the girl said quietly. "It is impossible to be too careful in these matters."

"We think alike, *Fraulein*," Captain Mueller said.

He drew the Luger from his holster and stepped past the girl toward Michael.

"You will come with me," he said to the American. "Any attempt to escape will be very unwise. I would enjoy shooting you in the stomach, *Herr Faber*."

"Why not the back?" Michael said ironically. His thin face was sardonically impassive, but the muscles of his body were coiled like tight springs, ready to strike at the slightest opportunity. "The back is the favorite Nazi target, you know."

"Dog!" Captain Mueller snapped. "I should break your stupid face for such an insult to our Reich."

Flushed with anger, he stepped forward and Michael saw, from the corner of his eye, the girl behind him reach out swiftly and pick up a heavy ash tray. Hope flickered in his eyes.

Captain Mueller caught the look and his face hardened suspiciously.

"What—" He broke off and wheeled as suddenly as a cat.

The girl was raising the ash tray over her head, ready to swing down with all her strength.

"So!" he snarled. "You are in with him. Did you think you could fool me?"

He swung the gun around to cover the girl. His face was brutal and dark. There was blood-lust in his small, pig-gish eyes.

For the first time his eyes were off Michael.

And Michael lunged forward, driving his hard shoulder with all his wiry strength into the back of the German officer's knees. The savage suddenness of the attack hurled the captain's heavy body to the floor in a tangled sprawl. Michael's fist closed on the German's gun wrist with vise-like pressure, as they rolled on the floor, locked

fiercely together.

The gun fell from Captain Mueller's hand, but before Michael could press his advantage, the German, with a savage twist, hurled him loose and staggered to his feet. He groped for the gun, but Michael lashed out with his foot, catching him in the shoulder and knocking him back against the wall of the office.

The girl kicked the gun out of reach as Captain Mueller lunged forward again. Enraged, he struck her with the back of his heavy hand across the face. A livid mark stained the whiteness of her face and she fell against the desk, her hands pressed to the angry red mark.

MICHAEL rose, cat-like, to his feet.

His narrow face was tense and the centers of his yellow eyes were smoky pools of savage rage.

"You are effective against women, Captain," he said softly. An inarticulate growl sounded deep in the German officer's throat as he charged forward, his fists swinging like mallets.

Michael side-stepped and snapped a hard left into his face. Captain Mueller's head jerked back and blood trickled from his mouth.

"Dog!" he roared.

He lowered his bullet-shaped head and rushed Michael, backing him toward a corner. Michael's left hand flicked out, again and again, like the darting tongue of a snake, blinding the charging German. But Captain Mueller's superior weight and strength drove the American relentlessly back until he was trapped in a corner of the room.

Ducking a round-house right swing Michael stepped in close and drove a hard, chopping right into the German's jowls. The punch packed behind it all of his wiry power and he felt its shock all the way to his elbow.

The captain staggered back, cursing madly through his blood-frothed lips. Michael stepped in again, recklessly. He knew he had to finish this quickly or the guards would be drawn to the scene by the noise.

He swung again, but Mueller blocked the blow and countered with a vicious right, Michael's guard was down and the blow landed solidly on his jaw, slamming him back against the wall. His head snapped back, crashing into the wall, and a million streaking lights exploded in his brain.

His knees sagged; his head slumped down on his chest. Through a red fog of pain he could dimly see Captain Mueller's stocky figure standing in front of him, gloatingly expectant.

He tried to lift his arms but he lacked the strength. His breath was a rasping pain in his throat. He knew he was through, that this was the end.

Captain Mueller turned suddenly and crossed the room with rapid strides. He bent and picked up the gun from the floor and turned back to Michael, the ugly blue hole in the Luger barrel centered unwaveringly on his stomach.

"You have lost, *Herr* Faber," Captain Mueller said, his breath coming heavily. "There will be no trial and execution for you. I will provide both."

Michael lifted his head slowly. He saw the bestial triumph in Mueller's eyes and he saw the twitching muscles of the hand that held the Luger; and he knew that he was facing death.

Suddenly an English voice roared in the room.

Mueller started and swung half way around. The red-haired girl, Michael saw, had flicked on the powerful receiving set; the voice in the room was that of the B.B.C. announcer. But the ruse had diverted, for an instant,

the German's attention; had given Michael one thousand-to-one chance.

And he took that chance.

GATHERING his fading strength, he hurled himself across the room at the German's surprised figure. Mueller wheeled, whipping the gun about to cover Michael. But he was too late. Michael drove into his gun arm, doubling the wrist inward and, as the two men crashed to the floor, a muffled explosion sounded.

The girl screamed as a hoarse, strained gasp followed the sound of the shot. She dropped to her knees and pulled Michael from the German's body. There was blood on his shirt front but it was from the oozing stain that was spreading slowly over Captain Mueller's chest.

Her lips moved in a silent prayer.

"Thank God," she murmured. She pulled Michael's head close to her and he opened his eyes and smiled faintly.

"Pleasant as this is," he said, "we'll have to postpone it for a while."

He stood up and turned down the radio.

"That was a neat trick," he said, looking down at her. "It undoubtedly saved my life, which isn't so important, but the work I have to do is important. Thank you for that."

He helped her to her feet.

"You fooled me again when he came in," he said. "I thought surely I'd misjudged you. I believed you when you said you'd come here to trick me into revealing myself as a British agent."

"It was the only thing I could do," the girl answered. "We are lucky he was stupid enough to believe me. Now we must plan to get you out of here. Do you think the guard could have heard the shot?"

"It isn't likely," Michael said. "The radio was on full blast and the sound

of the shot was muffled. Our luck is still holding."

He unfolded the paper of instructions he still held in his hand and studied it intently, a faint frown forming on his lean face.

"This is urgent," he said. "Every second, now, is precious. Get ready to leave. I'll dispose of the body in a less conspicuous spot. It won't be discovered until tomorrow morning. And by that time our work will be done."

Michael opened the door and glanced up and down the corridor. Seeing that the way was clear he bent and hoisted the heavy body of the dead German officer to his shoulder and stepped into the corridor. Lurching under his awkward burden he moved silently down the hallway until he reached an intersecting corridor. He followed this for several yards until he came to a small closet. Opening the door he dumped the German's body on the floor and covered it with a tarpaulin he found hanging on the wall.

Then he closed and locked the door. As he started back a sudden, chilling scream shattered the stillness. Michael froze in the darkness of the hall, his heart pounding. A thousand speculations seemed to crowd his brain.

The scream sounded again, a helpless, terror-filled cry of anguish that chilled the marrow in his bones. He hesitated for another second, his mind working with lightning-speed, then he broke into a charging run.

CHAPTER V

AS MICHAEL raced toward the sound of the scream he realized with sudden helplessness that he was completely unarmed. He had left the German's Luger lying on the floor of the radio room.

He charged recklessly around the

corner of the corridor. But the sight that met his eyes brought him to a sudden, incredulous halt.

Marie was standing in front of the open door of the radio room, her body stiffened in a posture of terror and a white mask of dread stamped on her lovely features.

But there was no one else in sight. There was nothing to account for her expression of terror. She was completely alone in the dimly lighted corridor.

As Michael started toward her, his eyes followed the gaze of her wide, horror-filled eyes and he suddenly saw what had attracted her frightened, fascinated stare.

In the gloom of the corridor, not a foot from her face, a heavy black gun was visible, menacing her with its grim blue-holed muzzle.

The gun was suspended in the air, five feet from the floor, a chilling, unnatural spectacle that apparently defied the laws of gravity.

Then Michael saw the shadowy hand that held the gun, and against the uncertain gloom of the hall he made out a vague spectral shape crouched before the girl's terrified figure.

A flood of relief washed over him.

"Paul!" he cried. He broke into a run. "Don't shoot; it's all right."

He saw the shadowy suggestion of a head turn toward him, then the gun lowered slowly. The girl leaned weakly against the wall. There was pathetic relief in her eyes as she saw Michael, but a wordless horror still lingered on her white features.

"Michael," she gasped. "What is it? Am I losing my mind?"

Michael put his arm about her slim bare shoulders and drew her close to him. She laid her head against his breast, sobbing.

"There's nothing to fear," he mur-

mured. "This is Paul Cheval, the man who eliminated Heydrich."

"But—"

"I know. You can't see him. But neither can the Gestapo, which is quite an advantage."

A FAINT humming sounded, grew louder, finally fading away to an indistinct murmur. Gradually the shadowy shape of Paul Cheval materialized. He stood before them, the gun still held in a hand at his side, his dark face grimly anxious. The invisibility head-piece was still strapped to his forehead.

Michael introduced him to the girl and rapidly explained to her how he had come into possession of the head-piece at the destruction of Lidice.

Paul glanced nervously down the darkened corridors.

"There is not much time for talk," he said. "The Storm Troopers of Captain Mueller are outside, waiting for a signal from him to enter. They will not wait much longer."

"I am leaving for Berlin immediately," Michael said. "You've got to hold the Troopers for a few minutes, Paul, while Marie and I slip out the back door. I have just received information from London that the second front will soon be opened on the continent. My orders are to contact every underground worker I possibly can with this news. We've got to strike at the Nazis with everything we've got. Rumors, assassinations, sabotage—all of these must be increased a hundredfold. We've got to give the Storm Troopers and Gestapo so much to do inside Europe that they'll take their eyes off the outside. Our job is to turn the continent of Europe into a cauldron of boiling trouble for the Nazis. Heydrich's death is only the start. From now on nothing must stop us."

Paul nodded. "Nothing shall stop us. The people of this region are ready for open revolt. Already fifteen hundred innocent hostages have been killed for the assassination of Heydrich. And more will be killed every day. The people have reached the breaking point."

"Good!" Michael snapped. "The Nazis are choking themselves to death with their own blood lust." He reached out suddenly and gripped Paul's shoulder. "When I finish my assignment in Berlin I am going back to London. Those are my orders. A camouflaged R.A.F. plane will pick me up when my work is done. But the fight here must go on. You must not falter, Paul. The second front is coming, but the dominated peoples inside Europe must prepare for it as carefully as our Allies outside Europe."

He broke off suddenly. Through the dark building came the echoing tread of swiftly striding booted feet.

"The Storm Troopers of Captain Mueller!" Marie cried.

"We must go!" Michael said softly. "This is goodbye, Paul. Hold them for a few seconds, at least. That will give us a start."

Paul's hand flicked up to the dial on his head-piece. The humming noise sounded and then his body faded slowly, almost imperceptibly, into the dark gloom of the corridor. His eyes were visible for a last instant, cold and gleaming in the blackness.

"I will hold them," he whispered. "Now go!" His formless, invisible hand touched Michael's arm for an instant. "Until we meet again." Then he faded away toward the sound of advancing troopers.

Michael took Marie's hand and led her swiftly through the blackened corridors, toward a rear door, which he knew would be unguarded.

A shot suddenly echoed through the building, followed by hoarse, confused shouts. Another shot rang out. And the sound of booted feet scrambling for cover could be heard.

Michael's hand gripped Marie's tightly as they slipped from the building into the narrow alley-way that flanked it. His thin face was set in hard lines; his yellow-green eyes flashed in the darkness.

The sound of another shot was heard; three more followed in quick succession.

"Michael!" Marie whispered tensely. "Has Paul a chance of escaping?"

"Perhaps," he said. "But if he doesn't, he'll send a number of Nazis to hell before they get him. Come, we have to hurry."

CHAPTER VI

THE sleek light bomber settled gracefully to a sprawling landing field on the outskirts of Berlin. The pilot cut the throbbing roar of the engines as the plane taxied to a stop facing the administration buildings of the field.

An attendant ran to the plane and adjusted a portable stairway to the gleaming side of the ship. Then he swung open the door.

"Thank you," Michael Faber said, smiling. "I see that you received my radio message. Is the car waiting?"

"Yes, *Herr Faber*," the attendant said, "everything is in readiness. Do you wish to leave immediately?"

"Yes. Speed is essential."

"I will take you to your car."

Michael strode down the sloping walk to the field. Marie Kahn followed him, walking carefully on her high-heeled evening shoes. She wore Michael's suit coat over her bare shoulders.

Michael held her hand tightly as they

hurried across the field to where a low-slung, powerful car awaited them.

"Our luck is still holding," he whispered. "Obviously Mueller's body hasn't been discovered yet."

The slanting rays of false dawn were coloring the blackness of the eastern horizon and, despite the season, there was a noticeable chill in the air.

The landing-field attendant opened the door of the waiting car with a flourish and stepped aside.

"You will be at your destination in twenty minutes, *Herr Faber*," he said. He smiled brightly. "I trust I have handled everything to your satisfaction, *Herr Faber*."

"Absolutely," Michael said. "And I shall see that word of your good work is passed on to your superiors."

"Oh, thank you, *Herr Faber*."

Michael helped Marie into the car and stepped in after her.

"Central Intelligence," he said to the driver, a stocky, blonde man wearing a corporal's uniform. "And hurry!"

The driver nodded without turning. The gears of the car meshed smoothly and it shot away from the field, rapidly gathering speed.

Michael looked down at the red-haired girl at his side and he smiled softly.

"So far, so good," he murmured.

"We have been lucky," the girl said. "Let us pray our luck holds."

"It must hold," Michael said grimly.

Nothing more was said until they reached the blacked-out Unter den Linden and turned off on a deserted side street that led to the Central Intelligence offices.

"Do you know any of the staff at Central?" Michael asked quietly.

"No. Why?"

"It might have helped if you did. The problem of getting in at this hour of the morning might be difficult. But

we'll manage."

"The office is in charge of Marshal von Umbreit," the girl said, "but I know nothing of him."

THE car rolled to a smooth stop a few moments later in front of a modern, white-fronted building. The building was completely dark and sandbags were piled high against the walls.

The driver got out and opened the door.

"Will that be all, sir?" he asked.

Michael noticed that a half dozen guards were on patrol in front of the building and that two of them had halted and were watching the car.

"Yes," Michael said, "that will be all."

He stepped out into the dark street and gave his hand to Marie. When she stood beside him on the sidewalk the driver saluted jerkily, got back into the car and drove off.

Michael took the girl's arm.

"Follow my lead," he whispered. In a louder voice, he said, "Come, *Fraulein*, there is not a minute to lose."

The words carried clearly in the dead silence of the night.

Michael saw the two guards moving slowly toward them, their booted feet sounding ominously on the hard sidewalk, but he pretended to be unaware of their presence.

With his hand on Marie's arm he strode briskly toward the main entrance of the Central Intelligence building. The booted feet broke into a run and a guttural voice cried, "Halt!"

With his foot on the first step leading up to the building's main door, Michael paused. He turned as the two guards approached at a lumbering run, rifles held in readiness.

"Ah, there you are," he said. "Just the men I wanted to see. Where the devil were you hiding yourselves?

Napping on post, I dare say." He turned to Marie. "Make a note of that, *Fraulein*. It's time steps were taken about such carelessness."

The two guards came to a stop, their mouths dropping in amazement. The larger of the two, a florid-faced, cold-eyed example of the Prussian type, stuttered speechlessly.

"What is the meaning of this?" he finally managed to bellow. "Who are you? What do you want here at this time of night? Where are your papers?"

"You want a lot of information, don't you?" Michael murmured. "Has it ever occurred to you that the British, too, want precisely that same type of information? No, of course it hasn't. My good fellow, we are here to see Marshal von Umbreit. If you can take us to him, please do so. If not, find us someone capable of performing that task. We have no time to waste."

THE guard's beefy face reddened.

"Marshal von Umbreit," he fumed, "will not be here for another five hours. I demand to see your papers."

Michael studied the man with cold, deliberate eyes.

"Would you be good enough," he said, "to tell me when you had your last discussion with the marshal about his plans for this morning?"

"I have had no discussion with the marshal," the guard said, flustered, "but it is his custom—"

"Bah!" Michael said in disgust. "How can we win a war handicapped by clods like you?" He whipped out his wallet and held his identification under the guard's nose. "I am a special agent from Marshal von Bock. 'Tell me, have you heard of Marshal von Bock?'"

"But, of course," the guard mumbled. "I—"

"This is *Fraulein Marie Kahn*," Michael snapped, "from the office of Heinrich Himmler. Have you heard of him?"

"Yes—"

"We are here to see Marshal von Umbreit in regard to the assassination of Upper Group Leader Heydrich. Is that name familiar to you, *Herr Dumpkoff*?"

"Certainly," the guard cried, his voice breaking slightly. "I—"

"You're progressing," Michael said gently. "Now," he said, his voice hardening, "will you take us to Marshal von Umbreit's office, or shall I call Himmler?"

"This is against my instructions," the guard moaned. "If anything happens—"

Michael turned to the red-haired girl.

"What is Himmler's private number?" he asked.

"No!" the guard almost shrieked. "Do not call him. It will not be necessary. I—I will take you to the marshal's office. Come with me."

Michael's hand closed tightly over the girl's as they followed the guard up the steps of the building to the main entrance.

The guard swung wide the heavy brass doors and preceded them into the darkened interior of the building. He drew a torch from his pocket and shot a beam of light down a wide, heavily carpeted hallway.

"Because of the blackout," he said, "we can have no lights."

"Oh, is that why?" Michael said. "I thought for a minute you were just being economical."

"Oh, no," the guard chuckled. "It is the blackout orders. It is silly, but it is an order."

"Silly?" Michael said. "You don't think the R.A.F. will come this way?"

"Of course not," the guard said. He led them down the wide corridor, past imposingly lettered doors, toward a heavy double door at the end of the hall.

"You seem confident about not being bombed," Michael said, "but how about Cologne? They tell me there was a raid over that city."

"British lies," the guard scoffed. "The German radio said no damage was done. One report said that only a few cows were hit by bombs."

"That's right," Michael said, "but those cows burned for five days."

"That's right," the guard smiled. "They burned for five—"

HE stopped smiling and looked sharply at Michael. He scratched his head slowly and a peculiar look of bewilderment spread over his blunt features.

"Five days," he mumbled. "That's a long time for cows to burn, no?"

"An ordinary cow might not burn that long," Michael said, "but naturally the superior breed of German cow would be a different matter."

They stopped in front of the double doors at the end of the corridor and the guard stepped aside.

"This is Marshal von Umbreit's office. You can wait for him here. Will you need my light?"

"Possibly," Michael said. "I'd better take it just in case. Thank you very much. I shall see that your superiors hear of your good work."

The guard's face beamed.

"Thank you, *Herr Faber*."

He started away and then turned back, his forehead wrinkled in perplexity.

"I do not mean to be disloyal," he said, "but five days is still a long time for cows to burn." With an embarrassed frown he wheeled and marched

back down the corridor.

Michael watched until he opened the building's brass doors and disappeared into the street, before drawing Marie into Marshal von Umbreit's office and closing and locking the door.

Marie leaned weakly against the wall and laughed hysterically.

Michael took her by the shoulders and shook her roughly.

"Stop it!" he said tensely. "The big job is still ahead of us. Get hold of yourself."

"I'm sorry," Marie said, pressing her hands to her face. "I'm all right now. But sometimes I have the feeling that something inside of me is ready to snap. I've had that feeling many times in the last two years."

"I know," Michael said softly. He lifted her chin with his finger and smiled into her deep gray eyes. "I've felt that myself. It's not pleasant. But then neither is the thing we're fighting against pleasant."

"I'm ashamed of myself," the girl said.

"You haven't any reason for being," Michael said quietly. "You've been magnificent. But you can't fold now. We still have a job ahead of us."

He flashed the torch about the large, luxuriously appointed office. Under the inevitable swastika there was a huge mahogany desk in immaculate order.

Michael crossed to the desk and studied the drawers for an instant.

"It wouldn't be in a drawer," he muttered. Nevertheless he tried the drawers, but all were locked.

"You haven't told me what you're looking for," Marie said.

"I'm after a roll of film," Michael answered. "Our Intelligence learned that the Germans had photographed the camouflaging that has been done on the French coast. These films are in microscopic scale. With special repro-

duction apparatus they can be blown up into eight by ten photographs. It is extremely vital that these films reach British hands. The entire plan for the second front depends on discovering what areas are camouflaged. Aerial photography isn't completely satisfactory, so the only alternative is to borrow the actual small scale German films. And that's just what we're going to do."

"Have you any idea where they are?"

"Roughly, they're in this office."

HE played his torch over the walls and ceiling and then inspected the desk again.

"Hardly in the desk. Too easy to steal." He frowned. "But there'd be no point in hiding them. The logical place would be an easily accessible repository that would be burglar proof."

"A wall safe?" Marie suggested.

"Probably," Michael nodded.

Marie turned suddenly and swept back the swastika from the wall.

"This is what you want, then. This is a favorite place of concealment in German offices."

Michael saw a small steel wall safe set in the bared wall. He stepped quickly to it and slowly turned the dial with his long, sensitive fingers.

"I have the combination," he murmured. "It was obligingly furnished by one of our workers here."

For several seconds he spun the tiny gleaming dial, then he pulled suddenly and the door swung noiselessly open. He pointed the flash into the small dark interior and saw several sheafs of paper and, at the far end of the safe, the object for which he was searching. A tiny roll of films.

"We've done it," he said excitedly.

He removed the films, checked them carefully but hastily, then shoved them into his trouser pocket. His lean face

was gleaming with triumph.

"By dawn we'll be flying for London," he cried. "We've got to leave immediately. Every second is working against us."

He turned back to close the wall safe. When he had closed it and drawn the swastika back into place he wheeled to the girl.

"Every step takes us nearer England," he said tensely. "We mustn't falter."

"We won't," Marie said.

Michael took her arm and started across the floor. Suddenly lights flashed on in the room. From overhead and wall sockets bright bulbs blazed into brilliance.

Michael's body froze in a crouch. He jerked Marie to a stop.

"Something's wrong," he whispered. "We'll have to find another way out."

Hardly had the words passed his lips when the great double door of the office swung inward, and the short, pigeon-puffy form of Marshal von Bock stepped into the room.

Two Storm Troopers followed him, Lugers drawn.

Von Bock's thick lips were curved in a sadistic smile. But his eyes were angry and cold.

"How fortunate we discovered your little game, *Herr Faber*," he said in his soft, lisping voice.

CHAPTER VII

FOR an instant there was complete silence in the room. The tension grew until Michael gradually relaxed and allowed a slow ironic smile to light his pale, thin features.

"What a suspicious nature you have, Marshal," he remarked mildly. "Please tell those determined men with you to put their guns away before they shoot someone accidentally."

"They will not shoot anyone by accident," von Bock said significantly. "Your clever tongue will not save you this time, *Herr Faber*. You have reached the end of your very long rope. I have just seen the body of Captain Mueller."

"Gracious," Michael murmured. "Is he dead? What happened to the poor chap?"

"Stop stalling!" von Bock snapped. "You killed him. I know that. And it will be our pleasure to execute you as a British agent. Or is it America you're working for, *Herr Faber*?"

Michael shrugged. "That's a technicality, isn't it? What difference does it make?"

Von Bock nodded to the two Storm Troopers.

"Search him."

The two men went over Michael carefully. They handed the roll of film to von Bock along with his personal effects.

"I think I know what this is," von Bock said, studying the film. "Yes, it is very fortunate we stopped you before you left Europe, *Herr Faber*." He turned his round head slightly and studied the red-haired girl. "Your presence here, *Fraulein Kahn*, I find rather puzzling. Perhaps you can clear the doubts that are plucking at my mind."

"There is nothing puzzling about my presence here, Marshal von Bock," the girl answered coldly. "Captain Mueller and I were working together to trap the American. Unfortunately we underestimated our opponent. He shot Captain Mueller with his own gun and forced me to accompany him here because I knew the layout of the building. I imagine he intended to kill me later."

"What a harrowing experience for you, *Fraulein*," von Bock said mildly.

Michael risked a quick glance at the

marshal, but it was impossible to tell from the man's expressionless, moon-like face what he was thinking.

He paced slowly back and forth, tugging at his fat under lip.

"I must make a report of this matter personally," he said thoughtfully. "Marshal von Umbreit must be notified immediately." He turned again to Marie. "I shall leave the American in your hands. I shall leave these two men with you, however, for he might become troublesome." He nodded to one of the Storm Troopers. "Tie his arms behind him and watch him carefully. He is very clever."

With a cynical wave of his hand to Michael, he stepped from the room, closing the door after him.

"You have your orders," Marie snapped to the Troopers. "Bind his arms."

AS the Nazi soldiers knotted a belt about his wrists, Michael nodded slowly to the girl. She turned away and removed his coat from her shoulders, tossed it over a chair.

"Do either of you have a cigarette?" she asked of the Storm Troopers.

Michael smiled faintly. The girl was acting her part admirably. This was obviously a trap by von Bock to see if she had been telling the truth. Probably the marshal was waiting outside the door with a dozen men. If she made the slightest move to help him it would cost both their lives.

One of the soldiers offered her a cigarette and held a match until the tip was glowing brightly. She blew a cloud of blue smoke into the air and faced Michael, a cool smile curving her lips; but there was an anguish in her gray eyes that she could not conceal.

"So," she said softly, "you thought you could fool the Gestapo indefinitely!"

Michael shrugged.

"We all make mistakes. I made one in forcing you to accompany me. Had I gone on alone I would probably have been successful."

Michael hoped that von Bock heard that much.

"I—" The girl started to speak, but she stopped suddenly. A tense, startled expression spread over her white features.

The Storm Troopers noticed the sudden change.

"What is it?" one of them demanded. He raised his gun and glanced about the room with suspicious eyes.

Michael raised his head slightly. A fierce, exultant hope was pounding through his veins.

For he could hear distinctly a faint humming sound in the large office and from the corner of his eye he saw a shadowy shape moving toward the girl. She obviously had heard the sound and had recognized it as did Michael.

Paul Cheval, the one man to survive the horror of Lidice, was in the room, a grim phantom of vengeance and retribution!

This was one development that von Bock hadn't planned when he had set this little trap.

"It is nothing," the girl said quickly. "I—I've been through so much in the last few hours that my nerves are jumpy. I thought I saw the figure of a man on the other side of the room."

BOTH Troopers turned in the direction she indicated and at that same instant the stocky, black-browed figure of Paul Cheval materialized beside the girl. With a swift rush he lunged at one of the soldiers, ripped the Luger from his hand. He shoved the man away from him and swung the gun to cover the second Trooper.

"Drop your gun!" he said. His voice

was like thin ice cracking. There was no mistaking the chilling intention in his hot, black eyes.

The soldier dropped his gun to the floor with trembling fingers.

Marie stepped quickly to Michael's side and went to work on the belt that was strapped about his wrists.

"Hurry!" Paul Cheval snapped. He swung one Nazi about and brought the barrel of his gun down across the man's temple. He sagged to the floor like a damp sack of oats. The other Trooper opened his mouth to cry out, but Paul rammed his gun, butt-deep into the man's stomach.

"One squeak and you die," he whispered.

The Nazi's eyes circled in terror, whites gleaming, but his mouth clamped suddenly shut.

Michael felt his bonds giving, but before he could slip his wrists free, the door of the office burst open and von Bock strode into the room. He was alone, but he held an unwavering Luger in his hand.

He saw Paul and his face went blank with amazement.

Paul jerked his gun up, but von Bock fired first. The bullet slammed into Paul, knocking him about in a half-circle. He fell slowly to the floor, his face a mask of agony. Blood stained his shirt and his face was an ashen gray. Desperately he tried to raise the gun in his hand, but it slipped from his nerveless fingers as he slumped to the floor.

Von Bock swung around to cover Marie.

"So!" he snapped harshly. "You were in with him!"

He strode across the room on his thick, stubby legs, flushed with anger.

"I caught you attempting to free him," he said. "For that you will die with him, *Fraulein*."

Without taking his eyes from the girl, he signaled to the Trooper who was still on his feet.

"Drag the swine I shot from the room. I don't like the smell of fresh blood."

The Trooper put his hands under Paul's shoulders and dragged him across the floor and out of the room, slamming the door after him.

"Now," von Bock said harshly, "we will see, *Fraulein*, if your tricks will work on me. We have been altogether too lenient in dealing with enemies of the Reich. From now on, we shall be more firm."

He shifted his gun to his left hand as he spoke. Then he stepped forward and slapped the girl savagely across the cheek.

"That, *Fraulein*, is only the start."

"You inhuman beast!" the girl cried.

MICHAEL said nothing, but his face was set and pale. He was working desperately at his bonds. The girl had loosened them, but not enough to free his wrists. If only he had time . . .

Von Bock sauntered slowly over to him. His thick lips were smiling grimly.

"You have made quite a fool of me, *Herr* Faber," he said. "My superiors are going to wonder how you were able to deceive me for over two years. It is possible that I may be demoted because of you. You were very clever. Many times you must have been laughing at me, *Herr* Faber."

His face clouded suddenly with bitter rage and the veins at his temples throbbled visibly.

"Didn't you laugh, *Herr* Faber?" he shouted, his voice hoarse and ragged.

Michael smiled and shook his head.

"I never laughed at you, *Herr* Marshal," he said. "But many times I pitied you."

"Pity!" Von Bock's voice shook with insane rage.

He drove his right fist suddenly into Michael's face. The unexpectedness, rather than the force of the blow staggered him and he slumped to his knees. Blood streamed from his lip.

But as he fell he strained desperately at the belt about his wrists and he felt it give slightly. On his knees before von Bock he slipped one hand free. As his other hand came loose he dropped his head to his chest to hide the elated expression on his face.

"That is a fitting posture for you," von Bock snarled. "On your knees, head bowed before the *Herrenvolk*."

He raised his booted foot, but as he kicked at Michael's face, Michael shifted slightly and von Bock's leg shot across his shoulder. Michael ducked swiftly and his hands shot out, grabbing the marshal's other leg.

A savage jerk brought the German's portly figure crashing to the floor. Michael lunged for von Bock's gun hand, but the Luger had dropped to the floor in the fall. The marshal squirmed on top of Michael and dug his thumbs into his eyes.

"You dog!" he cried. "I'll tear your eyes—"

A shot sounded. And the marshal's voice faded into a cracked, choking bleat. He rolled off Michael's body and his short legs pumped wildly, spasmodically for an instant and then they were still.

Michael climbed weakly to his feet.

Marie held the marshal's Luger, and a wisp of smoke was trailing from the muzzle of the gun. She brushed a lock of hair from her white forehead and leaned limply against the desk.

"I shot him in the back," she said dully.

Michael took her shoulders and shook her gently.

"Forget that," he said quietly. "Never think of it. It was simply something you had to do. Now pull yourself together. We've got a million-to-one chance to get out of here, but we can't waste a second."

He dropped to his knees beside von Bock's body and transferred the vital roll of film to his own pocket.

Then he led the girl to the door and opened it cautiously. The corridor was deserted. Michael's chief worry was the Storm Trooper who had carried out Paul's body. He should be back on the scene any minute.

"Come on," he said. "This is our only chance."

HE closed the door and, with Marie at his side, strode down the long carpeted corridor to the double brass doors that led to the street. His heart was hammering in his throat.

Opening the door boldly, he stepped out into the cool gray dawn. Instantly two guards confronted him. One of them was the florid-faced soldier who had originally let them in.

Michael nodded casually to him and gave his arm to Marie.

"Glad to see you're on the alert," he said, smiling.

The guard made no move to let them pass.

"I heard two shots from inside," he said. "The marshal instructed me to let no one into the building after he went in."

"Quite right," Michael said. "Important things have transpired here tonight. Do you realize the Heydrich's slayer was here tonight?"

"No!" the guard gasped. He looked nervously about.

"He is dead now," Michael said. "Our courageous marshal dispatched him himself. I am carrying the message to Himmler."

He patted the guard on the shoulder.

"You have done your work well. I have already mentioned your alertness to von Bock. Now keep up the good work. Let no one in or out until I return. Do you understand?"

"Yes. But what did the Marshal von Bock say about me?"

Michael smiled at the guard.

"You know how he is. He's not saying much at all these days."

The guard looked bewildered for a while, but then an uncertain smile broke over his frown.

"Yes, that's right. He doesn't say much these days."

"He is practically silent," Michael said.

The guard laughed hugely without knowing why.

Marie said quietly, "We must hurry."

"Yes," Michael said, "we mustn't keep Himmler waiting."

He pointed to a black military car parked at the curb a half block from the building.

"Is that the marshal's car?"

Still smiling, the guard nodded.

"Thank you," Michael said. Holding Marie's arm, he descended the short flight of steps to the sidewalk and walked toward the marshal's parked car.

"Steady," he whispered gently to the girl. "Don't walk too fast."

The girl's hand tightened in his as she forced herself to match his casual stride. When they reached the car Michael opened the door and helped Marie into the front seat.

"I'll drive," he said. He glanced up at the light-tinged horizon thoughtfully. "We are still in time," he whispered. "The plane will wait another hour."

He stepped around to the other side of the car and opened the door. But as he was about to slide under the wheel

he happened to glance at the sidewalk and he saw several fresh drops of blood gleaming in the early morning light.

The trail of drops led from an alleyway that flanked the Central Intelligence building to the middle of the sidewalk. And there the trail stopped.

Frowning, he stared at the drops of gleaming blood.

Suddenly he tensed and a strange chill shot through his body.

Another drop had fallen to the sidewalk—*closer than the last!*

And a voice whispered, "Michael!"

MICHAEL strained his eyes and he saw the faint suggestion of a human shadow standing on the sidewalk. And as he watched another ruby-red drop of blood splattered at his feet.

"Paul!" he gasped. "How—"

"I am not dead. Von Bock's bullet went through my shoulder. Did you get him?"

"Yes. But, Paul, you're hurt."

"Not too badly. I shall live for awhile yet. I have one more job to do."

The voice was a weak, ghostly whisper, but there was an undercurrent of determination in those tones that was as definite as Death itself.

"Go!" Paul said. "Already you have delayed too long."

Michael felt a soft hand on his shoulder for an instant, then it was gone.

"Until we meet again," Paul's whisper came faintly to him.

"Paul!" Michael said desperately. "Where are you going?"

The reply came back, soft as a sibilant breeze, but its implications were as definite as a roaring storm.

"Berchtesgaden!"

Michael heard the faint word and his lean face softened. An ironic smile curved his lips and he raised his hand in a gesture that was at once a salute

and a farewell.

"Until we meet again, Paul Cheval," he said.

There was no answer.

Michael slid under the wheel and the powerful car roared away from the curve. . . .

Far above the tragic, hate-ruined

continent of Europe, screened by banks of drifting clouds, a black unmarked plane streaked northward toward the Isle of Britain.

Michael Faber looked down at the land far below him and his arm tightened about Marie Kahn's shoulder.

THE END

GINGKO PETRIFIED FOREST

WASHINGTON State boasts a truly romantic forest for those with imagination to pierce the past.

Gardens of the bygone, set with huge trees, lost their tropic verdure in the onrush of lava leaving only the skeletons of those giant trees, imbedded in crumbling lava rock and soil in the hills near the Columbia River.

Some ten to thirty million years ago those colossal trees were swept along in a Columbia basin lava flow, stifling them in its molten mass. Ten additional flows of lava, laid upon the skeleton of that ancient forest, have since been eroded away by wind, rain, and river action. Now close to the surface are marvelous opal logs, showing the exact structure of the wood, rings, and grain, cast in a medium more beautiful than agate.

The climate in which this far-distant garden flourished must have been similar to the present Inland Empire's temperature, but damp, because the Cascades had not yet been thrown up to catch the Pacific rain-clouds with their spurs. As a result the trees were of a type found now in

the Great Lakes district of the country, plus many Asiatic and semi-tropical varieties.

The Ginkgo for which the forest is named, is an oriental tree, a silver apricot, growing until the last century only in the sacred gardens of China. It is now used in this country for ornamental purposes. The only known specimens of petrified Ginkgo are found in this forest, 28 miles east of Ellensburg on the main highway near the Vantage bridge over the Columbia River.

About one hundred logs have been uncovered here. Besides the Ginkgo, there are three and four-foot Douglas firs. Maple has been found three feet through, and among the spruce and three kinds of elm are logs nearly two feet in diameter. Others unearthed include bay, locust, oak, sweet gum, birch, and blue beach. Foot mass, solidified into hard red stone, is found near the Douglas fir in some cases. Half a dozen specimens of hardwoods have not been identified with any present day species or with any known extinct species.

NEW USE FOR FARM WASTES

THE research division of the Department of Agriculture is always on the look-out for ways to increase the farmer's income. One of the latest processes to be discovered is a new way to remove iron and manganese from water by means of such farm wastes as corn cobs, corn stalks, straw, and sawdust. The process is covered by patent No. 2,269,315, issued to Gussie H. Nelson, Max Levine, and Daniel F. Lynch of the department's experiment station at Ames, Iowa.

First of all the specified farm wastes are boiled in a diluted solution of sulphuric acid. The mixture obtained is heated with caustic soda under steam pressure. The solution is then treated with dilute acid and a precipitate called lignin is

formed.

The lignin produced from corn cobs is used in the purification of water by adding one part lignin to one million parts of water from which the iron and manganese are being removed.

The water is then agitated and filtered through sand and other filters. After filtering, the inventors claim that lignin-treated water is freer from iron and manganese. Moreover, the lignin treatment is so effective that it will remove the iron even if the water only contains ten parts of iron to a million parts of water. On the other hand, the lignin process can be used to remove heavy concentrations of iron and manganese so that it can be used in the household or in industries requiring pure water.

LOST CITY of BURMA

The Japs stormed on until
they faced the legendary
Flame of Life; then all
hell rode the Burma Road



Death dropped down before that grim gateway

by EDMOND HAMILTON

JOHN TERRELL suddenly paused in his hasty preparations for departure, as the distant rattle of machine-gun fire was punctuated by two thunderous explosions. They shook the flimsy native hut to its foundations, and set the flickering gasoline lantern to swinging wildly. Then the machine-guns started stuttering again.

He knew what it meant. The Allied defenders of Lashio were blowing up the remaining warehouses of munitions, a warning that this vital junction of the Burma Road was falling to the Japanese. He could hear cries and crackle of flames and racing motors, out in the night.

"Where the devil is that crazy Burmese?" Terrell muttered as he crammed things into his pockets. "If he doesn't get back soon—"

The tall, lank American hastily buckled his pistol-belt over his civilian clothes. His lean, sober young face was taut with the sense of crisis as he grabbed up his pith helmet.

Brakes squealed outside, and then his native Burmese servant bounded in. The man's thin brown face was glistening with sweat.

"I have the spare cans of gasoline in the car, sahib!" he reported. "We leave now, pretty quick? The Japs are almost in town—the last people here are heading up the Road."

"We're going pronto," Terrell nodded. "But we're not going up the Road, Sigri. We're going to turn off it and head north."

Sigri's brown face expressed incredulity. "North? But there is nothing in the north but wild jungle and mountains and uncivilized tribes."

Terrell eyed the Burmese intently. "Isn't the fabled land of Yamaya supposed to be somewhere up there, beyond

the Shian River?"

"Yamaya?" The Burmese's eyes became round as he repeated the name. "But Yamaya is only a land of legend."

"But your people believe that legend, don't they?" Terrell persisted. "They believe that in that legendary northern land of Yamaya exists the Flame of Life?"

Sigri looked queerly uneasy. "The Flame of Life is only an ancient story. Many peoples tell that story."

"What is the Flame of Life supposed to be?" the American asked intently. "Is it a jewel, or an idol, or what?"

"I don't know," muttered the Burmese uncomfortably. "Tradition says only that it is a thing of supernatural powers which lies in the lost land of Yamaya. It is only a superstition."

"But that superstition is strong in the East, isn't it?" Terrell demanded. "If anyone could secure that Flame of Life, its possession would give him vast influence over the eastern peoples, wouldn't it?"

Sigri looked scared. "Terrell Sahib,



you surely are not planning—”

Terrell reassured him quickly. “All I’m planning right now is to get away before the Japs catch us. And we’re going north. We’d better—”

He was interrupted by a third and louder explosion. The hut shook as though to an earthquake.

“They’re blowing up the last warehouses now!” Sigri cried.

“Out of here, then!” Terrell exclaimed.

They ran out of the hut into the hot, steamy blackness of the tropic night. The battered, topless car whose spare cans Sigri had filled with gasoline was waiting outside the door. But, for a moment, Terrell was spellbound by the unearthly spectacle of Lashio tonight.

THE war-gods were trampling here!

Red flames were spouting from scores of the flimsy buildings, casting a lurid glare high in the heavens. Shells were slamming monotonously into the huddle of burning streets, and the whining roar of diving Jap planes was sequenced by the crash of bursting bombs. Burning wreckage flew skyward a block from where they stood.

Lashio was falling—but not without savage resistance even in this final hour of its doom. Down at the southern edge of town a few 105s were still booming, and the constant crackle of machine-guns told of the outnumbered Chinese, British and Americans who were determinedly taking toll of the advancing hordes of Nippon.

“That’s only a rear-guard left to cover the main retreat up the Road,” Terrell said tensely. “They can’t hold for long.”

His fists were clenched, his lank figure taut with fierce desire to go down there and join those fighting men in their last stand. But Terrell conquered that tugging emotion.

“Our job is to get away to the north,” he said harshly. “Come on!”

Sigri leaped behind the wheel of the car and gunned its motor. Terrell jumped in beside him. The car sped up a street of flaming shacks, twisting to avoid shell-craters and fallen debris.

Shadowy shapes of looters skulked in the burning town but most of its inhabitants were already miles away, streaming up the Road toward China. Smashed trucks and empty shell-cases littered the way.

They were at the north edge of town, where the Road wound out into the hills, when a figure leaped out into their headlights.

“Hold it, Sigri—that’s a girl!” exclaimed Terrell hastily.

The girl came running to Terrell’s side as the car halted. She looked absurdly small in her khaki shirt and short skirt. Her dark head was bare and there was a smudge of grease on her firm little chin.

“You’re an American?” she cried to Terrell. “Thank Heaven! I’m Ruth Dunn, nurse with the American hospital unit. I’ve two wounded men I have to get up the Road, and my ambulance smashed its axle.”

Terrell now saw the men behind her. One was a haggard youngster in the slate blue of the Royal Air Force, his arm in a sling. The other was a Chinese officer with an imperturbable olive face, who leaned on a makeshift crutch as he puffed a cigarette.

“They’re Lieutenant Aleck Harris, and Captain Yuan Chi of the Route Army,” Ruth Dunn continued eagerly. “I can make them comfortable among the supplies in your back seat.”

“Sorry, but I’m not going up the Road,” Terrell reluctantly told the girl. “I’m forking off it a few miles from here and heading north.”

The nurse’s brown eyes grew stormy

and scornful. "You know the Japs will drive on up the Road and you figure the northern jungles will be safer—is that it? Well, you *can't* go north—these men can't be left here to be slaughtered."

Terrell set his teeth. He had never faced a harder task than to leave this girl and the two wounded men here in doomed Lashio.

But he had to do it, he knew. The mission upon which he was engaged was too all-important to be thwarted by humanitarian impulses.

"It's impossible," he said stonily. "Drive on, Sigri."

The Burmese hesitated. "Maybe after all we had better go up the Road than north, sahib?" he suggested hopefully.

Sigri didn't want to go north, Terrell could see. His mention of the legendary land of Yamaya, of the fabled Flame of Life, had roused the man's superstitions. That was why Terrell hadn't told Sigri the direction they would take until the last moment before departure.

"You heard me," he rapped to the servant. "Get going."

Harris, the RAF pilot, stared at him incredulously, as though unable to believe that an American was actually deserting them. The Chinese officer puffed his cigarette without change of expression.

BUT Ruth Dunn, her face white with anger, suddenly acted. Before Terrell could realize her intention, she snatched the pistol out of his belt holster and leveled it at his head.

"We're going up the Road!" she blazed. "If you value your skin as highly as you seem to, you'll change your plans."

Terrell felt a shock of alarm and dismay. For a moment he meditated snatching to recover his gun.

But Ruth Dunn's snapping brown

eyes had such scorn and determination in them that he knew such a move would be fatal. She thought he had refused to help her because of cowardly solicitude for his own safety, and she wouldn't hesitate a moment to shoot him and take the car.

Boom! The crash of bombs suddenly dominating the death-throes of the burning town behind them put a period to the tense moment.

"If we don't go quick, the Japs get us sure!" shrilled Sigri.

"All right—get in," Terrell grated to the girl. "You hold the high card."

Ruth helped the limping Chinese and the Britisher with the shattered arm into the back seat of the car. She got in with them, sitting cramped amid the gasoline-cans and supplies back there.

"Straight up the Road to Kun-ming," she ordered Sigri. And added in the native Burmese tongue, "*Tik ao!*"

Sigri needed no command to go fast. The car rabbitted ahead along the gravel highway, away from the doomed town.

Terrell's thoughts were a confusion of dismay. He had to retrieve this disastrous situation somehow. He *must* get northward before the Japs cut off the way there, and forestall him.

If only he were a free agent, he'd go to any risk to help the American nurse and her charges. Those two men had been wounded fighting the common enemy of civilized nations. But he wasn't a free agent—and he couldn't tell these people why he wasn't.

Ruth Dunn was looking back, though the pistol still rested on her knee with its muzzle trained on Terrell's back. Her soft face was white in the lurid red glare of burning Lashio.

"It—it's like the end of the world," she said unsteadily. "Like a horrible nightmare."

"I have seen all this many times before, in China in the last five years," Yuan Chi said quietly. "We have retreated much from the Japanese. But very soon, I think that we will retreat no longer."

"Yuan's right—we'll be back here," gritted Aleck Harris. The RAF pilot's haggard face was grim. "And when we come back, we'll give them hell with bells on."

Terrell turned his attention back to the highway ahead. In the splash of the headlights, the wreckage of an evacuating horde strewn the way. Cases of supplies that had been abandoned, pitiful heaps of native possessions, a few straggling, dazed-looking Burmese.

But most of the Burmese populace was far ahead, streaming up the Road toward China in frantic flight from the merciless invaders. Somewhere up ahead, too, the Chinese and British and American commands were organizing a new line of resistance while the sacrificial rear-guard held Lashio to the last minute.

Gray mists were beginning to swirl up into the bobbing glow of the headlights. Dawn was not far away, Terrell knew. Then his heart jumped as he saw that they were passing the rude oxcart road that forked northward off the Road.

That was his own way! That rude trail led into the unmapped northern jungles that hid the thing he must find! But already they had passed the fork, were climbing on up the looping grades of the Road.

Terrell tried a desperate appeal. "Listen, I *can't* go this way! I've simply got to go northward."

Ruth Dunn's voice was a whiplash of contempt. "I never before realized there could be Americans like you. Worrying about yourself, when thou-

sands of men have died back there and are still dying."

Terrell groaned inwardly. If he could only tell this girl the truth and convince her of it! But he had purposely left all credentials behind, and she'd think his story merely a panic-born falsehood.

DAWN was filtering grayly through the mists. Level fingers of sunlight reached from the east and began to disclose the great shoulders of gray-green land across which the Road wound northeastward.

Almost instantly, as the protective veil of darkness was lifted, there came the whine of motors from the heavens behind them.

"Planes!" exclaimed Aleck Harris. "They'd be Japs, coming up to strafe the evacuation on the Road."

"Maybe they're American Volunteer fliers," Ruth said hopefully, looking back up at the misty sky.

"No chance—the AVG chappies' bases were all knocked out, after they'd smashed the Japs five times running," Harris replied. "I'm afraid we're in for it—"

Terrell yelled warning to Sigri at that moment. He had heard the drone of motors roaring suddenly louder and lower.

Two planes with the sinister emblem of the Rising Sun upon their wings were diving toward them. Machine-gun bullets stitched the gravel alongside them as Sigri swerved the car to the left.

The planes roared overhead—the Burmese driver frantically braked as Terrell shouted. It was not a moment too soon, for the stick of bombs exploded in geysers of spouting dirt just ahead of them.

Their car rocked from the blast, and Terrell felt gravel pattering down on them. The planes were roaring onward

in search of other prey.

Terrell saw his chance! Ruth Dunn was clutching at the door of the rear seat, to right herself. He reached swiftly back and snatched the pistol from her hand before she recovered her presence of mind.

"Now, turn around, Sigri!" Terrell cried. "Go back to that northward fork!"

"You coward!" cried the girl. And Aleck Harris rose in the seat, his face raging and his uninjured hand balling into a fist.

"Get back down there, both of you," Terrell barked, holding the gun. "I'm going north as I planned, and leaving you three here."

Frightened, Sigri had spun the car back to the fork they had passed but a few moments before. As they reached it, the Burmese uttered a hoarse cry and pointed back along the winding Road toward Lashio.

"The invaders are coming!"

The sun flooded everything with brazen light now. Terrell could plainly see swift gray scout-cars racing out of Lashio toward them. They were miles away, but coming fast.

"That means the Japs have bypassed our rear-guard holding Lashio," he muttered.

His eyes swung to the furious girl and the two wounded men.

"I meant to leave you three here to be picked up by our rear-guard when it evacuated, but I can't do that now," he said rapidly. "The Japs have gained the Road and they'd cut you down on sight."

"Why should you care about that as long as your own skin is safe?" Ruth flamed at him.

Terrell ignored her words. "You've got to go north with me, now. Not all the way—but I'll take you far enough that you may be able to cut east across

country to Kun-ming. It's the best I can do."

Sigri had swung the car into that oxcart road leading northward. Ahead of them loomed the green wall of the jungle that swallowed up this rude native highway. The car bumped and lurched in the ruts.

Terrell looked back tensely. Had those Jap scout cars sighted them? It didn't matter—sooner or later there would be Japs after them. He was forebodingly certain of that.

He looked ahead again. The unmapped wilderness of northern Burma was like a great ocean of jungle into which they were launching. Could he find in it the fantastic object of his desperate quest before he was forestalled?

CHAPTER II

Jungle Mystery

BROODING silence wrapped the hot, steamy green jungle. The grassy glare of the noonday sun, stabbing down through the lush foliage of the tropical forest, had driven the chattering monkeys and screeching parrots to the shade. Not even a vulture flew now across the wild, wooded hills.

But down in the green gloom of the jungle floor, the battered car chugged steadily northward. It was now following the bed of a small stream, dry and baking at this season. It seemed moving along a tunnel through solid vegetation, for towering teak and pyinkado trees drooped branches trailing with lianas overhead. Constantly, the vehicle detoured to avoid boulders in the dry stream-bed.

Terrell mopped perspiration from his face and looked anxiously backward, for the hundredth time during the last two days.

Ruth Dunn's soft lips tightened

scornfully. "You needn't be so frightened now," she said scathingly. "The Japs are not going to pursue a little party like this one all the way we've come."

"That," Terrell told her grimly, "is where you're wrong. There'll be a Jap party coming up this way after us. I know it."

Aleck Harris snorted disgustedly. "I say, you really do have the wind up, don't you?"

Terrell ignored the taunt, and the cool amusement in Yuan Chi's eyes. He'd become hardened to the detestation and contempt of his three unwilling passengers, in the last two days.

He had pushed relentlessly northward, in those two days. First by ox-cart roads between villages, then across a ford of the Shian River into the wilder northern jungles by elephant trails and dry watercourses. It had been tropical travel at its worst, with the menace of tiger and leopard and snake less hard to bear than the steamy heat and the insects.

By a miracle, the battered car had held together and kept chugging on. But they were now penetrating an almost uninhabited wilderness, having passed no village all this day. And the last spare can of gasoline had been emptied into the tank.

Sigri looked anxiously at him. "Pretty soon the car stops, sahib."

Terrell nodded. "There should be one last village of Kachin tribesmen close ahead, if my information is correct. I'm hoping to trade there for horses."

He looked a little uncertainly back at Ruth. "I'm going on north from there. The best chance for you three is to get horses, too, and strike east toward China."

"You don't intend to be bothered from here on by a couple of wounded

men, do you?" Ruth Dunn said bitterly.

"No, I don't," Terrell answered doggedly. "I can't be hampered by anybody."

"Not for the world would we hamper your mad rush to save your hide," Ruth said stingingly. "We'll stay in that village until Aleck and Yuan Chi are better able to travel."

"You mustn't stay there!" Terrell warned earnestly. "The Japs will be up this way after us very quickly."

"Really, old man, you must think the Mikado's whole army is invading Burma solely to do you in," scoffed young Harris.

At that moment, the jungle began abruptly to thin out as the car lurched around a bend of the dry stream-bed. They were entering a small man-made clearing in the great forest. But that fact was for the moment less arresting than the tremendous landscape they could see in the farther distance.

Jungle-blanketed hills rolled far away on all sides, a forbidding wilderness. Miles to the north, a great plateau shouldered up for nearly a mile above the forest floor. That brutal upthrust of the terrain ran east and west for many miles, and appeared itself to be swathed by tropic forests. It towered stark and mighty, dominating the whole vista.

"THE plateau of Yamaya!" gasped Sigri, superstitious awe and reverence leaping into his eyes as he stared. "The land of the gods!"

Terrell's pulse jumped. "Then the land Yamaya where the Flame of Life exists is supposed to be a plateau like that?"

Sigri answered fearfully. "The legends say so. But I do not know anything about it. I have never before been near it. No Burmese would dare

set foot upon the sacred plateau."

Aleck Harris was staring at the distant plateau in wonder. "Weird looking place, that. Hasn't it ever been explored?"

"Few white men have ever been up even this far," Terrell retorted. "The whole country north of here is a sort of unknown no-man's-land between Burma, Tibet and China."

"But I should think that a plane could—," began the British pilot.

"A plane couldn't land anywhere within hundreds of miles of here—there isn't a clearing in the jungle big enough," Terrell told him.

As he spoke, his eyes were intently scanning the frowning rock wall of the distant plateau. He noted a zigzag crack up its side.

"I think I see a way up there," he muttered. "If only—"

Yuan Chi was saying speculatively, "I've heard of the legendary land of Yamaya, and the Flame of Life. Tell me, Terrell—why are *you* so interested in those ancient stories?"

Terrell was spared an answer. A babble of shrill cries broke out close ahead. Their car was chugging toward a high bamboo stockade that enclosed a village of several dozen straw-thatched huts.

Brown native tribesmen in white loincloths and turbans were running with their bows and spears in answer to the alarm. Women who had been tilling the narrow belt of cultivated land around the jungle village were retreating hastily to the protection of the stockade.

"This is the last Kachin village," Terrell said rapidly. "That must be the headman coming. I'll do the talking."

The car was chugging into the enclosure, and creaking tiredly to a stop. Beside the thatched huts, there were a

few round "paltarais" or granaries for storing unhusked rice, a rude corral that held a dozen tough little hill ponies, and a small *hpoongyi-kyaung* or Buddhist temple.

The brown-faced tribesmen were chattering excitedly as they gathered around the car. Innumerable pariah dogs ran yapping through the crowd. To add to the din came an unearthly roar from a huge striped tiger prisoned in one of a row of bambo cages beside the flimsy little temple.

Terrell got out of the car and approached the headman, a withered oldster beside whom stood the shaven-headed, yellow-robed *hpoongyi* or priest. The American spoke in a northern dialect of the Burmese.

"We are friends come to trade! We bring knives, axes, things you need greatly. In return, we desire a few of your horses so that we may go on from here."

"We have horses," answered the headman cautiously. "But these things must be talked over first, in my house."

Terrell, despite his feverish impatience to move on, knew better than to try to hurry a Burmese in bargaining. He turned back to the others.

"We'll get the horses, all right—they always need steel tools," he said. "But it'll take a little time. You may as well come along into the shade."

AS Ruth Dunn and the two wounded men accompanied Terrell toward the biggest of the thatched huts, the girl looked at him curiously.

"How do you happen to know their language so well?" she asked.

"My father was a missionary to this country and I grew up here," Terrell answered. "That's why I was chosen—"

He stopped abruptly, and the girl stared at him puzzledly. They were now entering the cool dimness of the

big hut.

They seated themselves on brilliant-colored mats, and the headman and the *hpoongyi* sat opposite them.

"Is it true that there is a great war in the south?" the tribe leader asked. "One has said that yellow monkey-men have come from the far east into this land."

"It's true," Terrell answered grimly. "And I fear the monkey-men will come here, too. That is why we wish the horses to leave here."

The old headman asked keenly, "In what direction do you plan to go?"

"The girl and these two men will go east," Terrell replied. "My servant and I go north."

The *hpoongyi* uttered a sharp exclamation, and made an excited gesture. The old headman also appeared disturbed.

"You cannot go north!" he told Terrell earnestly. "There is no way around the sacred plateau, and you cannot go over it for it is forbidden for any human to set foot upon the lofty land of the gods."

"Do you tribesmen never climb the plateau?" Terrell asked skeptically.

"Never!" answered the *hpoongyi* emphatically. "Only once each moon, we go to the base of the plateau and make sacrifice to the gods of light who war eternally with the gods of evil up there. Two days hence, we will sacrifice the tiger you saw in the cages outside."

Terrell was fishing for information. "Then there are gods of evil up there on the sacred land, also?"

"Aye, ancient gods of darkest wickedness," answered the Buddhist priest fervently. "They are the Nagas, the dread serpent-people."

Terrell recognized an ancient legend. All over the East, stories were told of the serpent-men who had existed in the

dawn of time. These Nagas, whose very name meant snake in the Hindu tongue, had been worshipped once by millions and still were widely dreaded.

"But is it not written," Terrell reminded pointedly, "that the great King Anahrwata and his Buddhist warriors wiped out the last of the Nagas many hundreds of years ago?"

"It is so written," conceded the priest; "but the Nagas who dwelt up there in the sacred land could not be killed for they had breathed of the Flame of Life."

Terrell leaned forward eagerly. "Then you believe that one who breathes the Flame of Life cannot be killed? Tell me, what is the Flame?"

"How should I know, who have never been up there in the sacred land where it exists?" countered the *hpoongyi*. "Why are you so interested in the Flame?"

Terrell knew better than to answer truthfully to that. "I have no interest in it. I wish only to escape northward to Tibet."

"I think you lie!" said the old headman with sudden harshness. "You plan to commit sacrilege by climbing to the sacred land."

Yuan Chi had followed the exchange intently, for he apparently knew much more of the Burmese tongue than the smattering possessed by Ruth Dunn and Harris. Now, he looked keenly at Terrell.

"Terrell, what is your game?" the Chinese officer asked in English. "Have you got some wild idea—"

HE never finished the words. They were stricken from his lips by an appalling interruption that came from outside.

A tribeswoman's shriek of terror was the only warning. It was followed almost instantly by a roar of motors and

a staccato crash of rifle and sub-machine gun fire.

"The Japs!" cried Terrell. "I *knew* they'd be coming up this way after us—"

His automatic jumped into his hand as he lunged for the door of the hut. The scene out in the sunlit village was heart-checking.

Two gray Japanese scout-cars were roaring in through the open gate of the stockade. Each had a half-dozen swart-faced occupants, Jap riflemen and sub-machine gunners who were blazing at the stupefied natives.

The attack was as brutal, as unexpected, and as merciless as was Japanese custom. Slugs slammed into petrified native men and women before they could even understand they were attacked. Those who tried to raise their pitiful bows were cut down before they could use them.

"Devils from hell!" hissed Yuan Chi, his slant eyes blazing hatred. "If I had a company of my men—"

"Out of here!" Terrell yelled. "There comes Sigri with the car!"

The Burmese servant, who had been waiting in the car, had started it and was heading it across the wild confusion of the village toward them.

Terrell's pistol kicked in his hand as he ran forward to meet the car, keeping Ruth Dunn behind him. He got one of the sub-machine gunners in the scout-cars and wounded another. But a Japanese officer shouted orders. A blast of fire swept in their direction.

The stream of lead hit the car, which was braking to a stop in front of them. Bullets flung Sigri forward over the wheel as though he had been hit a mighty blow in the back.

"Sahib—" he sighed, and died on the word.

Terrell's heart swelled with rage at the slaughter of his loyal servant, but

he wasted no time. Death was too close to them all.

He shoved Ruth Dunn and the two men into the car, pushed Sigri's lifeless form aside, and tossed his pistol to Yuan Chi as he floorboarded the accelerator.

"Hold on—we're going out that gate!" he yelled.

The car jumped forward just in time to miss a second blast of sub-machine gun fire from the Jap scout-cars. Terrell flung the battered machine between the huts of the village, momentarily masking the enemy fire.

He swung around and headed back through the huts toward the gate in the stockade. The village was a mad confusion. Women were shrieking, men yelling their war-cry, dogs howling, the caged tiger roaring.

"Here we go!" Terrell cried. "Keep down, Ruth—try to get that officer, Yuan!"

Its motor roaring, the battered car shot out from among the huts into the clearing within the stockade gate. Terrell, hunched low, hurled the old machine close past the two Jap scout-cars.

Rifle bullets whizzed over his head, but the Japs hadn't time to get the deadly sub-machine guns going. Besides, one car blocked the other's line of fire. The stocky, spectacled Jap officer was shouting a command.

Two Nipponese riflemen who were leveling their guns directly at Terrell slumped and collapsed as Yuan Chi's automatic barked.

"Look out, Terrell!" yelled Aleck Harris, at that moment.

Terrell saw the danger, at the very moment when the open gate of the stockade promised escape only a few yards ahead. The driver of the nearest Jap scout-car was swinging his machine to block the gate.

Terrell tried a lightning swerve but

the wheel of his old car was not responsive enough to make it. His radiator banged into the side of the heavy scout-car and caromed off it into the log stockade.

THE shock smacked Terrell's head against the windshield and for a few moments everything was a dazed confusion to him. He came out of it to find Jap soldiers swarming onto his wrecked car, and to hear the stocky officer shouting shrilly.

"Don't kill the American—take them alive!" He knew enough Japanese to understand the shrill order.

Ruth Dunn, her face white with loathing, was striking with little clenched fists at the swart soldier dragging her from the car. Yuan Chi had been stunned by a rifle-butt and Harris was held by two Japs.

Terrell knew that he'd failed—not merely in his attempted escape from the village, but in his whole vital mission. And that icy knowledge tripped a flare of unreasoning fury in his brain.

His fists smashed the swart face of the Jap soldier dragging Ruth from the car. Another Jap who rushed in to help got Terrell's knee in his stomach—he knew the sons of Nippon too well to waste any sportsmanship on them.

It wasn't any use. He knew it even while his furious fists were flailing the yellow invaders from in front of him. He knew it, with complete finality, when a pistol-barrel prodded his back.

"That," hissed an authoritative voice in English behind him, "will be enough. I shall have to kill you if you continue resistance."

Terrell dropped his hands and stood, breathing hard. His access of blind fury was cooling, but the icy feeling of failure deepened.

Ruth was beside him, unhurt. Jap riflemen viciously prodded the dazed

Yuan Chi to his feet beside Aleck Harris. They were herded into a little row by the bruised soldiers, whose black eyes glared their hatred.

The stocky Jap officer holstered his pistol and eyed the four prisoners. He was a pudgy little man with a plump saffron mask of a face, and glittering spectacles that veiled blandly cunning eyes.

"Let me introduce myself," he said in English marred only by a slight sibilance. "I am Major Hirota, Imperial Japanese Army, on special service."

Terrell made no answer, but Hirota continued unperturbedly.

"And you are Captain John Terrell, of the United States Army Intelligence."

Ruth and the Chinese and Britisher all looked badly startled. The girl stared from Hirota to Terrell's taut face.

"Terrell—an Intelligence officer of our army?"

Hirota smiled at her. "You did not know? Yes, it is quite true. Captain Terrell was sent up here to beat me to the thing I am after—the Flame of Life."

CHAPTER III

Land of the Gods

TERRELL was too crushed by his sickening sense of disastrous failure, to be interested in his companions' reaction to the disclosure.

For he had failed, and miserably. He had let this Japanese agent catch up to him, had lost a great game for vital stakes before it began. Only dogged determination kept his mental agony from showing on his face.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he told Hirota harshly. "I am simply a businessman caught in Burma

by the invasion. I know nothing about any Flame of Life."

Hirota's glittering smile deepened. "Don't overdo your denials, Captain Terrell. Everyone who has spent any time in the East has heard of the Flame of Life."

Obviously enjoying his position of power, the Japanese continued for Ruth's benefit. "The Flame of Life is supposed to be a wonderful something that can make men immortal. A man who breathes the Flame, they say, cannot be killed. The story has always been that the Flame exists upon a forbidden, hidden tableland called Yamaya, which is inhabited by the mighty gods of old."

Hirota laughed heartily. "Of course we, Japanese, the enlightened master-race, put no belief in such childish fables. We know the Flame is probably only some unusual jewel or mineral deposit. But these superstitious peoples whom we are now conquering believe in it, and if we possess ourselves of this so-called Flame, we can play upon their superstitions to dominate them utterly. Their beliefs will make them think us Japanese immortal and irresistible, if they know we possess the Flame. That's why I was detailed, when the invasion of Burma was planned, to come north here and seek out the so-called Flame."

"Very interesting," Terrell remarked coolly, "but I don't see what it has to do with us."

Hirota looked annoyed. "Really, your obstinacy is typically Yankee. I know that your army leaders got wind of my proposed expedition to secure the Flame, and that they sent *you* to get the Flame before I could secure it."

"You're dreaming," Terrell replied calmly. "It all sounds like a crazy fairy story to me."

Hirota's teeth showed. "These de-

nals are quite useless. My information is that that plateau to the north is the supposed location of the Flame. Undoubtedly, you were heading for it when we caught up to you."

The officer turned as a Jap non-com came up to make a report. It gave Terrell a chance to glance around at his companions.

Harris seemed bewildered by what he had heard, but Yuan Chi had listened with a queerly intent interest showing in his eyes.

Ruth Dunn was looking with horror and pity around the village. The uproar had quieted now, except for the continued roaring of the enraged tiger in the cages outside the little temple.

A third of the brown tribesmen lay dead between their huts, among them the old headman and the *hpoongyi*. Most of the others had fled into the jungle, but a few dozen had been rounded up in a huddle of prisoners.

Hirota had turned back to Terrell. "My men have been unable to obtain any coherent information about that plateau from these degraded tribesmen. However, I learn that you were conferring with the headman and *hpoongyi* about the plateau. Undoubtedly, they gave you some information."

Terrell shrugged. The Jap continued blandly, "They are unfortunately dead, but you can tell me what you learned from them about the plateau. It will be of considerable value to me in my quest."

"You don't really expect to get any sort of help from me?" Terrell countered contemptuously.

"I was afraid you would take that attitude," said Hirota. His spectacles glittered. "Let me remind you that your lives depend upon my orders."

A LECK HARRIS said scathingly, "Go ahead and shoot us, then—you

will, anyway. It's what we expect from the famous samurai 'chivalry'."

That taunt got under Hirota's skin. His thin lips compressed, but he kept his voice quiet.

"Oh, no, I would not have you people shot," he said. "I would not dream of doing that. But there are other ways."

His mouth twitched in a smile, as his eyes looked beyond them toward the temple cages in which the big striped tiger was still growling.

"That tiger looks as though he had been starved," the Jap officer remarked. "I wonder just what he would do to helpless victims?"

Terrell's neck corded with emotion, and his voice was thick. "So *that's* what you're going to threaten me with? It won't do you any good, Hirota."

"I think it will," Hirota said smoothly. "The white races have a foolishly exaggerated regard for the safety of their women. You will not want this girl to die under the tiger's claws."

Terrell stiffened. "Are you crazy? This girl and these two soldiers have nothing to do with me! They're simply fugitives from Lashio, and you're bound to treat them as prisoners of war."

Hirota shrugged. "You are an enemy spy, and they were captured in your company. I am forced to treat them as spies also."

Terrell saw the horror in Ruth Dunn's brown eyes, and it made him ball his fists and take a furious step toward their pudgy captor.

"Save it, Terrell," murmured Aleck Harris heavily. "The Japs don't go by the rules of war. Remember what happened at Hong Kong."

"You will give me what information you possess about the plateau in exchange for the young woman's safety?" Hirota asked keenly of Terrell.

Terrell hesitated, torn by conflicting

emotions. He had not actually learned much about the plateau from the *hpoongyi* and headman. But Hirota thought he had. If the Jap would stick to his bargain, it meant that the plucky girl behind him would escape a horrible death.

No, he couldn't do it! He couldn't give Hirota even the smallest scrap of information that might help the Jap in his quest for the Flame of Life. That legendary fetish would be too potent a psychological weapon in the hands of Nippon.

Ruth Dunn's clear voice interrupted Terrell's frantic mental debate. "Don't tell him anything, Terrell," she said defiantly. "If they're going to kill us, they'll do it anyway."

"Miss Dunn is right," said Yuan Chi, bitter hatred throbbing in his voice as he eyed the Japanese. "This creature does not mean for any of us to escape here."

"I give you the word of a samurai that these three people will be given their freedom in exchange for your information," Hirota affirmed.

Terrell answered scathingly, "Saburo Kurusu showed the world what the word of a samurai is worth, when he talked peace in Washington while Jap bombers were flying toward Pearl Harbor."

A flash of rage crossed Hirota's eyes at that taunt. "Then you will tell me nothing?"

Terrell's mind was made up. "I have nothing to tell."

Hirota shrugged. "You force me to take extreme measures. But I shall give you a few hours to reconsider your rash decision."

He uttered a staccato command in his own language to the riflemen covering the four prisoners. In English, he added:

"To quicken your reconsideration, I

am going to confine you in the cage next to that of the tiger. The nearness of the beast should have an excellent effect upon your meditations. You will please step that way." Resistance to the command was out of the question. Two bayoneted rifles were covering them, and Hirota's hand rested on his pistol-butt. Silently, the four prisoners walked toward the cages outside the temple.

THERE were four of the cages, which had obviously been built by the tribesmen for the prisoning of those trapped beasts intended as sacrifices to the gods of the plateau. They were constructed of tough bamboo saplings tied by thongs, and each cage was separated from the next by a single row of the bamboo bars.

Hirota's men thrust Terrell and his three comrades into the cage next that of the tiger. Then the two Jap soldiers took post outside its door, which they secured by a heavy cross-bar.

"Ah, the animal is already giving you an object lesson," smiled Hirota.

The tiger, its green eyes blazing, had thrown itself with a hoarse roar at the row of bars separating it from the four prisoners.

Ruth Dunn shrank back against Terrell with a little cry of terror as the big cages shook violently to the impact. He put his arm around her protectively.

"It's all right, Ruth. The beast can't break through those bamboo bars."

"He cannot now, but he could very easily if we cut the thongs holding the tops of the bars," Hirota said, from outside their prison. "I want you to think about that very earnestly during the next hours."

The Japanese looked at the sky, which was flushing red as the coppery sun sank toward the western horizon.

"You have until morning to think things over," he told Terrell. "You will

have no longer than that, for whether or not you talk, I leave here at dawn for the plateau."

Hirota went off across the village, leaving his two stumpy soldiers on guard outside the door of the four prisoners' cage.

Terrell looked sickly at his fellow captives, his eyes clinging finally to Ruth's white face.

"I'm sorry I got you three into this mess with me," he said heavily. "It's bad enough for me to fail, without dragging you into the consequences."

Ruth's face softened. "It's we who ought to apologize, for the way we behaved toward you since leaving Lashio. Why didn't you tell us you were an Army Intelligence man? You let us think you were a coward!"

Terrell shrugged. "An Intelligence officer isn't supposed to blurt out his mission to everyone—especially a mission like mine."

"Terrell, this mission of yours seems fantastic to me," Aleck Harris said puzzledly. "A flame of Life that can make men immortal! You don't really think there can be such a thing."

"Of course not," Terrell answered. "But half the peoples of Asia think there's a thing with such powers, and that's the important point. Whatever the flame may be, it's a fetish that focuses the superstitions of millions of Eastern peoples. They believe anyone possessing it would be invulnerable, unconquerable. That's why it's so important to prevent the Japs from getting it."

Yuan Chi spoke thoughtfully. "I have heard the legends of the Flame of Life, many times. It's a very old and very strong belief. Perhaps there is more in it than mere superstition."

Aleck Harris looked at the Chinese officer incredulously. "You don't mean to say you put any credence in the story? Why, you were educated at

Harvard University, Yuan—you ought to know better.”

“There are things in the vastness of Asia that are much more ancient than Harvard University and its knowledge,” Yuan Chi answered quietly.

TWILIGHT was falling. The tiger had ceased its charges against the bamboo bars and now was crouched upon its belly, its blazing green eyes glaring eerily at them through the gloom. Its intent, avid stare was more terrible than its former roaring charges. The great beast must be starved, Terrell knew—the tribesmen wouldn’t bother to feed an animal that was destined for sacrifice.

Firelight flared above the village as laughing Japanese soldiers set fire to the granaries of the tribesmen. Others of the soldiers were fastening the rude hide saddles upon the squealing, kicking mountain ponies in the corral, apparently at Hirota’s orders. Hirota himself stood at the edge of the village, his pudgy figure staring toward the plateau.

The plateau stood out, a black, distant mass against the tropic stars. Terrell’s eyes went hungrily toward it. He sought to make out by starlight the zig-zag crack up its side. A beaten trail of the tribesmen led through the jungle toward a point at the base of the plateau that was quite near that crack. If he’d only been able to reach it, to climb to that unmapped tableland and search out the mysterious fetish—

Ruth’s hand touched his shoulder lightly. She said ruefully, “It’s all our fault. If you hadn’t been hampered by us, you might have succeeded.”

“‘Might have’ is a poor epitaph for an Intelligence agent on a vital mission,” Terrell said somberly. “I let Hirota catch up to me, and I’ve no one to blame but myself.”

His fists clenched. “But that Jap

hasn’t won the game yet! If we can get out of here and find the Flame before he does—”

“Get out of here?” echoed Ruth in a startled whisper. “How can we? Those two soldiers outside the cage will shoot the moment we step out.”

Terrell nodded grimly. “They will, and they’ll probably get us. But isn’t it better than waiting until morning for *that*?”

And he jerked a thumb toward the next cage in which the burning green eyes still glared at them through the deepening darkness.

He felt Ruth shudder, and shrink against him. Aleck Harris came over to them, with Yuan Chi limping after him.

They talked in whispers. The two Japanese soldiers outside the cage, their rifles gleaming in the starlight, watched them suspiciously.

“We’re going to try a rush for it,” Terrell told the others. “If we make it, we’ll grab horses from the corral and ride for the plateau.”

Yuan Chi said calmly, “I shall not be entirely sorry to quit this incarnation and ascend to a higher plane of existence.”

“He means it’s suicide to try it—and it is, Terrell!” Harris whispered tensely. “Those two Japs are ready to blast us down any moment.”

“I’ve got a plan, of sorts,” Terrell said tersely. “If I can get one of these bamboo bars loose, it might work.”

He had been surreptitiously fumbling at one of the bars of the back of the cage, against which they had crouched as they talked. His fingers had been prying at the tough thongs that held the bar in place. The two watching guards could not see the furtive effort.

“It’s no good, Terrell,” muttered Aleck Harris. “Even if you could make an opening big enough, those two Japs

would knock us off before we could get out through it."

"That's not my plan," rasped Terrell. "We're going out through the front door. Ah, that does it!"

His low exclamation came as he felt the thongs loosening. He had freed one of the tough bamboo bars, and now he furtively drew it out of the wall. It was a thin, springy sapling seven feet long.

"You come with me, Harris," Terrell directed tautly. "I want you to talk to the guards and distract their attention from me as much as possible. Ruth, you and Yuan be ready to go."

The RAF pilot went with him toward the front of the cage. Terrell trailed the bamboo bar behind him, trusting that the two Jap guards would not be able to see it in the vague starlight.

The Japs had raised their rifles threateningly as the two men approached the front of the cage. The tiger, too, stirred quickly.

"I demand to see your officer!" Aleck Harris told the Japs in peremptory tones. "What's the matter—can't you understand me?"

ONE of the stumpy guards said something to the other, and they laughed contemptuously at the Englishman. But both kept their rifles on the ready, alert to prevent Harris from approaching the barred cage-door.

Harris kept on demanding to see Hirota. The two Japs began to get angry at his insistence. Meanwhile, Terrell had approached to within a few feet of the barred front wall of the cage.

"Here goes," he breathed to himself, tensing for the attempt.

With a sudden movement, he put his scheme into action. He thrust his bamboo sapling out through the bars of the cage-wall.

He thrust it toward the feet of the two Jap soldiers. And, instantly, Ter-

rell levered it with all his force against their ankles. The two Nipponese yelled as they were tripped, staggered and fell.

Terrell knew he had five seconds to work in. As the two Japs staggered and began to fall, the American was already snatching the bamboo bar back inward, and thrusting it out again through the bars of the door. He swept it upward, lifting the heavy cross-bar of the door, and plunged outward with the sapling gripped like a spear.

The two Japs were scrambling to their feet, yelling shrilly in alarm. One was raising his rifle. Terrell drove the butt of the sapling into his face, and the Jap screamed and staggered back from the crunching blow.

The other man had dropped his rifle in the fall and was stooping wildly for it. Terrell swept the bambo down upon the back of the Jap's neck with all his strength. The man sagged limp, his vertebra snapped.

"By Heaven, you did it!" Aleck Harris was crying. "Yuan—Ruth—come on!"

But Terrell held them back inside the cage. "Wait a minute!"

The yells of the two guards had given the alarm. Hirota's voice was blaring orders across the village, and there was a rush of running feet toward the cages.

Terrell knew those hastening Japs would shoot him and his companions down before they could reach the horse-corral. There was one expedient left, and he seized it. He jumped toward the door of the tiger's cage.

The great beast was clawing furiously at his bars, and had been roaring ragingly since first aroused by the uproar. Terrell unbarred and flung open the gate of that cage, and hastily leaped back into the one in which he and his comrades had been confined.

"Good God!" breathed Harris, ap-

palled by what instantly followed.

The starved tiger had bounded out through the open door of its cage like a huge striped projectile. The leap brought him face to face with the Jap soldiers running toward the cages.

The Japs shrilled in terror, and fired; but the beast was already among them, its claws and talons flashing in the starlight. Before that snarling, spitting fury, the Japs broke wildly. The tiger leaped after them.

"Now, to the corral!" Terrell cried. "We've only a minute!"

He had snatched up the rifles of the two fallen guards, handing one of the weapons to Harris. Ruth was beside Terrell, her face white under the stars, as they ran for the corral. Yuan Chi kept pace with the other three, his face showing none of the agony his shattered ankle was enduring.

They got into the corral while the uproar of shots and cat-snarls was raging unabated across the village. The scrawny horses shied and kicked at the smell of strangers. Terrell with difficulty caught one and helped Yuan Chi into its rude saddle.

Harris had got Ruth Dunn onto a horse and was scrambling on another himself, awkwardly trying to hang onto his rifle. But the pony whose bridle Terrell had grabbed seemed to have the devil himself in him, and danced about like mad to prevent his mounting.

"Terrell, hurry!" yelled the Englishman. "They've finished the tiger and they're coming—"

An explosion of rifles across the village had terminated the tiger's blood-chilling roars. Hirota's frantic voice was yelling orders.

"Ride for it!" Terrell shouted. "I'm coming!"

HE had finally got his leg over the back of the bucking pony. Rifle-

slugs sang close over their heads in the starlight.

Frightened, their horses bolted together out of the corral. They thundered across the village toward the open gate of the stockade. In the red glow of the smoldering granaries, Terrell saw Hirota shooting at them with his pistol. Japs with sub-machine guns were running up.

But they were outside the stockade in the next moment, the scared little horses running like mad across the tilled fields around the village.

"This way!" shouted Terrell, reining his horse hard toward the right.

The moon was rising, an enormous silver disk pushing above the eastern jungle. Its light showed the narrow trail of the tribesmen that ran northward through the jungle toward the distant plateau.

Terrell and his comrades were galloping along that trail a moment later. The uproar back at the village was swallowed up. But there was sound about them—night-noises of the jungle, the screech of startled monkeys, the distant crash of an elephant through brush, the whooshing sound of a black flying-fox diving across the silver moon.

Trailing vines whipped and stung their faces, and branches projecting into the trail tried to tear them from the saddles. They were riding single-file now with Terrell in the lead, and the first mad rush of the horses was dropping into a steady gallop.

Aleck Harris' laugh came over the rush of hoofs. "I'd like to see Hirota's fat face right now!"

"Don't fool yourself—that Jap will be after us with all his men as soon as they can round up the horses," Terrell warned. "And we've got to climb that plateau."

But desperate hope was now singing through his own mind. He wasn't beaten

yet! There was still a chance to find the fabled Flame of Life before Hirota.

The mystery of the moonlit jungle through which they galloped, the greater mystery of the lost land toward which they were riding, woke strange new speculations in Terrell's chaotic thoughts. What if Yuan Chi were right, and there was more to the Flame of Life than mere superstition? What if a great secret of ancient Asia lay somewhere ahead of them?

He shook off that eery thought impatiently. "Just nerves—and no wonder!"

The horses were tiring, as miles of jungle trail unreeled behind them. Terrell looked anxiously back, each few minutes.

"There's the plateau!" Aleck Harris cried suddenly, a little later. And then, "Good Lord, we can't climb *that*!"

THE thick jungle was giving way to more open ground, glades of tall trees dappled black-and-silver by the brilliant moonlight. They were within a short distance of the stupendous wall of the plateau.

A massive, jagged rock precipice that loomed up thousands of feet in the moonlight, it extended east and west out of sight. There were inky black cracks in its side, and crags of metallic minerals that glittered brightly in the moon.

"The big zigzag crack in the side was a little east of here," Terrell said rapidly to his companions. "It looked climbable."

Ruth Dunn's soft face looked stunned, as she stared up at the gigantic, frowning cliffs.

"It scares me," she said shakily. "It looks as though it might really be a land of gods."

Terrell was already urging his tired pony eastward along the base of the cliff. They passed a big, curiously-

carved stone altar, obviously that at which the tribesmen sacrificed to the gods of the plateau. In a few minutes they came to the base of the big zigzag crack.

Terrell's eyes tensely followed that rift in the side of the moonlit cliff, when he had dismounted from his pony.

"I think we can make it," he said tautly. "We might as well turn these horses loose."

Yuan Chi spoke quietly, "You three can make it. I would only be in the way. I will stay here and give Hirota's men a little reception."

"I'll not go and leave Yuan!" Ruth Dunn said instantly, and Aleck Harris nodded agreement.

"You've got to come—we're losing our chances by lingering here," Terrell told the Chinese officer sharply. "I'll help you, and—*listen*!"

The drum of distant hoofbeats came clear above the jungle noises, growing rapidly nearer and louder.

"Hirota and his men!" cried Terrell. "Come on!"

Without waiting to argue further with Yuan Chi, he took the Chinese officer's arm and helped him limp hastily toward the base of the great angled rift in the cliff. Ruth and Aleck Harris followed quickly.

That zigzag crack up the precipice was not as climbable a way as it had looked from the distance, Terrell found at once. The gradients were so steep that they would have been impossible had it not been that fallen rock and detritus gave a foothold.

"There they are!" exclaimed Aleck Harris a few minutes later, looking tautly back downward.

The fugitives had toilsomely ascended a third of the cliff's face. But now Hirota and three of his soldiers galloped their horses into view down there at the base of the cliff.

The three Jap soldiers had each brought one of the heavy, deadly sub-machine guns and extra clips. Hirota led them up the zigzag rift in pursuit.

"Keep back against the wall as much as you can, and we'll be out of their range," Terrell said hastily.

The sub-machine guns turned loose a moment later. That the pursuing Japs could see them only vaguely in the shadow of the crack was proved by the fact that the first bursts spanged off the cliff far above.

Harris turned, raising his rifle to his uninjured shoulder and firing rapidly back down the cliff-face at their pursuers. One of the Jap sub-machine gunners toppled off the face of the precipice.

"Good work, Harris—but don't stop again!" Terrell sweated. "They're overtaking us."

He could hear the yelping cries of the officer and two men still pursuing them. Bullets continued to scream off the rocks around them as the remaining two sub-machine guns fired intermittent bursts.

Terrell's heart was pounding from exertion, as he toiled on up the zigzag way. One hand clutched his rifle, the other aided Yuan Chi.

"You will soon be overtaken if you continue to hamper yourself with me," the Chinese officer was saying urgently. "Give me one of the rifles and leave me behind to—"

SHRILL cries of triumph interrupted. Hirota and his two men had come around an angle of the rift just below them. The Japs could plainly see the four fugitives from this position.

Aleck Harris instantly dropped to his knee and raised his rifle to aim again at their pursuers.

Bam-bam-bam! One of the hellish sub-machine guns was already cutting

loose at him. The RAF pilot was knocked over on his side.

"Aleck's hit!" cried Ruth, darting back to the fallen pilot.

"Just a graze," panted Harris, scrambling up. "It caught my rifle."

Machine-gun slugs had shattered Harris' rifle and seared across his forearm. Hirota and his two men were running on up the rift, shouting.

Terrell let go of Yuan Chi, turned and leveled his own rifle. He fired at the glitter of Hirota's spectacles, but it was the soldier behind the Jap officer who fell.

With savage satisfaction, Terrell let the whole clip go. Then he saw that with his first shot, Hirota had snatched up the fallen man's sub-machine gun and had skipped hastily back behind an angle of the rock with his remaining follower.

"That's my last cartridge—we've got to keep going now!" Terrell exclaimed.

They were, he estimated, within a few hundred feet of the summit of the plateau. His lungs seemed bursting from the climb. Ruth's knees gave way under her, and Harris helped her along as Terrell was helping Yuan Chi.

Mercifully, the last long slanting gradient of the rift was less steep. They struggled up over fallen boulders and detritus toward the vista of moonlit trees that marked the summit of the plateau.

Bam-bam! The bullets screamed off a rock beside Terrell as they were nearing the top. The glance he spared backward showed Hirota and his remaining man coming up that last long grade after them, on the run.

"If we just had a few more cartridges now!" Aleck Harris was agonizing.

They stumbled up onto the top of the plateau. All around them towered a mighty jungle as dense and forbidding as the sea of moonlit jungle they could

glimpse far below.

Ruth sank to her knees again, unable to go further. Yuan Chi's face was distorted by the agony he had endured on that upward climb. But Terrell staggered toward a big boulder imbedded at the crest of the rift.

"Harris, help me!" he gasped. "If we can roll this down on Hirota and his man—our last chance—"

He had dug his empty rifle under the boulder and was prying convulsively to lever the big rock out of the ground and send it thundering down on the two Nipponese who were coming rapidly up the rift.

Bullets sang around them as Hirota recognized their purpose. The boulder began to come out of the ground as Terrell and Harris frantically levered with the rifle. The two Japs spurted fiercely, not daring to pause again to fire.

The boulder came loose! It tottered on the brink of the rift, then with a grumbling thunder started rolling down the rift. But Hirota and his Jap were so close now that they were able to save themselves from annihilation by leaping up onto the plateau just as the rock thundered past.

"Terrell!" screamed Ruth Dunn, in wild warning.

The two Japs were scrambling up from the wild leap that had saved them. Hirota was raising his sub-machine gun. Terrell leaped, flailing his empty rifle. He knocked the heavy weapon from Hirota's grip.

Instead of trying to recover it, Hirota snatched his rifle. He banged its butt back against Terrell's face. Terrell felt his head ring from the stunning blow, felt himself tottering—

He was dimly aware of Hirota's triumphant face as the Jap raised the rifle-butt to smash at him again. He vaguely glimpsed Harris struggling

with the other Jap for his sub-machine gun, Yuan Chi hobbling forward—

Suddenly, Hirota's face froze in a strange expression. The Jap officer remained petrified with uplifted rifle, staring beyond Terrell.

Yuan Chi also was staring stupefiedly in the same direction, and from him came a strangled exclamation.

"The gods!" cried the Chinese incredulously. "The gods of Yamaya!"

Men had appeared like magic out of the moonlit jungle around them—but were they indeed men? Tall, golden-skinned figures they were, warriors garbed in glittering brazen armor and helmets, with big swords and spears which were raised ready to slay Terrell's party and the Japs.

And these incredible golden men had beasts with them—big, snarling black leopards whom they restrained by leashes attached to jeweled collars. The leopards strained to get forward at the strangers, like hunting-dogs whining to be released at prey.

CHAPTER IV

Golden City

TERRELL'S already dazed mind could not for a moment compass the reality of these apparitions. These surely could not be real—these golden men who held snarling black leopards in leash as hunting-hounds.

The American struggled against a superstitious awe. It could not be that the legends of Asia were true and that gods of light and gods of evil dwelt in this lost land! To admit that was to admit that the Flame of Life itself might be the supernatural thing that fable stated.

All of them had been frozen until now by the appearance of the menacing golden men. But now Hirota stooped

quickly to pick up the heavy sub-machine gun that Terrell had knocked from his hands in the fight.

Instantly came a bellow of warning from the leader of the golden men. He was a huge figure, a brawny, grizzled giant of a warrior whose short, bristling black beard and uptilted mustaches lent an additional fierceness to his hard face. He raised his great sword as he shouted.

Terrell could understand that warning cry. The giant leader was speaking in an archaic variant of the root-language of the Burmese.

"Let that thing lie where it is!" belled the golden giant to Hirota. "Try to pick it up, and you'll get a spear in your heart."

Hirota froze. The threat was no idle one. Spears of golden warriors were raised, covering them all. Before they could make any attempt at resistance, these golden men could cut them down.

The giant captain pointed to the two sub-machine guns, the one lying at Hirota's feet and the other still held by both Aleck Harris and the Jap with whom he had been contending for it.

"Get those things and bring them here," barked the big captain to two of his warriors. "They must be weapons of some kind. The way that fellow just tried to snatch one up shows that."

The giant warrior glared at them when this had been done.

"Who are you strangers that fight among yourselves, and why are you here in Yamaya?" he demanded in his deep, growling bass.

"Then this *is* Yamaya?" husked Terrell.

"It is the land Yamaya, forbidden to all outsiders," rapped the fierce giant. "And I am Gron, captain of warriors of our city that is also called Yamaya. Speak—why have you dared enter this land?"

Terrell strove for words with which

to explain the situation. But the quick-witted Hirota was ahead of him.

"I come as a friend to Yamaya!" the Japanese officer said quickly to the giant Gron. "I represent the great master-race of the outer world, and I come upon a mission to your ruler."

"Our king, Kuluun, is at our city," growled the big captain. "But how do I know that you are speaking truth about this mission to him?"

"He is not speaking truth!" Terrell cried. "He is an enemy to all the peoples of this region, which his country's armies have attacked."

Gron's fierce eyes swept from the American to the Japanese. "One of you is lying," he growled. "Perhaps both of you."

Yuan Chi chose this moment to ask an unfortunate question. The Chinese officer had been staring at the golden-skinned warriors with extreme excitement. Now he put an eager query to the bristling captain.

"If this is really the land of Yamaya, then the Flame of Life is near here?"

THE Yamayan warriors uttered a chorus of raging cries, at the question. They surged forward fiercely, raising their weapons menacingly.

Gron's bleak eyes were dangerously narrowed as the big captain roared at Yuan Chi and Terrell. "Did you come here to seek the Flame? If so, you die here and now!"

Hirota saw and instantly took advantage of the Yamayans' fierce reaction. The Japanese spoke swiftly.

"Yes, this man Terrell and his companions came here to seek the Flame of Life. I came here to warn you of Yamaya against the attempt. That is my mission to your ruler."

The cunning duplicity of the Japanese had its effect. Gron and the other Yamayans glared at Terrell with con-

centrated fury.

"Is this true?" bellowed Gron to the American. "Are you among those evil ones who would become slaves to the accursed Nagas to win to the Flame?"

The Nagas? Terrell was for a moment bewildered by the reference. Then he remembered what the *hpoongyi* back in the native village had declared—that the ancient, evil race of the Nagas, the dreaded serpent-men of Asian legend, still existed up on the forbidden plateau.

Terrell had put as little faith in that wild tale as in the supernatural powers credited to the Flame of Life. But these golden-skinned Yamayans before him seemed utterly certain of the reality of the Nagas.

"The Japanese is lying!" Terrell exclaimed. "We came here only to prevent *him* from seeking the Flame."

Gron swore. "By Buddha, I think you're all liars. We'd do best to kill you all out of hand."

A young Yamayan warrior spoke to the angry captain. "The king Kuluun would want to question these strangers," he reminded. He added significantly, "It may be they have come here by connivance with Ibir."

Gron snarled when he heard that name of Ibir. "If that cursed friend of the Nagas has conspired to bring these strangers here—"

He broke off, his bristling brows meeting in a black frown as his massive face wrinkled in thought. Finally, he spoke harshly.

"I'm going to take you all to Yamaya City," he barked. "We'll learn the truth there. If it's true you came here by connivance with Ibir and his party, you'll die unpleasantly."

He turned and rapped an order to his warriors. "Search these people and take everything from them. Leave them nothing, for I think their weapons are

of a dangerous kind."

Terrell's party and the Japs were thoroughly searched. Even their pocket-knives were taken. Also the extra clips of cartridges were taken from Hirota and his follower, and put with the two sub-machine guns.

"Bring those along," Gron ordered the warrior who had the two heavy firearms. "We'll learn later if those are the thunder-weapons whose noise attracted us."

Terrell realized from that that Gron and his men had been on a hunting-party when attracted here by the unaccustomed sound of gunfire.

DAWN was breaking as they were marched by an almost invisible path through the choking green jungle. It led to a more open glade in which a half-dozen war-elephants waited. They were huge beasts, with tusks armed by sharp metal spikes and with low wooden howdahs on their backs.

Terrell and his three friends were roughly thrust onto one of the kneeling beasts, and the two Japanese upon another. Gron mounted the lead animal and bellowed an order. The mahouts goaded their mighty steeds, and the elephants silently swung northward along a broader trail.

To Terrell and his companions, jolting in the low howdah, it was like an Arabian Nights dream-journey. The great, swaying beasts, the golden-skinned, armored riders, the warriors who walked alongside with the padding black hunting-leopards in leash—they were like a pageant of the legendary past moving through the dawn-lit green jungle.

"Terrell, you heard them speak of the Nagas?" Yuan Chi was saying excitedly. "If the serpent-men really exist here—"

"That's impossible," Terrell inter-

rupted. "The Nagas are only an old legend."

"Yes, a legend old as Asia!" Yuan Chi flashed. "There *must* be something to a story as anciently and universally believed as that of the serpent-people. Who knows what weird semi-human races rose from strange mutations back in the world's dawn?"

He continued excitedly. "Some of that weird race might still exist here. Remember what that *hpoongyi* said—that Nagas existed on this plateau who could not die because they had breathed the Flame of Life?"

"Don't let imagination run away with you, Yuan," cautioned Terrell. "We've found here a lost colony of an archaic Asian race, but that doesn't mean all the superstitions about this plateau are true."

He continued tensely: "What I can't understand is the fiercely hostile attitude of these Yamayans about the Flame of Life. They talk as though they *hate* the Flame."

"But who is this Ibir they talk about, whom they seem to suspect of having connived to bring us here?" Ruth asked puzzledly.

"I can't guess," Terrell confessed. "We've jumped into the center of a flock of weird mysteries. The only thing certain is that, whatever kind of fetish the Flame of Life may be, Hirota will move heaven and earth to grab it and get it out of here. And it's my job to stop him!"

The sun had risen, driving slanting bars of rosy light through the interstices of the jungle foliage. As the elephants shouldered tirelessly northward along the trail, one of the leashed black leopards whined.

The pace quickened a little. Presently they glimpsed open sky ahead. They were coming out of the dense jungle into a large clear area—

"Name of Buddha!" gasped Yuan Chi, shaken out of even his Chinese imperturbability by the vista ahead.

"It can't be real," denied Harris hoarsely. "There can't be a city here like that."

Their swaying elephant had passed out of the jungle into a circle of open land several miles in diameter. At its center rose a fantastically beautiful metropolis, towering in the sunrise, beautiful as a dream.

Lost city of Yamaya, focus of all the age-old fables of Eastern lore, shimmering in the rising sun before their eyes! Lifting its golden towers and terraces into the rose-flushed sky, as though newly created by Shingrah, whom the Burmese say first hammered out the world!

"But it looks as if it were all made of gold!" Ruth was gasping.

Terrell had the same first impression, though he knew after a moment that it was of warm, bright-yellow stone that the city was built.

"Yamaya the golden, city of golden men," he whispered raptly.

He had seen the ruined city of Pagana far to the south in Burma, built long ago by King Anahrwata, the great hero-ruler of the Buddhists. And this place was like a larger and living and more glorious Pagana.

It was all of golden-yellow stone—the high protective wall, the myriad towers of dwellings, markets and temples within, the great palace-pagoda whose lofty carved pinnacle brooded over the whole metropolis. The greenery of gardens laced its golden mass, and a belt of tilled fields, pastures and orchards separated it from the surrounding jungle.

"If this is real, why hasn't it ever been discovered?" Ruth Dunn was asking in stunned tones.

"No Burmese would set foot on

this forbidden plateau, and no white men have ever explored this region," Terrell reminded her. "Even planes almost never fly across this vast sea of jungle. Any flier who did get a distant glimpse of this place would suppose it another of Burma's ruined cities."

"I doubt if any outsiders other than ourselves have seen this place for centuries," Yuan Chi declared. His black eyes glowed with excitement. "This is an ancient Buddhist city-kingdom, isolated for ages."

TERRELL'S heart beat faster as their ponderous elephant- steeds shouldered toward the open gates of the golden city. Was the Flame of Life *here*? He knew that Hirota must be asking himself the same question. He foresaw that in this fantastic lost city he must contest a bitter struggle with the tricky, determined Japanese.

Inside the city, their party moved along paved streets of markets and bazaars. The golden-skinned people of Yamaya stared up wonderingly at the strangers. Many of the men were warriors, clad in shining brazen helmets and armor. Other men wore turbans, jackets and baggy breeches of brilliant-colored silks. The garb of the girls and women was a long silken robe and a mantle over the hair.

Gron was conducting his prisoners toward the great palace-pagoda at the center of the city. It was cruciform in cross-section, a great golden-yellow pile whose balconies and pillars were encrusted with fantastic carving that reached its climax in the soaring central tower. The palace was surrounded by gardens of wonderful beauty, enclosed by a low wall at whose portals armed warriors stood on guard.

Their elephants passed through the portals and halted before the entrance in the south transept of the palace.

They knelt slowly at the mahout's command. Terrell helped his comrades dismount from the howdah. The two Japanese were also alighting from their steed.

Aleck Harris' haggard face looked dazed as he stared upward. "I still can't believe it—this place is like an opium dream!" he exclaimed.

"We may soon find it a mighty ugly dream," Terrell warned anxiously. "It seems that these Yamayans sentence to death anyone who tries to seek the Flame. That puts us in a bad spot."

Gron, the towering bearded captain, was stalking toward them. His eyes ran sourly over Terrell's group and Hirota's mask-like face.

"You'll follow me and await audience with the king Kuluun," he growled. "It'll give you time to think up a few more of your lies."

They were escorted by Yamayan warriors with drawn swords as they entered the south transept of the palace. The broad north-south corridor along which they were conducted bore upon its walls a series of brilliant silken tapestries depicting men and monsters in battle.

This corridor intersected a similar hallway that bisected the east-west transepts of the palace. The intersection was a round hall in which Gron left them, under guard.

Hirota approached Terrell and spoke coolly. "We are in great danger here," pointed out the spectacled Japanese. "Would it not be wise for us to suspend our own hostilities and pool our efforts until we are out of that danger?"

Aleck Harris looked at him incredulously. "Cheeky little beggar, aren't you? After trying to kill us, you want to go partners?"

"I wouldn't trust you for ten seconds, Hirota," spat Terrell. "You'd double-cross us the moment we were of no fur-

ther use to you."

Hirota laughed softly. "You Americans have such a simple-minded detestation of cunning. Very well, then—each of us for himself."

He went back to the awe-struck Japanese soldier who had been captured with him. Terrell eyed the two of them forebodingly as they whispered.

THEY waited under guard for more than an hour. That their advent had created excitement in the palace was evident by the hasty coming and going of chamberlains and courtiers they could glimpse during that time.

When Terrell and his fellow-prisoners were finally conducted by Gron into a long, brilliant throne-room, they found it crowded by scores of the nobles of Yamaya. They were led between these silent men toward the burnished silver throne upon which sat the ruler of this lost city.

King Kuluun was a young man, with something frank and handsome about his beardless face that won Terrell's liking. His turban and silken jacket and belt blazed with priceless jewels, and a pigeon-blood ruby of incredible size formed the hilt of his curved sword.

"These are the strangers, highness," announced Gron in his rumbling voice. "They're all liars, if you ask me. They tell a lot of different stories, but I'm certain they came here seeking the Flame of Life."

Kuluun stiffened upon his throne, and his lips tightened. Again, Terrell wondered at the fierce hostility of these Yamayans toward the Flame.

"It's my opinion," Gron was concluding rancorously, "that Ibir has something to do with their coming. They carried yonder weapons that made sounds like thunder, which first drew our hunting-party to them. Perhaps Ibir was plotting to make use of them

and their weapons."

Kuluun's brow darkened as he looked at the captured sub-machine guns, and then at a Yamayan noble in the front of the throng of courtiers.

"Did you somehow send for these strangers, Ibir?" the young king demanded ominously. "Have you plotted with them to commit the sacrilege of seeking the Flame?"

Ibir stepped forward. He was a thin-faced, crafty-eyed Yamayan of middle age, who did not quail at this menacing question.

"I never saw or heard of these strangers before now," Ibir declared. "If they are seeking the Flame, I know nothing about it."

"But you yourself have been inciting the people of Yamaya to break the ancient commandment and seek the Flame!" Kuluun charged. "For many weeks you have been whispering that—do not try to deny it."

Ibir answered steadily. "I do not deny that I am in favor of coming to terms with the Nagas so that we may breathe of the Flame of Life and become invulnerable to death. Why should ancient superstition prevent us from enjoying immortality?"

There was a low murmur of supporting voices from several of the Yamayan nobles in the throne-room. Ibir, it seemed had a few adherents.

"Ibir is right," muttered one voice. "The Nagas would let us breathe the Flame if we made peace with them. We could become like gods, forever immortal."

Terrell saw wrath gather in the eyes of Kuluun. It burst into flaming utterance.

"Did not our forefathers adjure us never to seek the Flame lest doom fall upon us?" blazed the young king. "Did they not warn us never to parley with the evil serpent-men who sought to

tempt us with the flame?"

"Aye, but some of us deem it time we ended our age-old feud with the Nagas," said Ibir boldly. "We cannot kill them, for they are immortal. Why should we not make peace with them, and become ourselves immortal?"

Kuluun flared. "Because we know from our ancestors' warning that the immortality with which the Nagas tempt us is as evil as themselves!"

Ibir and his adherents were sullenly silent. Terrell, who had listened in wonder, found Aleck Harris plucking his arm. "I can't follow it," whispered Harris puzzledly. "What's it all about?"

Terrell explained in a brief whisper to the Englishman and Ruth. "It seems these Yamayans hold the Flame an evil, forbidden thing. But that fellow Ibir heads a group who want to disregard ancient tradition and seek the Flame."

INWARDLY, Terrell was himself mystified by the fierce controversy between these Yamayans. These people talked of the Nagas and the Flame of Life as though they were *real*—as though they had only to breathe the Flame, whatever it might be, to become undying and invulnerable. But surely they should know better than to credit such a wild legend?

Kuluun's voice recalled him from wild speculation. The young Yamayan king was looking down harshly at the prisoners.

"If Ibir's plot did not bring you into this land, what did?" he demanded of Terrell.

Terrell told the exact truth, trusting that it would best serve his purpose. He pointed accusingly at Hirota.

"That man, who is of the race called Japanese, sought to come here and secure the Flame of Life so that his

country might use it as a weapon against other races. We, who are his enemies in war, sought to prevent him from securing it."

"It is just the other way around, highness!" avowed Hirota instantly to the king. "My soldiers and I pursued these three men and the white girl because we knew they intended a sacrilegious quest for the Flame."

"You see—they all talk with forked tongues," growled Gron disgustedly to the king. "Probably they're all after the cursed Flame."

"I think so, indeed," said Kuluun fiercely. "And the ancient law left us by our ancestors still holds good—all who seek the Flame of life must die!"

His handsome face set hard. "You will take them all and give them death by the bowstring. And let their deaths be an example to you and your group, Ibir!"

Terrell had for the last few moments been expecting that death-sentence. He had seen which way things were going, and he had come to a desperate resolve that at least they would die fighting.

So that, as Kuluun finished speaking, Terrell was already lunging toward the nearest Yamayan guard and snatching the man's curved sword from his belt. Surprise won him the weapon before the warrior could prevent it.

Terrell's plan was to leap to the throne and threaten Kuluun with instant death unless he and his comrades were released. But he reckoned without the amazing alertness of the giant Gron. For swift as was his spring toward the throne, he found the big captain blacking his way with drawn sword.

"Oh-ho, my bantam, you have fight in you, have you?" bellowed Gron, his bristling face lighting up. "Well, I'd rather kill a man with a good clean



Gron pressed forward with deadly purpose

sword than a bowstring. Come on!"

Terrell struck furiously but the giant Yamayan's big sword easily parried the inexpert blow. He could hear a shouting of the guards behind him as they seized his fellow-prisoners.

He aimed another fierce, clumsy blow at Gron. Terrell knew that his tenuous scheme was thwarted, and that he couldn't long stand against Gron's swordsmanship. But at least, Hirota and his mission were doomed, and he was going to die fighting!

CHAPTER V

Shadow of Horror

GRON was already pressing forward with deadly purpose, his bleak eyes blazing battle-joy as his heavy sword hammered down Terrell's blade. Then above the clash of steel came an amazed shout from one of the guards.

"This man is of the Faith!" the guard was exclaiming.

"Wait, then!" ordered Kuluun. "Gron, stay your sword!"

Reluctantly, the giant captain lowered his weapon. It gave Terrell a chance to turn around and see what had happened. One of the Yamayan

guards, in seizing Yuan Chi, had exposed a leaf-shaped turquoise amulet that hung at the Chinese officer's neck. It was a Buddhist symbol.

Terrell had forgotten that his Chinese companion was a Buddhist. But it stood them in good stead now. For Yuan Chi at once took advantage of it.

"Yes, I am your co-religionist for I, too, follow the Ninefold Path of the Buddha," Yuan said quickly.

The Yamayans all seemed surprised. Kuluun asked, "Do your companions follow the way of truth also?"

Yuan Chi evaded. "They follow the Faith also, in their own way."

Terrell himself added quickly, "Is it not written in the sacred books that, 'All they who revere the Buddha and his teachings have their feet upon the Path?'"

His citation produced a marked impression upon the Yamayans. Terrell's hopes were rebounding. It was obvious that these people were fervent Buddhists who would not kill those whom they considered co-religionists.

Hirota too had perceived the situation. The resourceful little Japanese at once spoke up.

"We of Japan all reverence the Buddha and pattern our lives after his wise commandments," the Nipponese lied brazenly.

Yuan Chi's lip curled. "That is untrue. His people have no other god than their own emperor."

King Kuluun seemed puzzled. "Even trespassing strangers may not be put to death if they are of the Faith. Yet it seems that there is a doubt about some of you."

He gave his decision. "We shall defer judgment upon you until these doubts are resolved. In the meantime you shall remain in my palace as guests—*guarded* guests."

Terrell understood. They were far

from being out of danger, and were to be prisoners in everything but name.

Gron scowled at Terrell. "That interruption saved your neck, bantam. A moment more, and I'd have split you from head to heel."

Terrell answered coolly. "You're dreaming, man! I was just about to give you the death-thrust."

He knew as well as Gron how far that was from the truth. But instead of taking offense, the big captain grinned at Terrell.

"You've spirit in you, bantam."

Kuluun pointed toward the captured sub-machine guns and ammunition. "Lock up those strange weapons, Gron. We shall examine them later."

The young king added somberly to Terrell's group and the Japanese, "At tonight's banquet, I shall talk to you again."

TERRELL realized that their fate hung upon Kuluun's coming decision. But he was too grateful for their temporary reprieve to waste worry at this moment upon the uncertainties of the future.

Chamberlains who were accompanied by a file of Yamayan guards conducted the six prisoner-guests out of the throne-room. They passed up broad stairways into the upper levels of the palace, and into a wing in the western transept.

The chamberlains either realized the hostility between Terrell's party and the two Japanese, or else had orders to keep them separate. For they assigned Hirota and his bewildered-looking soldier to one room, and conducted Terrell's group to a suite of two rooms farther along the corridor.

Terrell and his three companions looked wonderingly around the rooms. They were big, cool chambers with walls of the golden stone, upon which

hung brilliant tapestries. A few divans and low, uncushioned chairs comprised the furniture. A curtained window opened upon a little balcony that projected from the sculptured wall of the palace.

Ruth went to the window, exclaiming with delight as she looked out across the golden towers of Yamaya and the green jungle beyond.

"It's all like a beautiful dream!" the girl said raptly.

"It's likely to turn into a nightmare, for us," Terrell said somberly. "We just escaped a hideous death by a hair. You saved our necks by speaking up so quickly, Yuan."

Yuan Chi shrugged. "You saved your own by the fact that you could recite the Buddhistic sacred writings. But we're walking the edge of a sword-blade. If Kulunn decides we're enemies, no talk will save us."

"Can't we break out of this place?" Aleck Harris wanted to know, his blue eyes keen.

Terrell went to the cedarwood door of their apartment and opened it slightly. A half-dozen Yamayan soldiers outside turned instantly toward him. He glimpsed others outside Hirota's door, farther down the hall.

"Not a chance of it," he told the others, returning. "Besides, I can't leave this place until I'm certain that Hirota won't be able to secure the Flame of Life."

"What is the Flame?" Ruth Dunn asked, mystified. "These people all talk about it as though it had real power to confer immortality."

"Just superstition," Terrell answered, though her question had awakened the haunting doubts growing in his own mind.

"That crafty noble Ibir didn't look like a superstitious type to me," declared Aleck Harris. "Yet, from what

you said, *he* believes utterly in the Flame's powers and wants to make a deal with the Nagas for it."

"That," said Yuan Chi thoughtfully, "is another mystery. The Nagas. These people talk of the serpent-men as though they knew them well. It appears part of an ancient, unhuman race has survived here."

Terrell felt a chilling sensation, as though he were peering into shadowy vistas of alien mystery and horror. With an effort, he fought down his uncanny premonitions.

"We're too tired even to think about it now," he said. "We'll learn more at that banquet tonight. In the meantime, I suggest we get some sleep. You take the other room, Ruth."

TERRELL slept, limp with exhaustion, though he had dreams in which the mocking, spectacled face of Hirota alternated with half-glimpsed, vaguely hideous shapes, to oppress him.

When he awoke, the other two men were already up. The day was almost over, the red sun sinking toward the jungle horizon. Out in the distance, Yamayan workers were returning from the fields and herdsman were leisurely driving their lowing, humpbacked cattle toward the city.

Aleck Harris was rubbing his chin and ruefully squinting at himself in a polished metal wall-mirror.

"I could do with a shave," commented the RAF pilot. "But I don't suppose they'd give me anything as lethal as a razor. Maybe I'll grow a beard, like Gron."

Terrell asked a little anxiously about their wounds. Harris' injured hand was apparently healing rapidly but Yuan Chi's ankle was badly swollen. But the Chinese officer made light of it, as he sat puffing his last cigarette.

Ruth entered from the other room.

"They brought me these new clothes! Maybe my costume offended Yamayan ideas of feminine attire. I feel now like an oriental princess."

"You look like one," said Terrell admiringly.

The little nurse in torn khaki had given way to a young beauty, slim in a tight, ankle-length Yamayan robe of white silk worked with pale blue flowers. A pair of silver-studded sandals and a silken white mantle over her soft dark hair completed the costume.

"What's going to happen at this banquet?" she asked anxiously.

"Nothing, I hope," Terrell answered soberly. "Kuluun is trying to make up his mind whether we or the Japanese are lying, or both of us. A wrong remark might send us to the bowstrings. Let me answer the questions."

"That won't be hard—I picked up a little Burmese at the base hospital but not enough to follow all this conversation," Ruth said.

"I'm a stranger here, myself," grinned Aleck Harris. "Anyway, I'm more interested now in food than in talk. I'm starved."

They had not long to wait. As twilight cast a velvety grayness over the golden roofs of Yamaya, the door of their apartment was opened. A chamberlain had come to conduct them to the banquet.

The banquet-hall of the kings of Yamaya was a long gallery with a vaulted roof, in the eastern transept of the palace. Fragrant torches in wall-sockets cast a soft, shifting glow across the iridescent glass and silver of a very long table at which King Kuluun and some dozens of his nobles were already seated.

Terrell and his three friends were given seats at the king's left, next to Gron. The giant bearded captain, who was already demolishing a roasted fowl,

greeted the American bluffly. Terrell grinned answer, but the smile faded as he looked around and met the glittering, spectacled gaze of Hirota, who sat beside Ibir across the table.

There was little talk, as they ate hungrily. But Terrell was aware of Kuluun's handsome, brooding young face watching them.

Kuluun asked their names. "Ter Rhel," repeated the young king, accentedly. "That is a strange name. And it seems that strange new people have risen in the outer world since the times of our ancestors."

Terrell saw opening for a question. "Then it has been long since the ancestors of you Yamayans came into this land?"

"Long, indeed," answered Kuluun broodingly. "My own remote ancestor was the great Anahrwata, the Buddhist hero of centuries ago who led the crusade of extermination against the Nagas. Those serpent-people had long lived and worked evil in these lands, for they were a prehuman race. They were worshipped by many humans, but at last Anahrwata led the Buddhists to destroy them, and rooted them out in all India and Burma.

"But Anahrwata heard of a remnant of the Nagas who still existed on this remote, isolated plateau. He sent his son's army to slay them also. But that army found that the Nagas here possessed the hidden Flame of Life which first kindled life upon earth. The Nagas here had breathed the Flame, thus becoming immortal.

"So Anahrwata's son, unable to destroy the invulnerable serpent-men here, settled down on this plateau to guard and to watch the Nagas and prevent them from ever going forth to the outer world to work more evil. The men of that army were our ancestors, and built this city of Yamaya. And

here we have lived ever since, keeping watch and ward upon the Nagas."

TERRELL asked incredulously, "You believe the Flame of Life can really confer invulnerable immortality, yet you don't try to attain it? Have you no desire to be immortal?"

"No, we do not, replied Kuluun sternly. "Our ancestors knew more of it than we do, and they left solemn warning that a dreadful doom would fall on us if ever we tried to breathe the Flame. We have obeyed that adjuration for centuries, though now Ibir and others are seeking to defy it."

Terrell had masked his unbelief as he listened to the fantastic tale. Surely, he told himself, all this was only superstitious legend.

"And have the Nagas whom you watch tried to get to the outside world?" he asked the young king skeptically.

Kuluun shook his head. "No, the serpent-men never leave their citadel. That Citadel of the Nagas lies miles northeast of here, in a gloomy valley deep in the jungle. Inside that Citadel of the serpent-men is located the Flame of Life."

Gron uttered a growling comment. "I still say that we Yamayans ought to attack their Citadel and pull it down around their ears."

"It would be futile to try," Kuluun answered heavily. "Even if we battered our way into the Citadel, we could not kill the invulnerable serpent-men."

Terrell noticed that Hirota was talking in a low, urgent voice with Ibir. The cunning-eyed Yamayan noble seemed deeply interested in what the Japanese was saying.

Aleck Harris leaned across Ruth to murmur a warning. "Looks to me as though our Nipponese friend is cooking up something with that fellow Ibir."

"I don't like it," Terrell muttered.

"Keep an eye on them."

Kuluun was speaking to him again. The young Yamayan ruler was asking Terrell:

"What is the nature of that war in the outer world of which you spoke? Why should it cause you people to come into this land?"

"Yes, tell us about the war," pressed big Gron. The bearded giant added chaffingly. "Are all those who fight as good at swordsmanship as you are, bantam?"

"It is not fought with swords, but with weapons more terrible," Terrell answered soberly.

"Bah, what kind of warriors are you if you can't use swords?" scoffed the bluff giant. "Who began the struggle?"

Terrell pointed at Hirota. "His people began it. They seek to bring all the peoples of the East under their tyranny."

Hirota broke off his low conversation with Ibir, to deny that. "It is not so! We Japanese desire only to bring the blessings of civilization to the less advanced races."

"As you have brought those blessings to the people of China for the last five years," said Yuan Chi bitterly.

Kuluun continued his keen questioning. The young king, Terrell realized, was far from being a fool. He seemed to be sifting much of the truth out of the opposing statements of the American and the Japanese.

When Kuluun finally rose to his feet as signal that the feast was ended, he looked darkly at the five strangers.

"It grows evident to me that each of your parties came here seeking the Flame to use as a weapon in your outer war," he said ominously.

"I have told you that I wish only to prevent the Japanese from securing it," Terrell said hastily.

"You have both told me many things

—but how much truth you have spoken I cannot decide," Kuluun replied implacably. "I shall reserve decision until I meet with the Council of Nobles tomorrow."

AS he was conducted back to their apartment with Ruth and Harris and Yuan Chi, Terrell gave the girl and the pilot a brief account of what he had learned, and of Kuluun's reservation of decision.

Harris' face tightened. "Doesn't look so good. At least it'll be the end of Hirota's mission, if we're all scragged together."

"The Japanese is resourceful," warned Yuan Chi. "He talked much with Ibir during the feast. I tried to overhear, but could not."

"If he could get away from here, he'd make straight for the Flame," Terrell said. "Apparently it's not so far from here."

They had reached their prison-suite, which was now lighted by torches. As their silent guards ushered them inside, Terrell looked back and saw Hirota being similarly conducted back into his own apartment.

Yuan Chi dropped onto one of the low chairs, a smothered exclamation of relief coming from his lips as he sat down.

"You've been walking too much on that ankle," Ruth said anxiously. "It'll never heal if you don't give it some rest."

Aleck Harris' keen blue eyes fixed on Terrell's strained, sober face.

"Terrell, what do you make of it all? I mean, what these people say about the Flame of Life and the Nagas. There *must* be something in it when they're so convinced."

Yuan Chi spoke quietly from the chair in which he was nursing his ankle. "There is much in it, I fear. The tra-

dition of the pre-human Nagas, the ancient, evil serpent-people, is unshakable in Asia. In this lost land, we are finding verification of that tradition."

Terrell turned impatiently. "Then I suppose that you think the Flame of Life tradition is true also, and that it can really give men eternal life?"

Yuan Chi shrugged. "It seems logical, to me. How else would a remnant of the ancient Nagas have survived, had they not won immortality from such a source?"

That chilling doubt flowed back into Terrell's mind. His thoughts shook to the impact of wild speculations. Men all through the ages had believed in and quested for a fabled source of supernatural life. If it really existed—

He was aroused from that oppressive speculation by a distant sound. Alert at once, Terrell raised a warning finger to the others, and silently opened the door into the corridor for a tiny crack.

Through that crack, he could peer past the guards outside and see down the corridor. At once, he saw Ibir speaking to the Yamayan guards outside Hirota's room. After a moment, the soldiers stood aside and admitted the crafty-faced noble to the Japanese' room.

Terrell softly closed his own door, and then turned swiftly to the others. "Ibir just went in Hirota's cell. That means he *is* cooking up something with that Jap!"

Yuan Chi's olive face expressed alarm. "I don't like that, Terrell. We know that Ibir and his party want to reach the Flame. Hirota wants to reach it, too. If the Japanese joins forces with Ibir's party—"

"If Hirota does that, he may be able to get out of this city and reach the Flame!" Terrell finished for him. "We can't let that happen. We've got to find out what they're plotting together."

"I don't see how we can do that," said Aleck Harris. "We can't get out of here or get near Hirota's room—there are guards outside our door, and his too."

Terrell's lips compressed. Without speaking, he walked out through the curtained window onto the little balcony that jutted from the sculptured wall of the palace.

OUT there in the darkness, the lights of Yamaya spread in a blinking pattern beyond the royal gardens. The distant jungle was a brooding blackness under the stars.

Terrell glanced keenly along the palace wall. From each suite of rooms, there projected a tiny balcony like the one on which he stood. Hirota's would be the fourth balcony from his own, nearly a hundred feet away. His eyes ran along the sculptured wall between the balconies.

He came back inside to the others, showing his excitement. "I think I can make it to Hirota's balcony, along the wall! There's a sculptured cornice or ledge, a couple of inches wide. If I can manage it, it'll give me a chance to overhear what he and Ibir are up to."

Ruth looked worried. "Don't try it! If you fell, or if they discovered you—"

"I won't fall, and they won't discover me, for Hirota's curtains are drawn," Terrell reassured her.

"At least let Yuan or me go with you," protested Aleck Harris.

Terrell snorted. "What are you talking about? It'll be all I can do to hang onto that ledge, and I haven't got a wounded hand like yours or a bad ankle like Yuan's."

He made his voice authoritative. "You three are to remain here, no matter how long I'm gone. Remember, if you give cause for any kind of alarm, you'll ruin my chances."

Terrell then went quickly out onto their balcony. The moon had not yet risen, and the lights of the city blinked in vague, starlit obscurity. Though the darkness would lessen the risk of discovery, it would increase the difficulty of the traverse along the palace wall. That sculptured ledge on which he relied looked very narrow, now.

He swung himself over the balcony and carefully planted his feet on the narrow projection. Flattening his whole body closely against the stone wall, he edged by imperceptible movements toward the next balcony. His progress was slow, and his whole body ached from the strain of maintaining the unnatural posture.

Terrell's heart jumped to his throat as his foot slipped upon an eroded spot on the narrow ledge. He teetered on one toe, frantically pressing himself against the wall. His breath came in a great gasp of relief when he regained his balance. Then he shuffled painfully on.

In a few moments he had reached the next balcony. He crouched upon it, breathing hard and relaxing his aching muscles, before he went on. There still lay before him two more such perilous stretches before he would reach the balcony of Hirota's room. It was, in all, twenty minutes before he reached it. It seemed twenty years, to Terrell.

Hirota's balcony, on which he now stood, was in darkness. The heavy curtains at that window had been drawn, and only a slight crack of light came from between their folds. Terrell applied his eye to the crack.

He was looking into the torchlit room, and could clearly hear the voices of its occupants. Only Ibir and Hirota were talking—the stumpy Japanese follower of the latter sat looking anxiously at his officer.

Hirota's spectacles were glittering in

the torchlight as he spoke urgently to Ibir.

"You want to reach the Flame as much as I do, don't you?" he was saying to the Yamayan noble.

Ibir's crafty face showed a consuming eagerness. "Yes! I am not frightened by the superstitious warnings of doom left by our ancestors. Why should I let musty traditions keep me from becoming immortal?"

TERRELL could see the faint sneer on Hirota's face. The Jap, he knew, was as skeptical of the Flame's powers as was he himself. But he was using Ibir's belief in those powers to secure the fetish for himself.

"If you feel that way, why haven't you tried long ago to reach the Flame of Life?" Hirota was asking the Yamayan.

"I did try!" Ibir exclaimed. "I went secretly to the Citadel of the Nagas, in which the Flame is located. I asked the Nagas to let me breathe of it and become immortal like themselves. But they would not let me do so, until I paid a certain price."

Hirota looked startled. "Do you mean that you've actually talked with the Nagas? That those serpent-people are *real*?"

"Of course the Nagas are real," Ibir said impatiently. "They are imperishable, and have dwelt for centuries in that dark stronghold from which they never come forth. And for centuries they have bitterly cherished hate of Anahrwata, the great Buddhist king who was Kuluun's ancestor and who long ago destroyed almost all the serpent-race.

"That is why the Nagas hate Kuluun so intensely," Ibir continued. "It is because he is Anahrwata's descendant, and their implacable enemy like all his ancestors. The serpent-men long to see

Kuluun killed and the line of Anahrwata ended. That was the price they set me. They would let me breathe the Flame of Life, if I would deliver Kuluun to them!"

Terrell, listening out on the dark balcony, was as surprised by this as the Japanese seemed to be.

He could hardly yet believe that the Nagas really existed. But if they did, if Ibir had really plotted with them against Kuluun—

"But how could I make Kuluun prisoner and deliver him to the Nagas?" Ibir was concluding. "I've tried to stir up revolt against him by inciting the people to covet immortality. But I've gained only a few adherents—nearly all the warriors and people of Yamaya remain overawed by the ancient warnings against the Flame. With my handful of adherents, I couldn't hope to overcome Kuluun's guard and take him away a prisoner."

Hirota spoke swiftly. "You could seize Kuluun and take him to the Nagas this very night, if you accept my offer of help."

Ibir looked doubtfully at the Japanese. "There are only two of you. You and the scant dozen Yamayans I could count on would not be able to overcome Kuluun's palace guard."

"We could, if we had those two weapons that Gron took from us!" Hirota asserted. "The swords and spears of the warriors here would be useless against our two thunder-weapons."

Ibir's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "Kuluun ordered Gron to lock up those weapons. But we *might* be able to get them. The guards outside this door are secretly my followers—I arranged to have them posted here tonight so that I could visit you. With them and my other followers—"

"We could secure the thunder-weapons, cut down the palace guard

with them, then seize Kuluun and deliver him to the Nagas!" Hirota finished.

Ibir's eyes flashed. Then he asked shrewdly, "But what do you expect in reward for your help?"

The Japanese officer replied quickly. "All that I ask is that I be given access to the Flame of Life. I too wish to be immortal."

Terrell, crouched on the balcony, felt growing alarm and dismay. He could see through Hirota's scheme now.

The Japanese didn't really believe in the Flame's powers. He was planning to help Ibir reach it, and undoubtedly was scheming then to double-cross the Yamayan and secure the mysterious fetish for Japan's uses.

"The Nagas will certainly let you, too, breathe the Flame if you help me deliver their hated enemy Kuluun to them," Ibir was saying to Hirota. "I accept your bargain! We'll seize the king this very night!"

"Good!" said Hirota. "First, you must get together all your dependable followers, and have horses ready so that we can get away quickly when we've seized Kuluun. When you've done that, we'll strike to secure my weapons, with which we can easily cut down the king's guards."

Ibir nodded agreement of the rapid outline. "Come on. The palace is sleeping now."

The Yamayan conspirator went to the corridor-door of the chamber and Hirota and his Jap soldier followed him.

Terrell's thoughts raced wildly. He instantly perceived that his most effective course of action was to let Ibir and the Japanese go, and then give the alarm. Forewarned, Kuluun would crush the plot before it got started. And Hirota and his mission would perish.

The only thing wrong with Terrell's plan was that he never got a chance to carry it out. As Ibir opened the door into the corridor, the draft that blew through the room momentarily parted the curtains behind which Terrell was crouching. And Hirota, wheeling to leave the room, glimpsed the American.

Hirota recognized the danger and acted to avert it with such wonderful swiftness that Terrell had not even a moment to recast his plans. A split-second after those curtains blew open to expose him, the Japanese officer was lunging back across the room like a human projectile.

Terrell went down with Hirota's hand across his throat choking off his outcry, and with the Jap's other hand pressing with devilish ju-jitsu wizardry upon the nerve-centers at the back of his neck. He flailed arms that suddenly seemed leaden and strengthless, trying to break that grip. His brain was roaring. He only dimly heard Hirota's low cry.

"Quick, your dagger!" the Japanese was hissing to the Yamayan noble who stood stupefied.

Terrell, struggling frantically, glimpsed Ibir running forward. The Yamayan's face was muddy-yellow with alarm, and his dagger was raised.

The American rolled convulsively to evade that blade as it stabbed toward his back. He felt the burning bite of the steel along his armpit. His lungs seemed bursting from Hirota's strangling grip.

Desperation spurred him to a supreme effort to break his enemy's deadly clutch. He felt himself succeeding, felt his hands tearing Hirota's fingers away—

Then Terrell glimpsed the other Jap running forward. The man's saffron face was contorted as he raised a small metal stool for a smashing blow. Ter-

rell tried to duck, and couldn't. The stool crashed down on his skull.

CHAPTER VI

Citadel of the Nagas

"JOHN! John Terrell!"

It seemed to Terrell that that frantic voice was calling to him from an infinite distance away, through leagues of formless haze in which he had been floating for ages.

"John, *please* try to wake!"

The agonized appeal in that sobbing voice triggered consciousness in Terrell's dazed brain. He was aware first of pain—red tides of it that flowed rhythmically from his head down through his body.

He opened his eyes, and tried drunkenly to focus his vision. The white blur poised above him resolved itself into the pale, agonized face of Ruth Dunn. Her brown eyes were wet with tears.

"I thought you were dead!" she sobbed. "I've been working here, bandaging you and giving you first aid, but you showed no sign of waking."

Her firm little arm around Terrell's shoulder helped him to sit up. But the movement made the red pain-tides pulse faster through his head.

"Ruth, how did you get here?" he muttered dazedly.

"I came along the ledge between balconies, the same way you did," Ruth confessed. "I *had* to do it! We'd waited almost two hours and you hadn't come back. I knew neither Yuan nor Aleck could make it along the ledge with their injuries, so I slipped out when they weren't looking."

Terrell looked wildly around. The torchlit chamber had no occupants but the girl and himself. That hours had indeed elapsed was evidenced by the faint gray light of dawn that showed

outside the window.

Remembrance came back to his aching brain in a rush. He struggled to get to his feet.

"Hirota and his Jap and Ibir—gone hours ago!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "They must have thought they had killed me—"

"I thought so too, when I first saw you," Ruth said quiveringly. "Your head looked crushed, and that slight stab in your back had bled so badly."

"Ruth, you don't understand!" cried Terrell. "Hirota and Ibir went to carry out a plot against Kuluun. We've got to warn the king!"

"What was that?" Ruth exclaimed suddenly.

Terrell had heard it too, a distant, raging yell that echoed from the lower levels of the palace. It was succeeded by a chorus of shouts, and then came a staccato sound that cut brutally across them.

Bam-bam-bam-bam—

"We're too late!" Terrell cried. "The Japs have got their guns back."

Trumpets were blaring alarm through the palace. There were fierce shouts and the rush of running feet below.

Terrell and Ruth ran out into the corridor. The guards who had been stationed there were gone now. They met Aleck Harris and Yuan Chi emerging from the other rooms.

"Terrell, you're hurt!" exclaimed Aleck Harris. Then as the staccato rattle of the sub-machine guns came again: "Good God, what's happening?"

"Ibir's leading an attempt to seize Kuluun, and that devil Hirota is helping him," Terrell answered hoarsely. "We've got to help stop it. Come on!"

Ruth started to follow them as he and Harris and the limping Yuan Chi started down the corridor. But Terrell thrust her hastily back.

"Stay here, Ruth. There's fighting going on down there."

"But I'm not afraid—" she protested.

He was already stumbling down the stairs. Aleck Harris ran beside him and the Chinese officer hobbled hastily in their wake.

AN appalling scene met their eyes as they lunged down the steps to the round central hall in which the two main corridors intersected. Ibir and a half-dozen other armed Yamayans were hurrying away, dragging with them the senseless form of Kuluun. The young king was bleeding from a wound on the forehead.

Kuluun's guards lay scattered about the corridors in dead heaps. The last handful of guards remaining was desperately charging forward with up-raised swords, to rescue their ruler. But Hirota and his Jap soldier, covering the escape of Ibir's group, were using the sub-machine guns.

The spray of bullets cut down those charging guards before they could get close enough to use their swords. Terrell yelled his rage as he threw himself on down the steps toward the Japs. Hirota saw him coming, and the startled Jap officer swung his deadly weapon up toward him.

"Terrell, look out!" shouted Aleck Harris. As he voiced that warning, the young English pilot shoved the American violently aside.

Bam-bam-bam—

The burst from Hirota's gun caught Harris before he could get out of the line of fire. He crumpled forward on the steps.

Terrell leaped furiously across the fallen pilot, charging on down the stairs. But Hirota and his Jap had swiftly retreated after Ibir and the others, for now the whole palace was waking to the uproar.

Snatching up a sword, the American staggered down the corridor after them. Before he reached the entrance of the palace by which they had left, the drum of horses' hooves reached his ears.

He burst out into the gray mists of dawn, to see Ibir and the two Japanese and their half-dozen Yamayan followers riding off at full gallop through the slumbering city. And Kuluun's unconscious figure lay across Ibir's saddlebow.

"Gron!" yelled Terrell hoarsely, turning and running back into the palace. "Gron, where are you?"

Then he saw the giant bearded captain, his massive face distorted with anger and his great sword in his hand, running toward him at the head of a mass of Yamayan warriors. The alarm of uproar had brought them.

"What's happened here?" roared the giant. "Where's the king? If you strangers have murdered him—"

Terrell was too numb with shock of horror and dismay to fear the upraised sword with which the raging giant menaced him.

"Ibir and his men have seized Kuluun and are on their way to deliver him over to the Nagas!" he cried. "Ibir plotted it with the Japanese, and they stole those weapons of theirs and used them. The Nagas are to let Ibir breathe the flame, for delivering the king to them."

Gron's bearded face became terrible in its white rage. "Hell destroy that traitor! The Nagas would pay any price to get their hands on Kuluun!"

"Are you going to stand here groaning about it or are we going after them?" shouted Terrell.

"We'll go after them!" cried the raging giant. "We may not be able to overtake them before they reach the Citadel of the Nagas. But by Buddha, we'll smash our way into that devils'

castle before we let them kill the king."

Gron began shouting orders to his officers. "Gather every horseman and war-elephant! Rouse the city!"

Terrell was running back along the corridor to the stairs. There, Yuan Chi and Ruth were bending over Aleck Harris' limp body.

The girl looked up, her eyes glimmering. "He's dead."

"He died pushing me out of the way of Hirota's bullets," choked Terrell. "That murdering Jap owes me now for both Aleck and Sigri."

TRUMPETS were sounding stridently inside and outside the palace. They could hear distant cries, clank of armored men running up, gallop of arriving horses and the heavy, hasty tread of elephants.

Terrell and Yuan Chi carried Harris' body into a nearby chamber, laying it upon a couch and reverently covering the dead pilot's face. They hurried out then, to the palace entrance.

The sun was rising. And the golden city Yamaya had become a vast hive of excitement. A score of great war-elephants, a half-hundred horsemen and several hundred Yamayan footmen had gathered here.

"You ride with us?" cried Gron as Terrell and the Chinese appeared. "Good! If we had believed what you told us about that lying Japanese, this never would have happened."

"I've my own account to settle with Hirota," Terrell replied as he mounted one of the waiting horses. Then he exclaimed with sudden anxiety, "Ruth, no! You can't!"

The girl, who had changed back into her soiled khaki uniform, was mounting one of the Yamayan ponies beside himself and Yuan Chi.

"I won't stay here!" she cried. "I'm going where you go, John!"

It was a confession of love as clear as the admission in her strained brown eyes. Terrell's heart pounded with the mingled emotions of wild, incredulous joy and overpowering anxiety.

"But Ruth—"

It was too late for remonstrance. Gron had vaulted onto his big stallion and was shouting thunderously to his followers.

"Yamayans, we ride to rescue our king from the Nagas! It is said that the serpent-men are deathless. Today we shall prove or disprove that forever, with our swords!"

A wild yell answered him from hundreds of throats. And they were immediately all sweeping forward after Gron as the giant leader spurred his stallion.

Terrell, swept along with Yuan Chi and Ruth by the fierce, galloping horsemen, could only shout fearfully to the girl.

"Ruth, for God's sake stay close to me and keep out of danger!"

Thunder of hundreds of hoofs clattering fast upon the cobbled streets of Yamaya, drowned out his appeal. They were riding out through the open gates, with the war-elephants and the footmen following them closely. The red glare of the rising sun painted their faces luridly.

Gron's black stallion led the way across the fields toward the jungle. The giant captain's bellowed orders strung them out into a long file, in which they galloped into a jungle trail leading northeast.

Terrell's crazy thoughts kept time with the hammer of his pony's hoofs along that dim, narrow trail. He was keyed to unbearable tension.

"This is the showdown, Yuan!" he called to the Chinese riding behind himself and Ruth. "If we don't get Hirota now, if he gets to the Flame of

Life and escapes with it—"

"John, *what* are the Nagas whose citadel we're riding to?" Ruth cried to him. "They can't really be what the Yamayans say?"

"No, that's impossible," Terrell denied. "That's simply superstitious legend about an enemy people."

Desperately, he repeated that assurance to himself to quell that premonition of shadowy horror that kept rising in his mind. The belief that the Nagas were the serpent-folk of ancient legend could have no real basis. Kulunn had said that the Nagas never came forth from their Citadel, and that mystery had somehow engendered horrifying traditions.

Whatever the Nagas were, the Flame of Life was somewhere in their stronghold! And that mysterious and evil fetish, to which such impossibly miraculous powers were ascribed, was the final focus of his deadly struggle with Hirota. If the wily Japanese secured it and escaped with it—

Terrell's agony of apprehensions made the ride through the jungle seem many hours long. Yet it was actually little more than two hours of galloping along the dim jungle trails before Gron drew rein.

"Down in that gorge is the Citadel of the Nagas," bellowed the giant captain. "And look, there go the traitors we pursue!"

A yell of rage burst from all the mounted Yamayans as they saw.

THEY had reached the lip of a gorge many miles long, but only a half-mile wide. The floor of that gloomy chasm wound downward from where they sat their horses, to depths in which reigned perpetual dusk.

Far, far down on the distant floor of the dark gash in the rock, there loomed a somber and ancient black

castle of hexagonal shape. Toward it through the twilight rode the party of Ibir and Hirota.

"That Citadel!" gasped Ruth, her face pale. "It looks as old as evil."

"Aye, it is the stronghold of evil itself," hissed Yuan Chi, his slant eyes blazing. "The last refuge of the *daevas* or demons who once oppressed all earth."

"Forward!" Gron was roaring. "We may still cut them off before they enter the Citadel!"

They galloped pell-mell down the rocky slope into the gorge, Terrell clinging desperately to his mount and glancing anxiously at Ruth.

It was like riding down out of daylight into a somber dusk that became deeper and chillier as they went lower. No trees or grass grew upon the dark, barren floor of this chasm. No life was visible except the bats flitting through the unnatural twilight.

Gron's drawn sword glittered through the obscurity as the giant Yamayan led their rush forward along the floor of the chasm. His raging voice floated back to them on the wind.

"Faster! They're entering the Citadel!"

Terrell felt the hair bristling on his neck as he descried at this close distance the mysterious and dreaded stronghold ahead.

The Citadel of the Nagas loomed, as immeasurably ancient in appearance as though built in the dawn of time. Its vast, hexagonal bulk was of massive black stones crumbling from the erosion of countless ages.

There was but one entrance in the high stone wall of the Citadel. That portal was set between the outreaching paws of a gigantic, devil-faced stone sphinx whose colossal face glared from directly above the gates.

Those massive metal gates were

closing! Ibir and the Japanese, with their followers and the captive Kuluun, had been admitted by the Nagas.

"Too late!" cried Gron furiously. "They've closed the gates! But we'll batter them open!"

He spurred his horse around, and sent his stentorian yell ringing back along the gorge to the elephants and foot-soldiers who followed.

"Bring up the elephants, quickly!"

Terrell was unnerved by the somber silence of the Citadel, as contrasted to the raging horde of Yamayans outside its gates. Not an arrow, not a spear, came from the castle's walls. No one showed upon them.

He fiercely fought down that chill of doubt. With a cautioning word to Ruth to stay back, he and Yuan Chi spurred forward with Gron as four ponderous elephants came rushing toward the metal gates of the Citadel.

The great beasts lowered their heads, and braced their mighty legs. They thrust with all the power of their huge muscles. There was a snapping crash—and the gates of the Citadel burst inward.

"Come on!" bellowed Gron exultantly, spurring forward. "Kill Ibir and find the king!"

Terrell too was yelling as with sword in hand he and Yuan Chi and the other horsemen galloped in through the open gate. The Yamayan footmen were rushing after them.

Then it happened. A cataract of fire rained suddenly down across the portal. Blazing oil or chemicals were being released from the open, grinning jaws of the devil-faced sphinx above the gates.

"Hell's trick of the Nagas!" raged Gron. "They've trapped us!"

THEY were caught inside the fire-closed portals—he and Terrell and

Yuan Chi and a dozen other horsemen. And among them, Terrell saw Ruth!

He spurred toward the girl who had followed despite his warning. Screams were coming from outside, from Yamayan warriors caught by the hissing flood of fire from above. The forces outside were retreating from the gate.

"The Nagas!" screamed a Yamayan beside Terrell.

Terrell's heart skipped a beat as he saw the creatures who had sprung out of the walls around them, to attack them.

The Nagas were not human. But at first glance, they seemed of human size and shape. They were a horrible ophidian caricature of mankind. Their grayish-green bodies seemed as supple and boneless as a snake's, their legs and arms seeming more like tentacles than limbs.

Their heads were hideously snake-like, blunted, browless. The only features of the ghastly faces were the wide, white-lipped mouth and lidless eyes. Most alien feature of all, the bodies of these weird serpent-men shone with a faint, iridescent luminosity.

"God, they're real—the Nagas of legend are real!" husked Terrell as he won to Ruth's side. "Then the Flame of Life, too—"

"Cut through the fiends!" Gron was bellowing undauntedly. "Find the king!"

The hideous Nagas were not attacking with swords or spears. They were flinging uncoiling nooses that caught and wrapped around the Yamayans as though themselves alive.

Terrell recovered from his stupefaction of horror as one of the ghastly creatures raced toward himself and Ruth. He spurred his terrified horse forward, and sent his sword stabbing through the Naga's breast.

He ripped the blade out again. But the Naga did not fall. The serpent-man merely stood for a moment, as though momentarily stopped by the shock. And in that moment, Terrell's unbelieving eyes saw that terrible wound upon the Naga's breast *closing*, healing instantaneously.

The serpent-man was whirling his strange noose-like weapon. To Terrell came the awful final realization that these creatures were indeed indestructible.

CHAPTER VII

The Flame of Life

DAZED by the nightmare reality of the Nagas, Terrell was for the moment drained of all initiative and purpose. He was as though paralyzed by the numbing shock of discovery that the serpent-men of ancient tradition existed, and that they were indeed invulnerably immortal.

Ruth's sharp scream of horror roused him. One of the curious nooses of the Nagas had flown unerringly through the air and struck the girl. Instantly, with that weird pseudo-life that made the weapons so ghastly, the noose had coiled itself tightly around her.

Terrell spurred frantically toward her. He was too late. His momentary paralysis had sealed his own fate. The Naga whom he had stabbed without effect was flinging his own noose. The thin, black rope-like thing struck Terrell's chest, and instantly tightened around him. The weapon appeared to be a thing cunningly designed of organic, perhaps even semi-living matter. Whatever object it touched was instantly and tightly held.

Its constriction was so swift that Terrell had no chance to escape it. His

arms were pinioned to his body as though by a cable of steel. His horse was plunging frantically. Nagas were reaching up to pull him and Ruth from the saddles.

"John!" screamed the girl, in frantic revulsion from the touch of the Nagas.

He strained convulsively to free himself—and couldn't. He tried to call encouragement to her. But his throat was dry and tight.

They were captives. They all were captives—all of them who had been trapped inside the Citadel by the fiery curtain. Gron, and Yuan Chi, and a half-dozen others of the Yamayans.

"Devils from hell!" Gron was roaring like a trapped bear, trying in vain to break the nooses now binding him. "Spawn of evil—"

Yuan Chi's clear voice reached through the tumult. "Terrell, they got you too? It's all up with us, I fear. The Yamayans outside retreated in terror when the fire fell."

Yes, it was all up. Terrell knew it with an icy certainty that was like dull agony in his horror-fogged mind. The attackers outside had fled in an excess of superstitious terror. There was no hope from there.

Yet it still seemed like a bad dream. Lying bound and helpless on the pavement beside Ruth, he saw the Nagas about them as one might see demoniac creatures in a medieval vision of hell. The resemblance was heightened by the weird iridescence with which the Nagas' bodies glowed.

What caused that iridescent luminosity of their bodies? And what caused the shimmering haze of faint light or force that seemed to pervade everything inside the Citadel? He could feel that haze as a tingling, tangible vibration through his flesh, as he lay there.

The Nagas jerked the captives onto

their feet. Though the arms of all were pinioned by living nooses, their legs were unfettered. One of the hideous serpent-men pointed, and spoke to the prisoners.

"You will come with us before the Most Ancient, to answer for your crime of attacking this place," said the creature.

The voice was a sibilant, hissing one that issued between wide white lips that gave ghastly glimpses of the creature's *forked* tongue.

But the words were in the ancient Burmese language spoken by the Yamayans. These creatures were intelligent, despite their being inhuman.

"They're mutants!" Yuan Chi was speaking hoarsely as they were herded across this open courtyard of the Citadel. "Terrell, this is a mutant race that forked off the main human tree, far back in the past. An evolutionary freak of a species, that's been long extinct everywhere but in this lost corner of earth—"

"Yuan, they can't be killed!" Terrell's voice was husky with the horror of that knowledge. "I stabbed one through the breast, and the wound closed before my eyes. The creature was unhurt."

"I saw," said the Chinese officer. "It's incredible. Yet not outside the bounds of scientific possibility. Their bodies must possess an unearthly power of regeneration."

REGENERATION! Terrell's dazed mind seized upon that hint of explanation, which illumined many things.

For regeneration was the biological name for that ability of a living creature to heal and restore wounded parts of its body. Some forms of life possessed it in much greater degree than others. A lizard could regenerate a lost limb. An insect of some species, a

whole lost organ. A man could regenerate a lost bit of skin or bone, but little more. The degree of the power depended on the chemical activity of the living cells.

But suppose a deep and radical change was worked in the chemical constitution and activity of the cells? A change that caused a heightening of the regenerative power to the last degree of completeness and swiftness? Then, a group of damaged cells could almost instantly regenerate themselves.

Living creatures died, because a vital organ was damaged by accident or disease. But if their cells possessed the power to regenerate *instantaneously*, that damaged organ or tissues would instantly renew itself. Death would be impossible.

"But how was it done?" husked Terrell. "How were their bodily cells so deeply altered as to confer that power? If the Flame of Life—"

He stopped, appalled. "If the Flame of Life conferred that power of super-regeneration, then the potency of the Flame to bestow immortality is *real*! The ancient traditions are true!"

Yuan Chi's face was quivering. "And if the Flame really has that power, and that devil Hirota gains access to it—"

The reminder illumined ghastly possibilities in Terrell's brain. But there was no time to brood upon them. The Nagas were pushing them on.

The prisoners were being herded across that court toward the square, high, open entrance of the main structure of the black Citadel. Out of that open portal, the luminous, iridescent haze or force beat strongly upon them. Ruth Dunn's white face was that of a sleepwalker.

Terrell felt that same shrinking horror as they went up the few steps into the portal. Only Gron, in whom the hideous nature of the Nagas entailed no

violence to preconceived ideas, continued to voice his fury.

"There's that traitor Ibir!" he raged as they passed through the portal. "If I could get my arms loose—"

"Hirota!" hissed Yuan Chi, in accents of undying hatred.

Terrell saw neither of them. His vision was too transfixed by the awesome spectacle that lay before him in the vast room they had entered.

For the room was vast, and terrible. It was the main hall of the Citadel, a gigantic hexagonal chamber whose stone walls had no windows. Round its sides were gathering scores of the hideous Nagas, coming from all parts of the labyrinthine castle.

Near them, at the side of the hall, Ibir and his fellow-traitors from Yamaya stood with the bound, captive Kuluun. Hirota was with them. And a little beyond them, against the stone wall, was a stone throne carved in repulsive patterns. Upon it sat a single one of the Nagas.

All this was around the edge of the hexagonal hall. But at its center was that which dwarfed everything else here to insignificance. In the stone floor yawned a round pit or well, a hundred feet across. It dropped to incalculable depths. And up out of that pit, there gushed—

"The Flame of Life!" Ruth Dunn's voice was a dry whisper from beside Terrell.

"Good God!" he heard his own voice babbling. "That thing—"

IT WAS the Flame of Life. It could be nothing else, he knew. That awful radiance of cold white flame that burst up from the depths of the pit like a fountain of freezing fire was too unearthly to be aught else.

It was quite silent, and that added to the alien terror of it. A soundless and

awful geyser of heatless flame, it never for a moment ceased gushing up out of the opening. And from its raging brilliance there came that tingle of vibrant force, which he felt here much more strongly.

Terrell began to understand. This was radioactivity, not fire. That bursting geyser of blazing force was a torrent of radiation streaming up from unguessable radioactive deposits deep down beneath this Citadel. Radiation that could alter the chemical nature of living cells, deeply and irrevocably, to give them that power of super-regeneration—

"Bring the prisoners and the others before me!" It was the hissing voice of the enthroned Naga who had been called the Most Ancient.

The captives were herded stumblingly toward the throne. Ibir and Hirota walked ahead of them, the faces of both men avid with unholy eagerness as they looked toward the bursting Flame.

"It's all a dream," Ruth was saying pitifully to Terrell. "I'll wake up back at the base hospital."

Agonized apprehension for her cut through everything else in his seething mind. "Ruth, I'll get you out of here somehow—I will!"

But they were standing in front of that stone throne, and the lidless eyes of the unhuman creature upon it were looking down at them. Those alien orbs fixed upon Kuluun's hard, defiant face.

"So, at last," murmured the sibilant voice of the Most Ancient, "we have in our power to end the line of the cursed Anahrwata, who long ago stamped out our race. We have waited very long for this day."

The young king did not waver. "You only gained this victory by treachery, spawn of evil!"

His flaming glance fell upon Ibir and the Japanese. Ibir recoiled a little from

the bitter accusation in that look.

But Hirota did not. The Japanese stepped boldly forward to address the unhuman creature on the throne.

"Most Ancient of Nagas, it was *my* plan that delivered Kuluun into your hands," he declared. "For reward, I was promised a chance to breathe of the Flame of Life."

The dreadful lidless eyes rested on the Japanese. "You wish, then, to become immortal like us Nagas?" asked the hissing voice.

It seemed to Terrell that there was an ironic something in the sibilant question, a veiled quality. But Hirota, if he sensed it, ignored it.

"Yes, I wish to become invulnerably immortal as you are!" he exclaimed. "I have merited this reward from you. Will you give it to me, and let me return then to my own people?"

Terrell divined the appalling nature of Hirota's intentions. Until recently, he knew, the Japanese had no more than himself believed in the powers of the Flame. But now, he knew those powers to be true.

And knowing that the Flame could confer invulnerability, Hirota was scheming to use the Flame for Japan! He would come back with hosts of his countrymen, so that they too might become as he.

Dreadful vision of a world in which embattled democracies strove in vain against a Nipponese horde which could not be killed, flashed through Terrell's brain. It could happen, if Hirota succeeded—

"You have merited the reward you ask," the Most Ancient was hissing to Hirota. "You shall breathe invulnerability from the Flame, and then we will permit you to go from here."

"And I too?" panted Ibir eagerly. "You promised that I too should be allowed to breathe the Flame if I

brought you Kuluun."

"You, too," assured the sibilant voice of the Naga. "You both shall attain immortality like ours, and then may go. Yes, you may go as far away from our Citadel as you wish."

A GAIN, Terrell's overstrained mind seemed to catch a quality of *amusement* in the Naga's voice and look. But he had no time to speculate upon it, for he was raising his voice in frantic protest.

"No, don't do that!" Terrell cried to the Naga ruler. "You don't know what you're doing! If you let this Japanese become deathless and then go away, he'll be back with armies of his countrymen!"

"It is not so!" rapped Hirota harshly. "Once I have gone, I will not come back."

The Naga ruler answered Terrell's frantic warning imperturbably. "My word has been spoken. The man shall gain the immortality he seeks, and then shall go from here. If he wishes to return, that is his own affair."

The creature pointed a tentacular arm toward the raging geyser of radiance. Terrell perceived for the first time that a sender metal girder spanned the pit from which gushed the Flame. That spidery pathway was no more than a foot wide, and was almost constantly hidden from view by the torrent of blazing radiation.

"Step out into the Flame, and stand within it until its power causes your body to change and glow," the Naga was directing Hirota. "Then you will be as we are."

Hirota moved toward the pit. He hesitated, before setting foot upon that precarious metal pathway.

Terrell could well understand his hesitation! It seemed suicidal to walk out into the full blaze of that awful

geyser of cold fire. But, after a momentary pause, the Japanese stepped boldly out.

"By Buddha, he has courage," muttered Yuan Chi, watching with the same tension that held them all.

Hirota was walking into the terrific rush of the Flame! The geyser of up-bursting radiation veiled the Jap's stocky figure from view.

Terrell could see him only in vague glimpses, standing out there at the very center of that giddy span over the awful pit. It seemed to him that Hirota was shuddering and reeling beneath the impact of the radiation.

Minutes passed, seeming like eternities. Had Hirota staggered into the pit? No—now they saw that the Japanese was returning.

But Hirota was changed. His face and hands, his whole body, glowed now with the same iridescent luminosity as did the Nagas. And his glowing face was transfigured with triumph as he came back to them.

"I have done it!" Unholy exultation throbbed in his harsh cry. "I felt my body change—I can feel burning new life throbbing in me!"

"It is the new life kindled in you by the Flame, a life akin to the force of the Flame itself," said the Most Ancient's hissing voice.

Terrell dimly understood. The Japanese body had been transformed by the phenomenon of induced radioactivity. Every cell had been made at least partly radioactive in nature by that impact of awful radiation.

Hirota flung his arms out, as though drinking in the tingling force of the bursting Flame that throbbed and shimmered through the Citadel.

"I can feel the radiation of the Flame now in every fiber of me!" he exulted. "New life, new strength—and now I cannot ever die!"

A sudden doubt checked his exultation. "Or can I? Did it affect me as it affected you Nagas? I'll soon find out!"

And Hirota snatched out his dagger, and plunged its blade through his own arm.

The horrified watchers saw blood spurt from his wound only for a fraction of a second. Then, that swiftly, the wound closed and healed like magic.

"I *am* immortal!" Hirota's cry was one of supreme victory. "And when the leaders of Japan—"

He checked what he had been about to exclaim. He looked up at the Naga ruler's inscrutable ophidian face.

"I am free to go—now?" he asked swiftly. "You promised that I should be allowed to go."

The Most Ancient waved toward the open portals of the great hall. "You are free to go, as far as you wish to go."

Again, that ironic amusement in the sibilant voice! And with it, a stir of something like hideous mirth among the Nagas in the hall.

BUT Hirota, drunk with his triumph, was beyond noticing. With a final triumphant glance at Terrell's horror-stricken face, the Japanese strode out through the open portals.

Terrell watched frozenly, as the weirdly luminous Hirota walked out across the courtyard. The great gates in the wall of the Citadel were still open, and the wall of fire that had curtailed them was now cut off.

Hirota was walking out through those gates! The Japanese was on his way to take word to the hordes of Japan of a weapon that could make them invulnerable and unconquerable. Terrell saw catastrophe to the world he knew, walking out there in the form of the receding Hirota.

And there was nothing to stop it.

The Yamayan attackers had fled, and no obstacle lay between the Japanese and his dreadful purpose.

But why, then, was Hirota stopping just out there beyond the gates? Why was he staggering, writhing as though in torment?

"Something's wrong with him," breathed Yuan Chi prayerfully. "Something terrible—"

Hirota was running wildly back into the Citadel, as though to escape an agony too great for endurance.

And the Nagas were laughing! They were laughing as though the point of an expected joke had been reached, whose hellish humor they tasted with exquisite pleasure.

Hirota's luminous face was contorted awfully, and he was screaming as he ran back into the hexagonal hall.

"What happened to me?" he screamed. "As soon as I left the Citadel, every bit of my body began to *burn*! Each step I took made it worse—I couldn't bear it, I had to come back—"

The sibilant voice of the Most Ancient was a bland mockery. "It is something which we did not tell you about the Flame of Life. Those who breathe of it and let it kindle its own immortal force within their fibers, cannot die. *But forever after, they must remain close to the Flame so that their changed bodies may constantly drink its force. They must feed upon the radiance of it, or else suffer torment.*"

Hirota's face was awful as he heard, and understood. And Terrell, too, felt the icy shock of that ghastly revelation.

Dimly, Terrell sensed the immutable scientific laws that lay behind the dreadful Naga jest. Hirota's body had been kindled into weird radioactive life by the Flame. But the phenomenon of induced radioactivity that had irrevocably transformed his living cells must

be constantly renewed by the tingling radiation of the great source. If it were not, his cells would slowly feed upon their own atoms, an endless, fiery torment.

"Do you mean that I can never leave the Flame of Life's vicinity?" screeched the maddened Japanese. "That I must remain in this Citadel?"

"Aye, you must remain here until time ends as *we* have remained," came the Naga's merciless rejoinder. "Long ages ago, we breathed of the Flame without knowing that henceforth we would be chained to it, and that is why we had to build this castle around it and dwell here ever since. We cannot die, we cannot even kill ourselves—and we can never leave here."

The serpent-man added, with that bitter irony, "But we have kept our promise to you. You are immortal and you are free to go—if you wish!"

And again that hissing laughter broke from all the Nagas in the great hall, a sibilant mirth like that of fiends in hell.

HIROTA went mad. The Japanese raged and screamed insanely, shaking his fists at the Nagas and at the Flame.

Terrell was choking, "He'll never leave here. The Japanese will never use this as a weapon, not matter what happens to us—"

"*Now* we know why our ancestors warned of the evil doom that fell upon those who sought the Flame!" Kuluun exclaimed hoarsely.

Terrell heard Ibir whimpering. The Yamayan traitor was ghastly pale with horror and fear as he stared with bulging eyes at the mad Hirota. And sight of him triggered a faint hope in Terrell's mind.

"Ibir!" he whispered to the stricken traitor. "They'll make *you* one of them. You'll remain in this place forever."

"No! No!" gasped Ibir. "I'd rather die! I never dreamed—"

"There's still a chance to escape if you cut us loose!" Terrell said swiftly. "Your only chance!"

The Naga horde had all its attention bent upon the insanely raging Hirota. They were still filling the great hall with their hissing laughter as the crazed Japanese raved.

Ibir, hope flickering across his livid face at Terrell's words, slipped behind the row of captives. Terrell felt the traitor's dagger slicing through the pseudo-living ropes coiled around his body.

Those ropes curled and writhed when cut, as though indeed living. But his arms fell free of them. And Yuan Chi, and Ruth, with Gron and Kuluun and the others, were being freed also.

"Grab swords and make for the door when I give the word," Terrell whispered hoarsely along the line.

"We can't kill them!" Yuan Chi muttered frantically. "No weapon can kill them."

"If we can keep them off until we get outside the Citadel, we're safe!" Terrell flashed. "They can't follow."

Hirota had flung himself forward to attack the Most Ancient. The serpent-man upon the throne flung back the insane Japanese with a thrust.

The hissing mirth of the watching Nagas rose to a new pitch. And Terrell seized the opportunity of that moment.

"*Now!*" he yelled.

With the shout, Terrell snatched Ibir's sword from the traitor's belt and lunged with Ruth toward the portals of the great hall. Yuan Chi had grabbed the sword of another of the Yamayan traitors, and he and Kuluun and Gron sprang forward at the same moment.

It was like an explosion of sudden action in which everything in the vast

hall seemed to spin around the central Flame. They were at the door, the Nagas leaping with superhuman swiftness to overtake them.

But the crazily raging Hirota was in the way of the serpent-men. By the time they had swept the maddened Japanese out of the way, the moment had given Terrell and the others time to plunge out into the courtyard. They staggered across it toward the gigantic open gates of the Citadel.

A flying Naga noose wrapped around Ruth's ankles and tripped her as they were running between the great gates.

"Go on!" she cried to Terrell.

HE DID not even answer that plea.

He stopped and stooped frantically to pick her up, knowing that the Nagas would be on them the next moment.

But the Nagas were being held back. Yuan Chi had turned and was wielding his sword like a madman. His blade was slashing the serpent-men and the nooses with which they sought to trap him. The wounds he gave the Nagas could not harm them but he *was* blocking their pursuit for the moment.

"Yuan!" yelled Terrell. He had cut the noose around Ruth's ankles and now he thrust her on through the gate and turned to go back to Yuan Chi.

It was too late. The furious serpent-men had now used other weapons than the nooses. Yuan Chi was falling with three spears in his heart.

Gron and Kuluun had turned like Terrell to race back to the aid of the heroic Chinese. But now the giant captain thrust the staggering American on through the portals.

"We can't help him now! Out, before they have us!" yelled Gron.

They flung themselves through that giant gate over which the devil-faced sphinx grinned malignly. They stum-

bled away from the Citadel.

The Nagas followed through the gate! But only for a few yards. Then, the serpent-men stopped. Brought to a halt by their own agony at leaving the limits of the Flame's radiation, they retreated back to their prison-castle with cries of pain and rage.

Terrell and his group stumbled on along the floor of the gloomy gorge. Their strength was near the vanishing point, but they would not remain near the Citadel of the Nagas while they had strength left to crawl.

Not until they reached the crest of the gorge did they pause. They looked back down into the dreadful valley.

The great gates of the black, somber castle had been closed. The Citadel hid its hideous mystery, as it had done for ages.

Terrell looked at Gron, and asked a question. "Ibir?"

"He didn't get out," grunted the big captain. "Nor did his fellow-traitors. I could almost feel sorry for them."

Ruth's eyes were wet as she looked back down into the dusky valley. "Yuan Chi—"

"Yuan died a hero," muttered Terrell. "Somehow, I don't think that a nation which breeds fighting-men like that can ever be conquered."

They did not mention Hirota. None of them wanted to think of the Japanese, doomed to dwell for ghastly ages in that somber castle of horror. Prisoned irrevocably by the immortality he had coveted!

"I think," Terrell said slowly, "that we will say nothing to the outer world of the Flame of Life and those who haunt it. It is better if none ever come again to seek it."

Kuluun nodded solemnly. "So my ancestors warned. Today we have seen their warning of doom fulfilled."

Gron found grazing ponies left by

the Yamayans whose attack on the Citadel had been routed. They mounted, and rode back westward along the jungle trails.

The sun sank toward the horizon, red and big. Soon they could see the distant golden towers of Yamaya standing

out brilliant against the descending orb.

Beyond Yamaya, Terrell knew, lay the trackless jungles that he and Ruth must cross to reach China and return to their part in a world at war. But neither of them feared that journey. They would make it, together.

MAKING THE U. S. SELF-SUFFICIENT

THE U. S. Bureau of Mines has perfected a process whereby manganese can be extracted from low grade ores in large enough quantities to make this country self-sufficient.

Manganese is an absolute necessity in the production of high-grade steels and is therefore of utmost importance to U. S. industry.

It seemed inconsistent that, although we possessed huge deposits of magnesium ore, the U. S. was forced to import over 95 per cent of its needs. But the apparent mystery is solved when one finds out that until the U. S. Bureau of Mines had perfected their new method it was only pos-

sible to obtain magnesium from ore that contained over 48 per cent of the metal. The U. S. ore was mostly low-magnesium content ore.

The new method involves the use of an agent called DLT-958, which separates most of the worthless material from the ore and the remainder is of sufficiently high magnesium content to be put through the old extraction processes.

Plants, some of which are already finished and in operation, are being built in Nevada according to the engineers of the Bureau of Mines. The Las Vegas area itself contains almost a million tons of the ore with a 10 per cent or more magnesium content.

DICTATORSHIP IN THE AMERICAS

LONG before the days of Nazism, Fascism, and other strong-arm rulers of today, the Incas had organized a "party" dictatorship over a great number of Indian tribes in South America.

They set up rules and regulations telling their conquered peoples what they should wear, whom they should marry, where they should live, and how they should earn a living. The Incas also made sure that newly conquered tribes could not revolt by splitting up the tribes and locating the groups among tribes that had proven their loyalty to the Incas' domination.

About every ten families were watched by an Inca official who in turn was watched by a higher official and so on up till the chief of the Incas.

The Incas also had solved the problem of succession of chiefs. Foreseeing that the death of a chief would cause endless squabbles among the many "right-hand" men of the dead chief, the Incas decided that rule should pass from father to son. Thus, the dictator chiefs were the "royal" family of the Incas and were accepted as such by the people.

A DYING AMERICAN INDUSTRY

ALITTLE over a year ago the last of the great American whalers was issued a permit to operate a shore station at Humbolt Bay, California.

This company is the only whaling concern left from the hundreds of whaling companies that flew the American flag. In fact, about a hundred years ago, the American fleet of whalers numbered almost six hundred out of the eight hundred ships from all countries.

In 1940, the total American catch was only 29

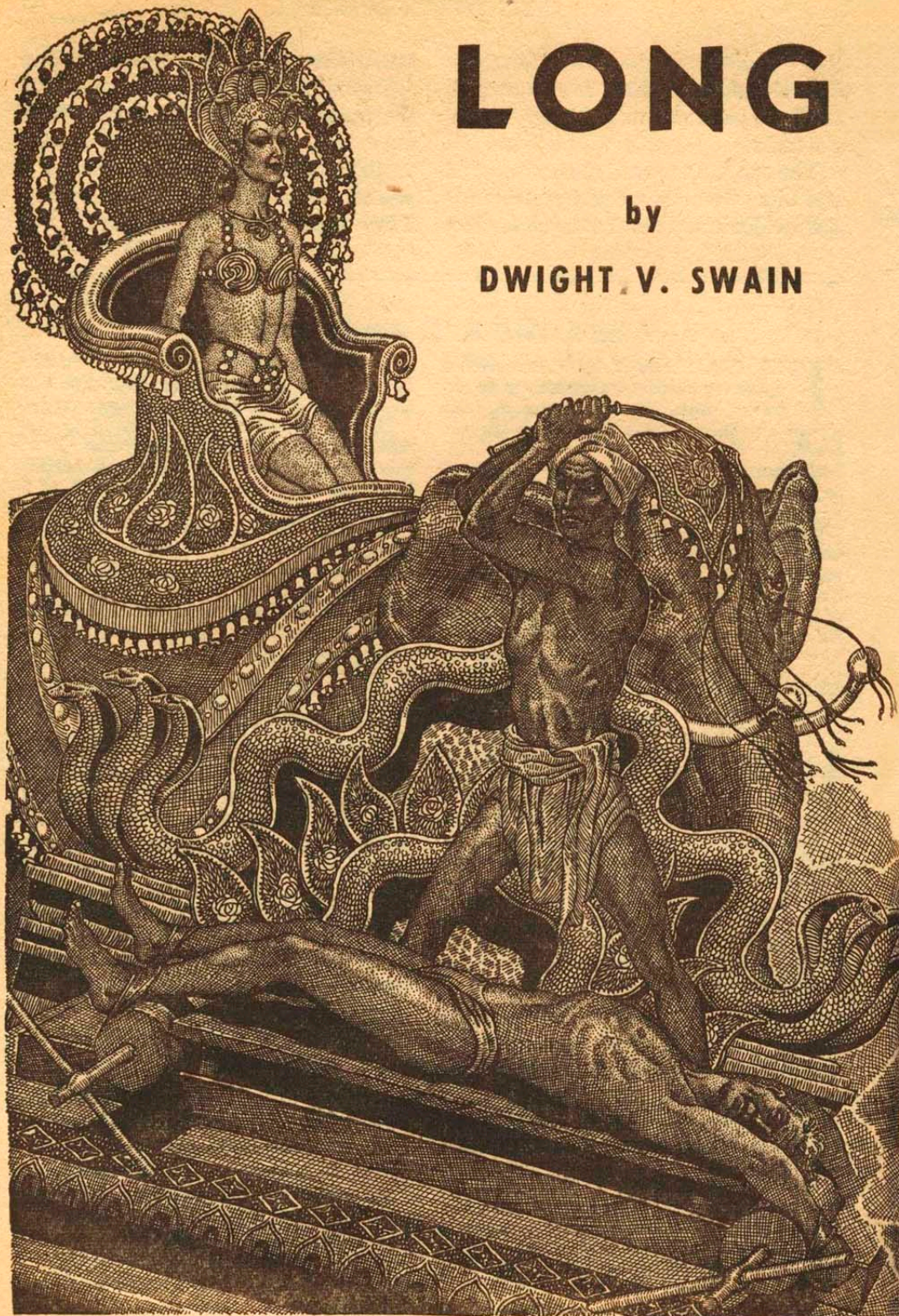
whales, while the total world catch ran well over 25,000 whales. With the withdrawal of the Americans, the industry has been taken over mostly by the English, Norwegians, and Japanese.

The whales are usually hunted for their fat and bone. The fat is processed into oil which is used in manufacturing soap, perfumes, as a base for face cream, to lubricate machinery and countless other uses. Whale bone also finds a great many uses in industry.

LONG

by

DWIGHT V. SWAIN



It was a vision of himself being mercilessly flogged

REMEMBER

"SO sor-ry, sair," cooed the little brown man behind the showcase. "No more elephant bells. All sold, sair."
"Oh."

Peter Ames said it in the cheery tone of a misanthropic undertaker. His expression was the one Hamlet would have worn in the graveyard scene, had the Melancholy Dane been Black Irish.

"Something else, perhaps, sair—?"

"Unless it costs less than eighty-four cents," young Mr. Ames commented gloomily, "you're wasting your time showing it to me." He sighed. "Molly'll just have to get along without a birthday present—"

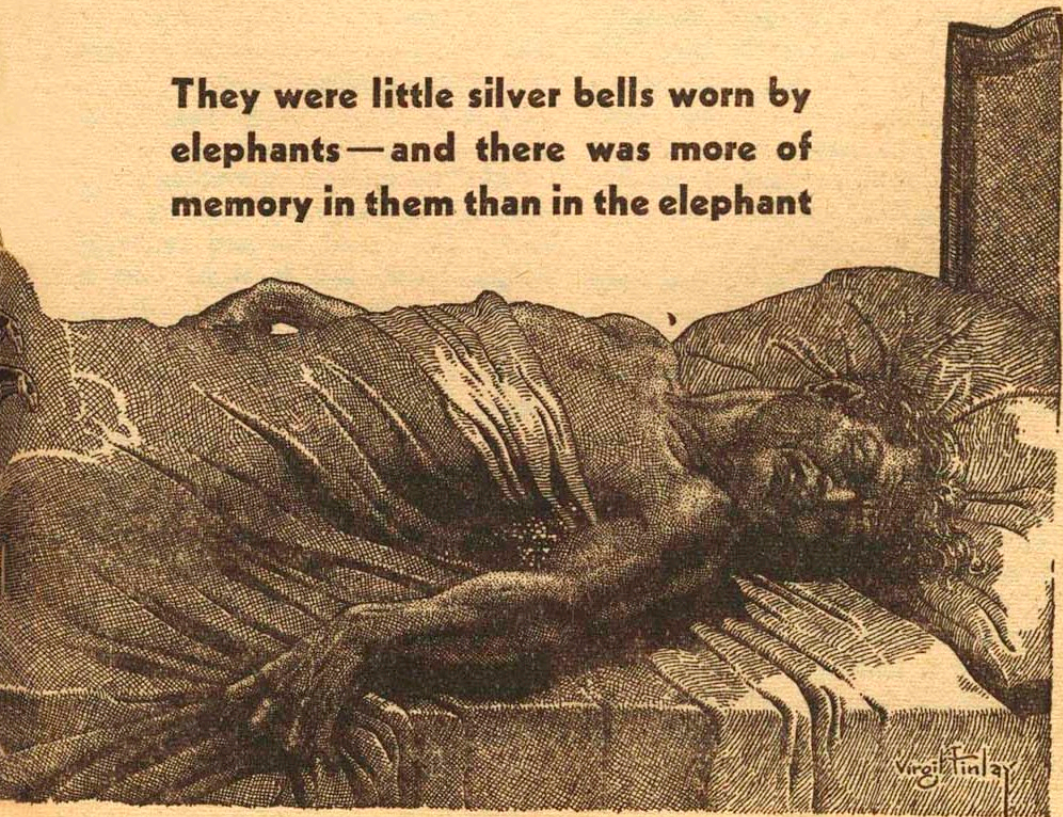
"Aieee!"

The sound was reminiscent of that given forth by a cat whose tail is caught in a washing machine's wringer. Peter whirled.

The store's second clerk—a coppersy twin of the first—was dancing about excitedly, his quivering forefinger leveled at the running figure of a man. As the figure scuttled into an alley, Peter caught a glimpse of the face.

Even the grimy window of the little shop, with its tarnished gilt lettering announcing that this was the House of Oriental Art: Cambodian Curios A Specialty, could not conceal one fact: the face was saffron-colored—unmis-

They were little silver bells worn by elephants—and there was more of memory in them than in the elephant



takably Oriental.

Peter turned back to the two brown-skinned clerks. "Well, thanks for your trouble, friends—"

The pair exchanged hasty, worried glances. Their faces suddenly seemed a bit gray. Then the man who had been waiting on Peter made a noisy business of clearing his throat.

"May I ask you humbly, sair, if the lady for whom you desire the gift is ver-ry close to your heart?"

"Sure, you can ask me." Peter nodded gloomily, his mind darting back to his own troubles like a homing pigeon to its own loft. "And the answer is yes."

"She would treasure your gift?"

"I guess so," Peter moped, "though there's an ex-hoodlum by the name of Sam Bienke trying to chisel in. And Molly's so stuck on the idea of reforming him that she may forget about me and what little I can do for her." He sighed. "Not that I blame her too much for going for him, at that. He's got more dough than he knows what to do with—throws presents at her like I'd throw rocks at a rattlesnake."

The clerk was suddenly beaming.

"You, sair, shall give her a gift she shall remember!"

"Huh?" Peter sounded perplexed. "Remember, I've only got eighty-four cents—"

"It will cost you nothing, sair," the brown-skinned clerk reassured him. As he spoke, he drew a small teakwood box from a drawer. Opened it. A strange silver ornament lay inside.

"An elephant bell!"

Now the other clerk pattered up. He sputtered a mouthful of—to Peter—unintelligible syllables, his face drawn with worry. The first Oriental responded in kind.

While they argued, Peter examined the bell.

It was about two inches in diameter, and made of silver instead of the customary brass. The portion above the prongs was delicately etched with weirdly beautiful patterns.

He rang it.

T-i-i-n-n-n-g-g!

The tone was as clear and silvery as the metal itself.

"**W**HEW!" muttered Peter. "It's a cinch this isn't one of the fifty-nine-cent bargains I was hoping to pick up!"

The clerks stopped arguing.

"You like it, sair?" Peter's asked anxiously.

"Sure." Young Mr. Ames nodded enthusiastically. "It's a beauty. But I can't afford it—"

"It is a gift, sair. A gift for you to remember us by."

Peter eyed the Oriental with the air that the farmer-fathers of lovely girls look upon traveling salesmen.

"I don't get it. Why should you give—?"

"Ah!" the brownie interrupted ecstatically. "I, too, have been in love, sair." He leaned forward confidentially. "This bell is more than a trinket, my friend."

"Huh?"

The clerk wagged an impressive finger.

"Yes, sair. Much more than a trinket. It is old—very old. It comes from Angkor-Wat, capitol of the ancient Khmers. Once it adorned the elephants of their kings."

"But I can't take anything as valuable as that," Peter protested. "It belongs in a museum—"

The other shook his head. "No, sair. It belongs with you and this girl—people young and in love. It is a bell of memory; of recollection—"

"A bell of memory? What do you

mean?"

The clerk smiled. "The legends of my people—I, myself, am a Cambodian—have it that the priests of ancient Angkor somehow transplanted the great memory, the retentiveness of mind, of thousands of royal elephants into this bell. So powerful was their magic that it became a fountain of congealed thought—a battery of memory.

"A deed done in this bell's presence, they say, will live in the memories of those involved until they die. There are tales of common coolies, sair, who won the everlasting love of royal Khmer princesses because of one moment of passion beside this trinket.

"Some it endows with strange powers of recollection. Men look at it, and like a crystal ball it brings back the scenes of their childhood, or of any moment they may desire.

"And always it is a great force for good. It links conscience with memory. Men remember their evil deeds, bitter as gall, and the thought of them rankles until they do penance—"

"You can't give a thing like that away—"

The brown-skinned clerk smiled, somehow sadly. "It is my wish, sair. I want you to take it."

"Well . . . well, I certainly appreciate it, sir. It's a lovely gift indeed for my Molly."

Again the clerk smiled. "You are welcome, sair. Now"—he picked up a salesbook—"your name and address—for our records?"

"Sure. Peter Ames. 1292 Cedar Drive. City."

The other carefully noted down the information, then returned the salesbook to its place.

"This is one of the few—the ver-ry few—shops where you will find Cambodian *objets d'art*, sair," he de-

clared, leading Peter across the shop. "Here, for instance, is a jade buddha of a much later period than your bell—"

THE second clerk pattered up to them. "You should not detain the gentleman, Li!" he scolded. And then, turning to Peter: "Here, sir, is your bell." He extended the teakwood box.

"Thanks again to you both, gentlemen—"

"Here also is a letter," continued the second clerk. "Would you be so kind as to mail it at the first box you pass?"

Peter glanced at it. It was addressed to an importing company in San Francisco.

"Of course. And I'll be in to see you again."

But as he walked away, young Mr. Ames was frowning.

"I still don't get it," he muttered half-aloud. "That gag about helping young love doesn't ring true to me. There must be another angle . . . Wonder if the bell's hot—stolen from a museum, or something."

But his meditations were rudely interrupted by the appearance of another young gentleman, a Mr. Art Adler. He rushed across the sidewalk toward Peter, hand outstretched in enthusiastic salutation.

Peter sighed.

Mr. Adler's weakness was his open-handed generosity with other people's property. That is to say, he was the kind of a character who, having borrowed your coat and pants, will cheerily request the loan of the vest when you ask for the return of the first two articles.

In a word, Mr. Adler was a conscientious, thorough-going deadbeat.

"Peter, old boy!" he cried happily, pumping the other's hand. "Say, you're just the fellow I want to see.

Had a run of bad luck the other night in a crap game. Left me stony. How's chances for a five 'til Saturday?"

"Non-existent!" reported Peter with some asperity. "I just got a birthday present for Molly. I'm broke, too."

As evidence, he opened the little teakwood box and showed Art the bell.

Then, reproachfully: "Besides, Art, you already owe me eighteen bucks. Remember?"

Young Mr. Adler was staring at the bell in most peculiar fashion.

"Yes, Peter," he admitted, "I remember."

Peter's jaw dropped. His eyes bulged like a bullfrog's. "Huh?" he gasped. "You admit it?"

"Yes." A sigh. "In fact, I guess it's time I paid you. It sort of worries me, remembering that I owe you money." Art pulled a wallet from his hip pocket. Began counting out bills. "Here. Ten. Fifteen. Sixteen. Seventeen. And one more is eighteen." Again he shook Peter's hand. "Good-bye, now."

He hurried away down the street.

Mr. Peter Ames stood paralyzed, stiff and stark as Cleopatra's Needle. His eyes mirrored the glassy stare of a punch-drunk pug who had just absorbed another k. o. punch on the button.

"It ain't so!" he choked in a tight, unbelieving voice. "Art Adler paying back borrowed money! No! It can't be!"

But stranger things were yet to come.

AHEAD loomed the gaunt, cadaverous figure of a man whose face bore the dour expression of a Gestapo agent alone with his conscience. He was almost on top of Peter before the black-haired young Celt recovered his wits from the shock of Art Adler's behavior.

"Arragh," the man grunted. "Er

. . . Ames."

Peter jumped. "Mr. Whitney!"

Mr. Whitney was Peter's boss. Had been for the past two years. But this was the first time since the hiring interview that he had deigned to speak to his subordinate.

"The draft board called me about your deferment as a defense worker, Ames," he announced.

"Yes, sir?"

"I told them I wanted the deferment continued."

"Thank you, sir."

"However"—Mr. Whitney shot him a wary, sidewise glance—"you've got to earn it, of course."

"You mean—?"

"If you'll just plan on coming to work an hour earlier from now on . . ."

The words which struck in Peter's throat were, "Of all the cheap, chiseling sweatshoppers in the trade," but he didn't quite let them out.

Instead, an idea came to him. It sizzled through his brain, from cortex to cerebellum.

"Mr. Whitney."

"Arragh."

Young Mr. Ames extended the teakwood box containing the silver bell.

"Isn't this a lovely bell, Mr. Whitney? I bought it for my girl's birthday."

The look Mr. Whitney returned him was a masterpiece of disinterest. Abruptly, Peter changed the subject.

"By the way, sir, when am I to get the raise you promised to give me a year ago? Remember?"

Mr. Whitney's eyes were suddenly glued on the bell. Yet, paradoxically, there was a far-away look in them.

"Yes, I remember," he agreed. "You should have had it long ago. I'll tell the payroll clerk to take care of it tomorrow morning. Retroactive, beginning a year from the date you were hired."

Peter's head had not spun so since the time he had ridden the Loop-O-Plane three consecutive times at the county fair. He leaned against the building before which they were standing for support.

"Got to be going now, Ames," said Mr. Whitney, his voice full of the cordiality ordinarily reserved for paying customers. "I'll take care of that the first thing tomorrow morning, though. You can count on it. Glad you reminded me of it. Now that I remember it, I can't see why I didn't attend to it before now."

With that, he was gone, leaving his reeling subordinate to stare wildly at the little silver bell.

MOLLY CONNORS had red hair, green eyes, and the kind of figure that the late Florenz Ziegfeld always wished he could find.

"A present?" she cried when young Mr. Ames handed her the teakwood box. And, on opening it and examining the bell: "Oh, Peter! It's beautiful. Truly beautiful. Darling!" She kissed him in enthusiastic—albeit a bit too sisterly fashion.

Peter decided that the bell's story would have a splendid psychological effect, so he told it to her in detail, with special emphasis on the strange powers of memory it was supposed to impart.

"That's why I wanted you to have it, Molly," he explained earnestly. "I hoped 'twould keep the good times we've known fresh in your heart. I wanted you to remember the joy we two have known . . ."

Molly was properly impressed.

"It's lovely, darling," she told him softly, her eyes misty with tenderness as she traced the delicate, exquisite patterns adorning the silver bell's surface with her fingernail. "Even without magic, no one could ever forget it.

I know I never shall." In proof, she curled up in Peter's arms like a lovely, contented kitten.

Young Mr. Ames mentally honored Cambodia, the Khmers, elephants and elephant bells in general, and the two brown-skinned clerks at the tiny curio shop, with separate 21-gun salutes.

Then the doorbell rang.

Peter grunted: "Who's that?"

"Sam Bienke, probably." Molly extricated herself. "He's coming over this evening, too, you know. I couldn't very well play favorites on my birthday."

"Sam Bienke!"

Peter's tone, at the mention of his rival's name, was about the same as if he had discovered a cockroach at the bottom of his bowl of breakfast porridge. But before he could express himself further, Molly was opening the door. And in oozed Sam Bienke, in person.

Mr. Bienke was a burly man, or had been in his prime. Now he looked like he wore a girdle. His hair was black and kinky, but glued tight to his head with a particularly smelly pomade. Grease gathered in the creases of his fat face, and little black eyes squinted out from beneath shaggy black brows.

To put it mildly, Peter considered him repulsive. Mr. Bienke reciprocated the sentiment heartily.

Beaming at Molly, Sam stepped on the tail of the Connors' family cat with a neatly-maneuvered air of the accidental, then guffawed at the animal's anguished scream. That tribute paid to his own quaint sense of humor, he got down to the business of the evening.

"You are certainly looking pretty as a picture, Molly," he stated, smirking into what apparently was intended to be a warm and friendly smile. He spoke with the stilted precision of an eighth grade grammar lesson.

"I'll bet he *has* to watch his step on what he says," Peter snorted to himself. "He sounds like he came out of the 'dese, dem 'n' dose' school for me."

"I have brought you a birthday present, Molly," the nauseous Mr. Bienke continued. "It is just a little trinket, but I thought you might like it." He held out a box about a foot cube.

Then, pretending to notice Peter for the first time: "Good evening, Mister Ames. This must be quite a treat for you, indeed—being allowed to spend an evening here instead of having to stay down at the city mission with the rest of the riff-raff."

PETER felt the color rising in his cheeks like the tinted alcohol in a thermometer resting on a red-hot stove. Throwing an extra pair of half-hitches around his Irish temper, he carefully selected words for a reply.

"The city mission?" he quizzed. "Are you sure you don't mean the jail?"

It was Mr. Bienke's turn to blush. His not inconsiderable fortune had been accumulated by devious fishings in Prohibition's troubled waters, and it was an open secret that he had escaped a long, state-arranged rest cure only through undue financial familiarity with a later-impeached district attorney.

"Now, boys! No quarreling!" Molly intervened.

To Sam Bienke: "Oh, Sam, you shouldn't have spent so much money."

And, turning to Peter: "Look! A camera! A real Contax, too."

"Photography is a very nice hobby," Sam observed profoundly, beaming on Molly. "I enjoy using a camera very much myself. With you taking nice pictures too, we'll have a lot in common."

Molly shut him off hastily. "See,

Sam? This is Peter's gift." She held up the elephant bell. "Isn't it lovely?"

Even as she said it, her eyes went starry with memory. She looked fondly over at young Mr. Ames.

"Some people put their junk in the ash-can," Sam Bienke commented coldly. "Others try to save money by giving it away as birthday presents."

"Hitler has lots of money to spend, too," Peter retorted caustically.

"Boys! Please!"

The pair settled into black silence. In vain did Molly try to salvage the evening. Neither would respond.

Then, suddenly, flash bulbs were popping in Peter's brain. The corners of his mouth twitched with the makings of a wicked grin. He became brightly voluble—seemed to forget his irritation.

"You know, Sam, this 'bell has a mighty interesting history," he announced, leaning forward and displaying the little silver ornament. And, in spite of all Herr Bienke's glowerings, he launched the bell's legend.

"It really can do remarkable things," he declared. "You wouldn't believe it." A pause. "I'll tell you: let's try it on you—"

"I do not want to try anything you can suggest, Mister Ames," Sam snapped.

"Oh, but it's all in fun." Peter dangled the bell in front of his rival's nose. "Let's just see if it can make you remember something you've forgotten. Let's see, now . . ." His eyes were sparkling with suppressed merriment. "I've got it! This is simple: try to remember what you were doing ten years ago tonight. Remember? *Remember!*"

THERE was no question that Mr. Bienke was remembering something. He squirmed in his chair, and sweat poured down his face. All in all,

he looked thoroughly abject and miserable.

"Is it working, Sam?" Peter probed solicitously. "Can you remember? Tell us what you remember—"

"Damn you!" roared Sam Bienke, exploding angrily from his chair, grammar forgotten. "You damn' well know I remember. Ten years ago tonight the cops was workin' me over on dat Ravacholli bump-off. You an' dat devil's bell!"

Snatching up his hat, he burst out the door and away. Peter Ames, rocking with laughter, watched him go.

"Oh, Peter!" Molly admonished. "You shouldn't have done a thing like that. It's cruel to remind him of a phase of his life he's trying to forget."

The bell still dangling between his fingers, Peter faced her.

"I know," he agreed contritely. "It was just that I kept thinking about how happy we both were before he came along. *Remember?*"

Miss Molly Connors' irritation melted like butter under an August sun.

But although Sam Bienke's face was haggard with worry, he already was at Molly's home when Peter arrived the next night. He was instructing her in the use of the expensive miniature camera he had given her.

"It is very simple, Molly," he was explaining as young Mr. Ames entered the room. "First you must set your stops for the aperture you desire. Next you focus. Then press this button—"

Peter watched silently from the doorway. The object on which Sam was sighting was the silver bell, standing now in the center of the table.

"Hello," said Peter.

Molly and Sam both looked around. The latter promptly got up, forcing a particularly greasy smile.

"Good evening, Peter," he said toothily. "I stopped in to show Molly how

to use her new camera. But I must go now." He turned back to the girl. "I'll take these films with me, Molly. I know a place where I can have them developed by tomorrow."

Peter stared at Mr. Bienke's departing back with all the confidence of an early Arizona settler welcoming an Apache war party.

"That guy's up to something," he muttered half-aloud.

"Peter, you're too suspicious," his light-o'-love scolded. "Sam is a perfect gentleman."

"Maybe." Then, more brightly: "Remember how we said good-night?"

Molly raised her face to his, eyes suddenly adoring, ripe lips trembling to be kissed. . . .

Peter walked home whistling. His landlady met him at the front door.

"There's two furriners in the livin'-room t' see ye," she whispered hoarsely. "Slinky-lookin', if y' ask me."

"Foreigners?" Peter's face was blank. He entered the living-room.

THE pair who rose to greet him were close to being replicas of the two Cambodians who had given him the silver elephant bell. They bowed low, twin brown incarnations of politeness.

"You ar-re Mistair Peter Ames, yes-s?" effervesced the first.

Peter grinned and nodded.

"I are Mister Peter Ames, yes."

In the mood he was in, he would have greeted Hirohito with the warm right hand of fellowship.

Both his brown-skinned visitors beamed.

"A silver elephant bell you bought recently, yes-s?"

"Yes."

"Where is bell, please?"

Peter eyed the pair thoughtfully. "Maybe you better tell me a little about yourselves, first," he suggested. "Just

why are you so interested?"

The brownies exchanged glances.

"Because," Peter went on, "I don't think I'll be telling you anything 'til I know some of the answers."

The first of the little men sighed. The second echoed him.

"Our names, they ar-re not important," said Number One.

"We ar-re Cambodians," explained Number Two.

A strained silence.

"Go on from there," Peter urged.

"Ver-ry well." A sigh. "You leave us no alternative. We must speak. I am so sorry—"

The other interrupted: "You see, the bell was not really for sale."

"Then why—?"

"The silver bell is a symbol," Number One went on. "To Cambodians, it represents our era of power and freedom. It is like Angkor—an emblem of the mighty Khmers."

"Now Nippon has overrun our land," broke in Number Two. "We ar-re but vassals."

"But Cambodia shall rise again!" Number One's black eyes flashed fire. "The day of rebellion is near at hand—"

"That is why the silver bell means so much," explained his companion earnestly. "It stands for a free Cambodia. The Japanese know this."

Peter frowned. "Then why was it given to me?"

"It was sent to America for safe-keeping—"

"But the emissaries of Nippon traced it. They feared its ver-ry existence. At last their agents found it was hidden in the House of Oriental Art."

Peter nodded. "Yes. I saw a fellow who looked like a Japanese running away from the place."

"Yes-s. Our countrymen saw him; knew they were trapped. They gave

it to you, then sent us your name and address."

"We came at once," the other reported gravely. "We found our people had committed suicide rather than risk betraying Cambodia's cause under Nipponese torture."

There was a long moment of silence. Then:

"And now, Mister Ames," said Number One, "will you tell us where you have put the bell?"

"I'm sorry," said Peter, "but I'm afraid it's not available."

"**WE** MUST have it!" Number Two broke in excitedly. "We shall pay you well for it."

Number One leaned forward impressively.

"A thousand dollars we shall give you for it!" he cried. "Even more! Tell us how much you want!"

"It was given to a young lady," Peter explained. "I wanted it as a birthday present for her."

"But you can get it back?" Number Two demanded eagerly.

Peter shook his head. "No. I can see your point, and I can understand why you want it, but I can't ask for it back. Anything you do along that line will have to be through the girl herself. I'll give you her name and address, though" — he scribbled them on a pocket scratch pad—"and you can see her."

Bubbling thanks, the two little brown men bowed out.

When Peter called on Molly, two nights later, he again arrived only to find Sam there before him. And this time the irksome Mr. Bienke's greeting was even more slaverously cordial than before.

Peter's eyebrows drew together in a bleak, suspicious line.

"What are you up to, Bienke?" he

demanded. "And don't tell me you love me for myself alone, either."

"Who? Me?" Mr. Bienke was the epitome of injured innocence. "Why, Peter, there is no reason for us not being good friends. After all, look at all we have in common. We both are very dear friends of Molly—"

"Nuts!" grunted the youthful Mr. Ames.

Sam gave vent to a reasonable facsimile of a sigh. "I do not see why you must be so hostile, Peter," he declared in a plaintive voice. "I was telling Molly only a moment ago how I admired you—"

"Yes, Peter," Molly interrupted eagerly. "He was. Sam really wants to be friends. Why, he was just admiring your birthday gift to me. Please, Peter—"

Peter's black Celtic hair seemed to bristle nearly as much as his black Celtic temper. He scowled adamantly at San Bienke.

Again the latter sighed.

"I can see it is no use, Molly," he reported with touching wistfulness. "Mister Ames is too prejudiced ever to see me as I am, now that I have reformed. I had better go."

Shaking his head sadly, he moved toward the door. Peter stared after him with cold and calculating eyes.

"I don't like it," he told Molly. "His ugly puss may be all injured innocence, but there's a gleam in his eyes. There's one guy the devil already has found work for."

Miss Connors stamped her foot.

"Peter Ames, you're worse than he is!" she cried. "Oh! Of all the mistrustful—"

Grinning, Peter walked over to the center table and picked up the elephant bell.

"Let's not talk about it any more, dearest," he suggested. "After all,

there's so many other things more worth while. Remember the pleasant things—the fun we've had together, the places we've gone, the things we've done. *Remember?*"

AGAIN Miss Connors stamped her foot, green eyes flashing. "Of course I remember!" she snapped. "But don't go trying to change the subject. You've been behaving like an awful heel about Sam Bienke right from the start, and I won't have it. I ought to tell you to get out right now!" She gave the auburn curls a tempestuous toss. "We're going to settle this thing right now, Peter Ames, once and for all—"

But Peter was not listening. His eyes were bulging like those of a rabbit hound which has just watched a cotton-tail climb a tree. His jaw had assumed the same angle as that of Charlie McCarthy in a bewildered moment.

"Remember—"

"If you think you can ride forever on the fact that you were a nice boy when I first started going with you, you're mistaken, MISTER Ames. I'm telling you right now that you've been behaving like a stubborn, egotistical fool. And I'm getting tired of it—"

Peter transferred his stunned gaze from belle to bell. He rang the latter with trembling fingers.

Ta-a-n-n-n-g-g!

The note was a half-tone low!

Heedless to Molly's diatribe, Peter scrutinized the ornament. His eyes caught a dozen imperfections in the delicate tracteries which covered it.

"A phoney!"

He turned on Molly.

"When was Sam here last?"

"Why . . . this is the first time since the other night, when you were here—"

Young Mr. Ames was out the door before she could finish the sentence. He headed in the direction Sam Bienke had gone, full-tilt.

The third bartender he quizzed admitted to having seen his rival.

"He said he was gonna walk home," the mixologist reported.

Peter galloped out the door and down the street which provided the most direct route to the Bienke villa.

"If he gets away with this—" he fumed.

Block after block he panted, but no signs came of the man he sought. He despaired. Almost gave up. And then

On the bridge crossing the White River, which flowed through the heart of the city, he sighted a familiar, burly figure, sauntering casually along.

Peter got his second wind and sprinted onward. In barely two minutes his hand slapped down on Sam Bienke's thick shoulder.

"HEY, you!"

The nauseous Mr. Bienke about-faced, fists raised pugnaciously. Then, recognizing Peter, he forced a characteristically unpleasant smile.

"Oh! It is you, Peter. You startled me."

"I'll bet I did," the other retorted grimly. "All right, brother. Give!"

Injured innocence diffused over the Bienke physiognomy.

"I do not believe I understand what you mean, Peter."

"Save that guff for soft-hearted girls," came the caustic reply. "You know what I mean. You caught on that the elephant bell was jimmying things up for you, so you took a picture of it. Then you had a duplicate bell made, and tonight you substituted the phoney for the real thing. Only you're not going to get away with it,

so hand it back right now."

Sam Bienke's greasy face all at once seemed to congeal into harsh lines.

"Chum, that ain't the way to talk to a gent like me," he warned sinistinely, grammar forgotten. "Youse is out of your class."

"I'll say I am. 'Way down below it."

"So far I been puttin' up wit' you," the other continued. "But I ain't gonna do it much longer. An' if youse ever mention bells to Molly again, you can count on the dead-wagon crew measurin' you for a wooden kimono before the week's out. Got dat, chum?"

Peter leaned against the bridge railing and swallowed hard. There was a cold and menacing sincerity in his rival's piggish little black eyes. And there was no question about Sam Bienke's ability to plan and execute a slight matter of murder any day in the week.

"What are you going to do with the bell now that you've got it?" he asked at last, somewhat weakly.

Sam drew the familiar silver bell from his pocket. He jingled it casually.

"Oh, I dunno." He eyed Peter with undue good cheer. "Mebbe I could remember youse by it . . . just in case anyt'ing happened to youse."

One moment Peter had the sensation of icicles sliding down his spine. The next, a flame of inspiration was leaping through his brain.

"Well," he sighed, with a resignation belied by the sudden malicious gleam in his eyes, "if you want to spend the rest of your life remembering what a heel you are, there's nothing I can do about it."

"Hey—!"

"Remember all the cheap, dirty, crooked things you've done, Bienke? Remember what a rat you've been?" Peter's sneer would have driven Dillinger to a monastic life of saintly re-

penitance for past sins. "And now—you'll spend every minute—every second — *remembering* — how you couldn't even play square with a girl like Molly. How you had to cheat and chisel—"

"Stop it!" shrieked Sam. Big, greasy globules of perspiration were standing out on his forehead. The hand that held the bell trembled like the lady in "September Morn."

"All your life you can remember—"

The burly Bienke charged.

AS AN observer, Sam, himself would have disapproved of that wild rush. It lacked control. The finer points were absent—his head was not lowered for a preliminary butt; the knee did not come up with the nicety of timing necessary to incapacitate an opponent; the first blow was not devastating, nor did the elbow carry through for the final *coup* so desirable in first-class rough-and-tumble fighting.

Peter, on the other hand, was completely the master of his situation. Having goaded his rival into wrathful battle, he now stood back with fist cocked, ducked neatly under Sam's guard, and then came up with a right to the chin which would have felled an ox as effectively as any pole-ax.

Mr. Bienke staggered backward against the railing of the bridge. His knees began to buckle. His fingers released the silver elephant bell.

Before either he or Peter could stop it, it fell to the bridge's flooring, bounced once—and disappeared over the edge into the black depths of the White River.

"Oh!" moaned Samuel Bienke.

And young Mr. Ames answered:

"Remember?"

There was a tug anchored under the bridge when Peter crossed it on his way to work the next morning. A man

in a diving suit stood on the deck amidships. Beside him paced a harried, worry-fraught Sam Bienke.

Peter could not resist the temptation.

"Lose something?" he called.

Sam looked up. There were dark circles under his eyes. His jowls hung loose.

"Ames!" He recognized Peter, waved to him frantically. "Come down! Please, Peter—" His voice was plaintive.

"No, thanks. I'd rather keep my health."

"Then youse will go down," remarked a voice behind him.

PETER turned. Two large gentlemen had materialized from nowhere. They stood very close to him, and both were keeping their hands in their coat pockets.

"Come on!" the one who did the talking ordered, jerking his head toward the end of the bridge.

Peter gulped. "Yes, sir."

Together, the three of them went out to the tug in a small motor boat. The diver was just going over the larger vessel's side.

The spokesman for the two thugs who had captured Peter addressed Bienke:

"You want we should . . . take care . . . of this guy, boss?"

"Naw." Sam shook his head. He looked even worse at close range than from afar. His face was that of a greasy ghost. "Naw. I just wanna talk to him."

He turned to young Mr. Ames.

"I gotta get that bell back," he babbled wildly. "I'm gonna go crazy if I don't. All the time I keep rememberin'—just like you said." He clutched Peter's arm. "Please, chum, take dat curse offa me. I can't stand

it no longer. Every mean t'ing I ever done, it come back. I can't stand it!" He was panting like a fish out of water.

A sudden wave of something almost like pity swept over Peter.

"I don't know what I can do, Sam."

The other seemed scarce to have heard him.

"I t'ought mebbe I'd get away from it if I was asleep," he choked. "I got a sawbones t'give me a shot in de arm last night. Only den it was worse."

"Worse? What happened?"

"I was in a place 'way out in th' woods—you know, jungles, it seemed like. There was big stone temples, an' things. I never seen nothin' like it before. It was all full of little brown guys—like Chinks, only not quite. An' elephants—lots of elephants."

"Angkor!"

"Huh? Naw, no anchors. Just elephants. An' these guys was torturin' me. They stuck red-hot needles in me where they'd hurt me the most. Some of 'em kept whippin' de bottoms of me feet—"

"Bastinado!" Peter's eyes were bulging with amazement.

"Dey kept tellin' me what a heel I was; said I'd have to make up for it—said they'd keep on givin' me de hot-foot 'til I promised. Fin'ly they put some planks on my chest an' got all ready to make an elephant step on 'em. Dat's when I woke up." The man was shaking like a flagpole in an earthquake.

Peter shook his head. He, too, was a little pale.

"I don't know what I can do about it, Sam."

"I can't stand it no more," Bienke mumbled tonelessly. "I t'ought I could take it—but not dat. I'll go nuts—"

A bell rang.

"It's the diver!" shouted a crew member. "He wants to come up."

A MOMENT later the weird, helmeted figure was being hoisted aboard.

"Didja get it?" Bienke demanded eagerly. "Didja?"

The driver's face was grey.

"I'm through!" he husked. "I'll never dive again!"

"Huh? Whassamatter?"

The diver stopped the chattering of his teeth with an effort. "I had your damn' bell," he reported. "I even got my hands on it. Only the second I touched it, I remembered one time years ago when my air hose broke an' I come so close to drownin' that I'll never forget it.

"All of a sudden, it seemed like my hose was gone again. I was so scared I couldn't think of anything. I let go of that bell like it was red hot and yanked to come up."

"You had it an' then let it go—!"

The diver met Bienke's glare with one equally ferocious. "You ain't scarin' me none," he snapped. "Go hunt for your damn' bell yourself if you want it. Me, I ain't divin' again—now or ever."

By the time Peter finally succeeded in tearing himself away from the haunted, quavering Sam Bienke, he was an hour late for work. He stuck his head through the shop's door in the same speculative manner with which a mouse investigates the family cat's alertness.

He could have saved himself the trouble. Mr. Whitney was lurking just inside.

"Arragh!" he snarled. "Late again, eh?"

Peter nodded mutely. Then: "But —"

That was as far as he got.

"You can save your excuses, young man. I saw you, loafing on a boat down in the river—"

"But Mr. Whitney—"

"—and I'm not going to stand for it. You can draw your pay at the office. You're fired!"

It was afternoon before Peter—pay drawn, tools checked out, lunch eaten, and clothes changed—rang the doorbell at Molly's.

The lovely Miss Connors welcomed him with open arms.

"Darling!" she cried. "Oh, you were right, you were right—"

"Eh?" He reared back like a frightened colt. "What about?"

Molly snuggled against his shoulder. "About Sam Bienne, silly. He came in and told me everything."

"Everything—?"

"Yes. All about how he stole the bell, and how he'd threatened to kill you, and—and everything. He said that now he realized how wrong he'd been, and that he was going to try to sooth his conscience by leaving here and starting over again, devoting his life to doing good."

PETER breathed a sigh of relief. The specter of Sam Bienne's gunmen had been haunting him ever since the night before.

Molly looked up at him, adoration shining in her eyes.

"I know now how wrong I've been, Peter," she murmured repentantly. "It must have been terribly trying for you, to have me take up with him." A pause. "But that's all over now, dearest. We'll be married whenever you want to."

"Oh."

"Peter! You don't sound as if you wanted to marry me!"

Young Mr. Ames swallowed hard. He was suddenly aware of exactly how Socrates had felt when the jailer held out the cup of hemlock.

"Honey," he gulped, "things have

been . . . happening . . ."

"What do you mean?" Miss Connors' tone was not all dulcet.

Haltingly, Peter outlined the sad, sad story of what had happened at the shop that morning.

"You see," he concluded, "it . . . it means I'll have to get a job out of town. There's not many spots for guys like me right around here. And I can't very well marry you 'til I've saved some money."

The lovely Molly stepped back out of his arms and shot him a look which harsh and uncompromising realists might have construed as a glare.

"There are times," she remarked a bit acidly, "when I wonder why I love you." A moment's hesitation. "There's no reason in the world why you shouldn't have saved some money."

"None," snapped Peter, "except that I was spending it all on you." Then, abjectly: "I know. I should have saved some."

"Indeed you should," Molly agreed primly.

Peter swallowed hard, his eyes somber.

"But since you didn't," Molly went on, "we'll get married anyhow."

And then, suddenly, she was tight in Peter's arms, laughing and crying at once, and running her fingers through his rumpled black hair, and kissing him with a most unladylike enthusiasm.

The shock was too much for Peter.

"But we've got to have *some* money—" he wailed.

"We've got money, silly. All we need."

"Molly! Don't joke about it."

"I'm not joking, darling. We have." Her face was radiant with happiness. "You see, after you ran out last night, two little brown men called. They wanted to buy the bell. They told me

they'd tried to persuade you to get it for them, but that you wouldn't do it because it had been a present to me.

"Well, I decided right then that I was going to marry you. And while it doesn't sound sentimental, I thought we could get more good out of the money than the bell, so I sold it—"

"But it wasn't the real bell!" Peter protested. "It was phoney—"

"Of course. But they'd offered me a thousand dollars for it, sight unseen. Naturally, I wouldn't have held them to it when they found it wasn't the one they wanted.

"They knew it was a fake the instant they saw it. They kept chattering away at each other, though, and finally they decided the real one must have gotten lost somewhere along the line, so a good substitute was better than nothing at all. And they said it wasn't my fault I didn't have the real bell, so they gave me the thousand dollars any-

how. I didn't want to take it, but they said they'd lose face if, after offering it, they didn't pay it."

"Darling!" whispered Peter.

"And on top of the money," Molly went on, her eyes starry, "they left me all those lovely memories of us together that that beautiful old legend promises." A pause. "They'll stay with us through all eternity, Peter."

For a long moment he held her very tight. Then:

"Come on, Molly. We're to go down town. Right now."

"Go down town?" The girl looked a little bewildered. "What for, darling?"

Peter flashed her an Irish grin as broad as the Blarney stone.

"A bride who pays for her own honeymoon deserves at least some little gift in appreciation," he cried, "so I'm going to buy you an elephant bell!"

THE END

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 7)

JUST to make sure you don't miss a good opportunity, we'll take time out here to mention the November issue of our big sister magazine, *Radio News*. You should get a copy of this one for your reference files, because it is the complete story of the U. S. Signal Corps as it has never been told before. You'll find many a fantastic story come true in it, and when you've read it, you'll have a pretty clear picture of what goes with radio in this war! Get it at your newsstand on October 23rd!

RIGHT now we'll pass on a few fantastic true bits that we've dug up in recent days. They are certainly worth passing on, and they will serve to show how fantasy can sometimes be fact, and still have a place in a book like this.

FROM Vichy, France, comes the announcement that French scientists in the new French observatory on the Pic du Midi have succeeded in making color films of scientific interest of the sun and of the planet Mars.

The films, by Carmichell Gentile and Bernard

Lyot, are a series of moving picture shots showing various characteristics of the sun and the planet.

The observatory, which will be the largest in Europe, is nearing completion, but it will be a year or more before its largest telescope, now being built, will be in use. It is thrilling to learn that scientific advancement is still going on in tragic France!

FOR some unknown reason, the larval fly known as the rat-tailed maggot prefers to find its food in the mud on the bottom of a pool of foul water. In order to do this, Nature has equipped the maggot with a long tube which reaches from its body above the water surface and is used to bring air below the water as the maggot seeks its dinner.

IF DR. WILLIAM L. STRAUS, JR., of Johns Hopkins Medical School, is correct in his theory, he will have exploded a belief long held by layman and scientist alike that man's earliest ancestors often swung from branch to branch through the trees the way monkeys do today. Dr. Straus has studied the arm muscles of man and is convinced that at no time did man's ancestors pass through a tree swinging age.

While it is true that orangutans, gorillas, chimpanzees, and humans have many characteristics of the forearm flexor muscles in common,

this does not prove a common origin for both man and the anthropoid apes. Dr. Straus points out that there are special characteristics of the human arm muscle which distinguish them from those of the apes and upon this difference he bases his theory that man's ancestors never traveled through the trees by swinging with his arms.

MR. M. J. NEUMANN DE MARGITTA of New York City has been awarded patent No. 2,272,059 covering his new photoflash bulb that uses synthetic plastics instead of glass. He claims that the new flash bulb will produce a more intense light for taking pictures. Moreover the bulb is safer to handle since it would be harmless if it exploded because there would be a shower of plastic instead of dangerous glass.

The bulb can also stand more handling punishment and therefore does not require the expensive wrapping and caution needed by the present flash bulb. Its greater light intensity will enable the photographer to use a smaller sized plastic bulb for his work.

Plastic used to make the bulb is translucent flexible cellulose acetate and the bulb contains the regular metal foil which produces the flash. To make the foil burn with greater intensity, oxygen is pumped into the bulb under pressure.

The patent has been assigned to the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company of East Pittsburgh, Pa.

ACCORDING to the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, rainy seasons cause oysters to become fat and "good eating" while in the drought years the oysters are lean and not as tasty.

The reason the rainfall is so beneficial to oysters is another case of the interdependence so often found in nature. First of all, the oysters depend upon the tiny one-celled plants of the sea for their food. These plants in turn cannot grow in great abundance unless the water contains the necessary mineral nutrients. The heavy rainfalls wash the mineral salts into the sea from the land. In times of plentiful rain the oysters flourish, but when the rains are few and far between the vital salts do not feed the one-celled plants who do not reproduce in sufficient numbers to feed the oysters. In fact, the best seasons of all for oysters, usually follow periods of huge floods when large stores of mineral salts are washed into the sea for the mutual benefit of both the tiny micro-plants and the connoisseur who enjoys a "fat" oyster.

DR. J. P. BENNETT, associate professor of plant physiology at the University of California, has been experimenting with trees in the inactive state. He found that he could make the twigs return to normal growing by injecting an extract of yeast into the branches. He produced the same result by preparing his extract from plant tissues taken from various active and

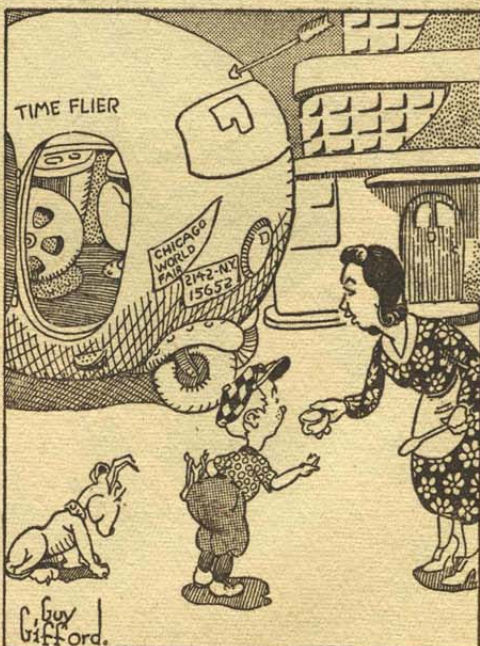
inactive parts of the trees or from some very common inorganic nitrogen salts. All of these substances used to produce the extract contain nitrogen.

Now it is a fact that if trees are not thoroughly chilled during the winter, they do not grow properly in the spring, but Dr. Bennett's experiment showed that the injection of an extract containing nitrogen produces the same effect as the chilling. Having the curiosity of a true scientist, Dr. Bennett is now investigating how the winter chilling is able to furnish the chemical containing nitrogen that causes the trees to grow each spring.

IF THE experiments carried on by the Institute of Biochemistry at Moscow prove to be as successful as first reports indicate, a new and abundant source of vitamin C has been discovered. Reports show that the soft outer shell of an unripe walnut possesses a generous supply of Vitamin C. Moreover, the vitamin can be removed from the shell and treated to remove the bitterness to produce a concentrate of the vitamin. The large crop of walnuts grown in Russia should produce a huge supply of vitamin C by this simple process.

AND now that we've come to the end of the Notebook for this month, we hope we've succeeded in putting together an issue that will please you as much as the last one. It seems Nelson S. Bond's novel has made a great hit, and in the future you can expect many more complete novels of this calibre. So until next month, let's get down to this business of smashing the axis!

Rap.



"Jump into the time machine and borrow a cup of sugar from your great grandmother!"



Like a thunderbolt the auto bore down on them

Priorities

by DAVID
WRIGHT
O'BRIEN

When war priorities made this car a priceless thing, it got a bad case of "swelled head"!



MR. BOTTLE was not the sort of man one could describe as a madcap driver. He was respectable, middle-aged, home loving and possessed of all the standard virtues that serve to make a man a substantial citizen.

Mr. Bottle worked in the city and kept a modest, well gardened home in the suburbs. He had an average sort of wife on whom he bestowed an average amount of affection. He had two standardly pleasant children away at school who wrote home regularly to make the usual requests for more money.

To be found in Mr. Bottle's life was the usual number of material possessions that similar men accumulate over a period of years to make living more convenient. Chief among these luxury items was Mr. Bottle's automobile, an aged sedan known as Pegasus.

When Pegasus first came into the Bottle household, some ten years previously, it was called, proudly, "the new car." But as time passed and the "new car" became more or less a member of the family, it came to be christened thus by one of the Bottle brats who was then under the influence of a

text book on mythology.

Nobody seemed to mind the name, least of all Pegasus itself, which by this time had settled down to the tired routine of an outdated, unstreamlined, five passenger sedan.

Like all average owners of automobiles, Mr. Bottle turned an eye each year to the tempting advertisements featuring new motor cars. But like a great many of similarly situated citizens, Mr. Bottle quite invariably decided to put off the idea of a new machine until this note was met or that bill was paid.

And so Pegasus stayed on, scarcely gaining dignity with age, but nevertheless continuing to serve the utilitarian purpose of taking Mr. Bottle to and from his place of employment six days a week.

An average car; an average owner. And the relationship between car and owner might always have been an indifferent one had it not been for two factors. The first factor was the Changing Times and World Tumult. The second factor, really a result of the first, was the news-broadcast Mr. Bottle heard on the automobile radio while driving home from work in Pegasus that Friday afternoon . . .

Mr. Bottle had tuned in on his favorite station to get the early afternoon news summary with no idea at all of what a pronounced effect the day's grim tidings would have on him personally.

He listened to the commentary on the Balkan situation with his usual impersonal interest, nodded emphatically when hearing that certain statesmen had advised that the government take a stronger attitude toward Vichy, felt remotely shocked to learn that two thousand Chinese had been wiped out in a dastardly bombing of Chinshi, and smiled knowingly at the news that the White Sox looked forward to a pennant

in the coming season. But through all this, Mr. Bottle's tranquility of spirit was undisturbed.

It was the closing news announcement that almost resulted in his driving Pegasus off the highway and into a ditch. It caught Mr. Bottle directly between the eyes.

"Automobile owners," the radio announcer's voice declared, "have been advised by the Office of Civilian Supply that they face a complete shut-down of motorcar assembly lines. Not only will there be no new machines made in this country for the duration of the war, but even such essential repair and supply parts as may be necessary to maintain the old ones will be strictly, yes rigidly, rationed. What few automobiles and parts as still remain on assembly lines have already been placed under rationing regulations. Motorcar owners are advised that their only chance of getting through this war on four wheels is to take extraordinarily good care of the automobiles they now own."

MR. BOTTLE scarcely realized that his hands still guided Pegasus' steering wheel. He was even less aware that the highway along which he was driving was narrowing and that he was in the outskirts of his own suburb.

The shock of the announcement left Mr. Bottle temporarily dazed. It wasn't until, automatically, he had turned up the pleasant little suburban side street where he had his modest home, that he began to come out of his shocked stupor.

And when he brought Pegasus to a halt at the curb in front of his house, Mr. Bottle snapped off the ignition switch and, making no move to get out, sat there staring dully ahead through the windshield.

Mr. Bottle was digesting the unsavory import of that news bulletin.

No more cars—and worse than that, no more parts for cars!

Mr. Bottle was trying to recall a comment made over the radio just the night before by some authority on military affairs. The authority had hinted darkly that this could well develop into a ten year war.

Sickly, Mr. Bottle thought of the slim chances poor Pegasus had of living another ten years. On sudden impulse, Mr. Bottle snapped the ignition switch back on and started the motor.

Pegasus roused to life, motor knocking merrily, front fenders rattling happily from the vibration.

Mr. Bottle listened to these familiar noises and shuddered. Then he snapped off the switch and sat back sickly. What would he do when Pegasus wore out? And, worse than that, how much longer dared he hope that Pegasus would last?

"Oh why, oh why didn't I get a new car last year?" Mr. Bottle berated himself mentally. But such questions, of course, were of scant comfort.

Mr. Bottle spent the next five minutes mentally wondering how in hell he would ever get to his place of gainful employment each day after Pegasus finally expired.

Finding no answer to this question, Mr. Bottle then proceeded to draw mental pictures in which he and his family finally starved to death.

These grim portraits of the future left him a trifle frantic, and in the back of his brain there suddenly flashed a spirited, grim-jawed resolve.

"Pegasus will not die!" Mr. Bottle muttered savagely. "Pegasus *shall* not die!"

That was it—that was the only solution!

And suddenly Mr. Bottle saw the picture as it stood. His own existence, the very food that went into his mouth and the mouths of his family, depended

solely, now, on the survival of Pegasus for the duration.

"Harrrooooooollld!"

The voice, loud and feminine, interrupted Mr. Bottle's mental deliberations. He looked up sharply to see Alice, his wife, standing on the porch of their home.

Alice was a plain, pleasant looking woman, thin and on the shortish side. She was, at the moment, standing with hands on hips and frowning with annoyance.

Grimly, Mr. Bottle climbed out of Pegasus and marched up the walk toward her. Women, he was thinking bitterly, are never aware of a crisis. He decided to withhold the bleak news from her until after dinner.

"WHAT on earth were you sitting out there in Pegasus for?" Alice greeted Mr. Bottle.

"I was," said Mr. Bottle with lofty dignity, "thinking."

"What about, for goodness sakes?" Alice demanded.

"Things," said Mr. Bottle darkly. "Things."

Alice Bottle sighed and followed her husband in through the door. Eighteen years of married life with Harold had left her wise enough to recognize his "thinking" moments as little more than sporadic broodings over life and its complexities.

"Well, dinner will be cold if you don't get upstairs and wash right away," she told him.

Mr. Bottle glowered briefly at his wife and clumped up the stairs to the washroom. When he came down to dinner, some ten minutes later, he wore the tattered clothes in which he generally did garden puttering.

"My heavens, Harold," Alice observed in some alarm over the mashed potatoes. "This isn't Saturday after-

noon, you know."

Mr. Bottle dug fiercely into his roast beef. He waited until he was busily masticating a huge hunk of it before he answered.

"I'm perfectly well aware of that," he snapped.

Alice Bottle looked at her husband curiously for an instant, then went back to eating in silence. Whatever was on his mind would soon pass by, she reasoned . . .

It was while Alice busily washed the dishes that Mr. Bottle crashed about in the cellar grabbing rags and buckets. And then he stamped upstairs into the kitchen to fill the buckets noisily, seize the best bar of soap, and, without explanation, march grimly through the living room and out to the front curb.

Alice saw him out in front of the house some fifteen minutes later, savagely soaping and splashing and polishing the sides of old Pegasus. She saw and marvelled. For, aside from the twice yearly wash given Pegasus when Junior was home over the summer from school, this was an unknown occurrence.

She shook her head bewilderedly at this and went back to her nightly perusal of the Civilian Defense Handbook. Alice Bottle was extremely active these days in matters relating to the Conflict. There was the Red Cross, the U.S.O., and the newly organized suburban Civilian Defense Women's League. To all of these Alice devoted every second she could spare from her household duties. The last named, especially being her favorite organization.

Mr. Bottle, red-faced and perspiring, clumped into the house with buckets full of dirty water and sopping, blackened rubbing rags, perhaps half an hour later.

His jaw had the grim set of a man

who has performed a vital and significant mission creditably. After he had emptied the dirty buckets into the clean sink and returned to the living room, Alice looked up from her Handbook.

"Maybe, Harold, you can tell me what this is all about," Alice suggested.

"I cleaned the car," Mr. Bottle answered challengingly. "Anything wrong with that?"

Alice Bottle rose and looked out the window. She turned back to her husband.

"I haven't seen Pegasus gleaming so in at least eight years," she admitted. "But what prompts your sudden concern over the appearance of the poor thing?"

"I don't suppose," Mr. Bottle said acidly, "that you've heard the radio reports today?"

Alice Bottle admitted she hadn't, adding that she'd been too busy with her war work.

MR. BOTTLE bade his wife to sit down, then. And when she was seated he began to pace back and forth, giving to her in every last dreadful detail the news report he'd heard on the way home earlier that afternoon.

It may be said for Alice Bottle that she listened without any noticeable horror. And when Mr. Bottle had come to a dramatic conclusion, her answer was startling.

"Well, Harold," she observed, "that shouldn't be so terrible. It will affect everyone just as it will us. Lord knows, if you have to get up an hour earlier every morning to catch the city train, it won't kill you."

Mr. Bottle regarded his wife with open mouthed amazement.

"Perhaps," he said bitterly, "you didn't catch the full import of my words. The city train doesn't stop within ten miles of my office in town. I

could never get to work on time, even if I got up three hours earlier—which would be silly, for there're no trains then."

Alice shrugged.

"There's no immediate worry, anyway, Harold. Pegasus isn't going to gasp and die for a while yet. And if the poor thing should, eventually, we'll work it out somehow."

Mr. Bottle's eyes gleamed like the last Christian at the stake. He threw one arm wide in a dramatic gesture.

"Even if you aren't aware of the terrible implications of this thing," he shouted, "I am. And I am smart enough to know that from now on Pegasus must take first place on any and all priorities as far as we're concerned. That car must be kept alive. Its life is our life!"

So saying, Mr. Bottle stormed out of the room and was heard a moment later clumping heavily up the stairs. He was a man weighted deep with the stern struggle for survival which had been so suddenly thrust upon him . . .

Morning came to end a fitful night of sleep for Mr. Bottle. And when he came downstairs to find his wife preparing breakfast he was met with a coldly reproachful glare.

"Harold," Alice Bottle demanded without preamble, "what do you mean by covering Pegasus with our spare blankets during the night?"

Mr. Bottle met her glance with one of righteous indignation.

"Were you using those blankets?" he asked acidly.

Alice Bottle's lips went tight. "They are practically new!"

"There was a frost last night," Mr. Bottle said patiently cold. "Pegasus had no covering. What did you expect me to do?"

"Pegasus has stood outside the house in fair weather and foul for all of ten years," Alice Bottle said frigidly. "It

has never caught cold as yet."

Mr. Bottle gave her a bitter glance and sat down to his bacon and eggs.

"I brought those blankets in the moment I saw them," Alice Bottle announced indignantly from the kitchen. "I didn't want the neighbors to think you'd suddenly gone insane."

"We will have to make room in the budget for a garage for Pegasus," Mr. Bottle growled through a mouth stuffed with toast.

"Why don't you fix up our guest room?" Alice asked acidly.

Mr. Bottle choked on the coffee he was in the process of swallowing. He rose, stiff with rage, tossed aside his napkin, reached for his hat and started for the door.

Alice followed him into the hall.

"Get back in time to meet the train at three, won't you, Harold?" she asked.

"Train?" asked Mr. Bottle frostily. "What train?" He knew damned well what train.

"Just because you're angry there is no need to be irritating," Alice told him sharply. "You know very well what train. The one from New York on which Mrs. DuShong, the National Organizer for the Women's Civilian Defense League, is arriving."

"Oh yes," Mr. Bottle said nastily. "I remember. You invited her to stay over the weekend with us while she looks over your Civilian Defense Women's League. You hope by such toadying to have her name you President of the League, isn't that right?"

Alice Bottle flushed. Her husband had cut deep, and close to the truth. But she would not be left without the last word.

"Please try not to act the boor while Mrs. DuShong is with us," she snapped. "Her impression of the weekend with

us will mean a great deal."

Mr. Bottle flushed. "Boor, eh? Boor, eh?"

He was still mumbling that when he stepped up to the running board of Pegasus. And then, quite suddenly, with the sight of the car, his quarrel with his wife vanished from his mind.

Mr. Bottle stood there a moment, proudly surveying the wash and rub job he'd done on the machine the night before. Pegasus looked years younger, he decided. Well, months, anyway.

He climbed in, conscious of the fact that his wife was probably watching him from the window. He frowned angrily. Damn women who didn't comprehend serious situations.

Mr. Bottle started the machine, gave the horn a defiant toot for the benefit of his wife, and was off.

It was Mr. Bottle's practice to stop each morning for gas at Joe's Service Station, an establishment on the edge of the suburb directly at the main highway fork. And not being a man to fly in the face of habit, Mr. Bottle headed Pegasus in that direction this morning.

Joe's Service Station had but one competitor, a lavish establishment on the other side of the highway fork which operated under the swanky name of Leon's Limousine Lounge. Leon's was patronized by the ultra wealthy members of the suburban community; and Mr. Bottle had often been heard to state that he'd be damned if he'd pay double for such foolish flim-flam.

And so when Mr. Bottle reached the highway fork he threw a contemptuous glance at Leon's Limousine Lounge, and whipped the steering wheel hard to the right, which should have brought him crunching up the gravel drive into Joe's Service Station.

But to his horror, the steering wheel seemed suddenly to have become a futile, liquid, whirlingly aimless thing

in his hands, and Pegasus, instead, turned to the left and moved smoothly up in front of the luxurious Leon's Limousine Lounge. It then came to an abrupt stop!

FOUR attendants, looking like Admirals at a Washington Conference, had dashed out of Leon's Limousine Lounge to surround the startled Mr. Bottle's automobile before he realized what had happened.

"Tire manicure?" asked one, smiling pleasantly.

"Fender buff?" asked a second.

"Ten or fifteen gallons, sir?" a third demanded, already detaching the gas hose from the side of the DeLuxe tank, marked, "30c per gal."

Mr. Bottle was far too shocked to answer. He shook his head hard from side to side, and the attendants seemed to interpret it as an affirmative gesture, for they were suddenly swarming all over Pegasus.

Fenders were buffed.

Tires were manicured.

Oil was changed.

Gas, at thirty cents a gallon, gushed into the tank.

Windows were shined, door handles polished, headlights wiped.

Grease was squirted here and there in Pegasus' underquarters.

Hubcaps were removed, cleaned, replaced.

And finally a smiling young Admiral shoved a notated bill through the window at Mr. Bottle.

"That will be six-fifty, sir," he beamed.

Sickly, Mr. Bottle paid off. And when he started up Pegasus the machine seemed almost buoyantly serene. And then Mr. Bottle remembered the useless steering wheel. He turned it sharply right and left. *But no longer was it liquid. Pegasus now responded most*

perfectly to Bottle's slightest touch!

There was no possible explanation for the sudden cold presentiment that assailed Mr. Bottle. For the sensations accompanying the presentiment were impossibly ridiculous.

And yet, in spite of his sanity, Mr. Bottle had the very definite sensation that Pegasus was inordinately pleased. Pleased in a very *human* way. Pleased and smug over the trick it had played to get Mr. Bottle into Leon's Limousine Lounge.

For Mr. Bottle couldn't tell himself differently. It had been a deliberate maneuver by Pegasus that brought him into that sedan salon. There was no other way of accounting for it.

A cold sweat broke out on Mr. Bottle's brow. . . .

By the time Mr. Bottle had reached his office in town, he had succeeded in working himself into a state bordering on a nervous breakdown.

For during the hour-long drive other things had occurred to needle poor Bottle even further. Other things which might well have been the result of Mr. Bottle's state of mind — and, again, might have been actually what he suspected them to be.

There was, for example, the red-light just coming into town. Stopping for it, Mr. Bottle observed that, off the sidewalk to his right, there was an enormous plate glass window which was so highly polished that it reflected Pegasus with remarkable clarity and sharpness of detail.

It might have been some temporary fault in the motor. Indeed, the carburetor might well have been slightly flooded. However so, when the red-light changed to green, Pegasus refused to start up.

While cars behind tooted madly for them to move along, Pegasus and Mr. Bottle remained as they were until—

so it seemed to the now distraught Bottle—the old sedan had taken a long and thoroughly admiring study of its reflection. Then and only then, did Pegasus react to Mr. Bottle's frantic efforts to set it into motion once more.

THERE were other things, smaller and less startling than the one just mentioned. Trifling circumstances which an unsuspecting Bottle would never have noticed.

But with the situation as frighteningly suggestive as it was, Mr. Bottle was stimulated to even greater frenzy of mind by such additional trivia.

And when Pegasus flatly refused to turn into the viaduct ramp where Mr. Bottle daily parked it free of charge, and, in spite of his frantically futile efforts to control the steering wheel, took him helplessly to a swank parking-garage service right next door to Mr. Bottle's office building, the owner of the arrogant sedan teetered for five precarious minutes on the brink of madness.

Finally, however, Mr. Bottle was temporarily rid of Pegasus, and clutching a garage-parking ticket in his trembling fist, he entered his office.

The switchboard girl, on seeing him, set the keynote for the rest of the remarks made to him during that day.

"What happened, Mr. Bottle?" she demanded. "You look whiter than a ghost."

Bottle didn't bother to answer. He made his way unsteadily through the stenographic enclosure and staggered into his small corner office.

Mr. Bottle did little work that day. He tried, of course. Tried desperately, in the hope of burying himself so deep in honest toil as to escape the devilishly terrifying thoughts that plucked at the back of his brain.

But he had small success with this

scheme. Wild, impossible ideas beat against his mind. His wife's words, for example, "why don't you fix up our guest room?" kept coming into his consciousness. And then he'd have hideous mental visions of Pegasus, four wheels and all, curled up snugly in bed in their spare room.

In the space of an hour he developed a terrible phobia which made him start with fright every time a visitor entered the outer office. Start with fright for fear the visitor might be Pegasus, who had somehow come up in the elevator.

And at last the short shift Saturday dragged to an end.

Mr. Bottle lingered in his cubicle of an office, however, until the rest of the staff had gone. And then he made his departure in a far more frightened state than when he'd entered.

The thoughts of going down to that garage-parking place, presenting his ticket, paying his fee and redeeming Pegasus from among the many-floored and modern ramps was almost more than Mr. Bottle could bear.

He cringed at the thought of slipping behind the frighteningly mutinous steering wheel of Pegasus again. And as a consequence, he started for a walk on leaving the building. A walk in the opposite direction from the parking-garage location. A walk in which he planned to gather courage.

The walk went on and on for perhaps fifteen minutes before Mr. Bottle was finally forced to admit to himself that he would never stiffen his spirit this way.

Mr. Bottle came to this conclusion when, coincidentally enough, he happened to be passing a retail liquor store.

A saloon as a source for courage would never enter Bottle's head. For since his somewhat scandalous college

days, Mr. Bottle had done little tippling, and that only in moderation in the proper surroundings of his own home.

But a retail liquor store, where one could purchase the stuff in a bottle and imbibe, say, in the quiet of his office, struck Mr. Bottle as being one hell of a nice convenience to the saloon-shy.

MR. BOTTLE stopped at the store long enough to purchase a quart of good bourbon. Then, retracing his steps, he took himself and his package back to the now deserted office.

In his own cubicle office, Mr. Bottle found a glass and set to work starching his soul.

It was a relatively simple matter. A matter of some five stiff shots.

"What a fool I am," Mr. Bottle told himself contemptuously after the second shot had burned its way down his gullet. "What a blasted, stupid fool!"

"A grown man!" Mr. Bottle snorted in self-denunciation, after his third drink. "A solid substantial citizen—letting myself believe in such fairy tales!"

"I must have been temporarily insane," Mr. Bottle decided after his fourth stiff one. "Thash it, temporarily inshane!"

"What 'm I doing here, sopping myshelf up with thish lousy likker?" he wondered aloud after the fifth one. "Why, I'm hiding from Pegasush, thash what! I oughtta be 'shamed. Grown man. Damn childishnesh. To hell with the likker. To hell with Pegasush!"

And Mr. Bottle then weaved out of his cubicle a trifle unsteadily, not, however, before pausing to pick up and cork the liquor he had denounced a moment before and place it in his coat pocket . . .

WHEN they brought Pegasus down to Mr. Bottle from the ultra modern twenty-sixth story ramp, he favored it with a challenging sneer and, without a moment's hesitation, slipped in behind the wheel.

"I'm giving orders now, understand?" Mr. Bottle demanded of his automobile once they were out in the street again.

And there seemed not the slightest sensation of any disagreement on the part of Pegasus to this statement. In fact, there seemed to be nothing at all remaining to hint at the strange personification of the machine that had been so terrifyingly evident that morning.

It was approximately twelve-thirty, Mr. Bottle noted as he steered Pegasus along through the mid-day traffic. Twelve-thirty, and he didn't have to get back to meet the train and the DuShong woman until three. Plenty of time for another drink.

Mr. Bottle's face felt flushed, his head a trifle heavy, as he turned Pegasus off down a side street where, under a deserted "L" trestle, he halted the car and pulled forth his bottle.

"Heresh to Pegasush," Mr. Bottle toasted, lifting the bourbon to his lips and taking a mighty gulp.

"Heresh to Mrs. DuShong," he announced a minute later, repeating the process.

Mr. Bottle was having difficulty now in adjusting his vision to point where things lost their fuzzy blur. He lifted the bottle to his lips again and took another swig.

Mr. Bottle then corked the whisky and placed it carefully on the floor beside him. He leaned back, then, head swimming. An overpowering wave of fatigue was sweeping over him. The day, the shock, the worry and exertion—the liquor.

In less than two minutes Mr. Bottle was snoring deeply . . .

THE first thing of which Mr. Bottle was conscious when he opened his eyes was the fact that he had a splitting headache. The next thing he noticed was the fact that his wrist watch said it was less than twenty minutes until three o'clock.

Horried, Mr. Bottle sat bolt upright.

Almost three!

He must have passed out. He must have slept for close to two hours. Mrs. DuShong's train was arriving in the suburb at three o'clock. And he was still in town, with a good hour's drive ahead of him before he could get home.

Mr. Bottle forgot his splitting headache. Mr. Bottle forgot everything but the terrifying fact that he'd fail to meet that train in time. Mr. Bottle reached wildly for the ignition switch, and in so doing happened to glance through the car window on his right.

His mouth fell wide open and stayed that way. His eyes bugged out until they could have been knocked off with a stick.

Mr. Bottle was home, right out in front of his house!

The words came choking from Mr. Bottle's lips before he was aware that he had arrived at such a conclusion.

"Pegasus brought me home!"

Mr. Bottle sat there stupefied. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry or scream. Pegasus had brought him home from town while he lay sound asleep in the front seat.

It was impossible, absolutely insane. Yet how else could this have happened? How else could he, having passed out under a metropolitan "L" structure, wake up to find himself parked in front of his suburban house?

It then occurred to Mr. Bottle to

wonder how long he had been here. It also occurred to him to wonder whether or not any of the neighbors had noticed his decidedly unique arrival.

Guiltily, Mr. Bottle reached down and picked up the quart of bourbon which still reposed upright on the floor. Supposing Alice should come out to see what he was doing lingering in Pegasus again? The thought chilled Mr. Bottle to the marrow. Alice did not disapprove of his having an occasional drink in his home, but lying in an automobile, swilling from a quart bottle, would be something else again.

Whitely, concealing the bottle under his coat, Mr. Bottle climbed out of Pegasus and moved cautiously around to the back of the machine. He held the keys to the trunk in his trembling hand, and his intention was to hide the damning evidence in there until he could find some other way of disposing of it.

Mr. Bottle wasted a precious two minutes fumbling with the key in the lock. Somehow he couldn't find the right key. He was sorting through the key ring, looking frantically for another one, when he heard Alice's voice coming from the front porch.

"Harrrroooooooooold!"

Mr. Bottle was a man berserk with terror. Looking wildly right and left he saw no possible concealment for the damning bottle. And then his eye fell upon the gas tank aperture. Quickly, scarcely realizing what he was doing, Mr. Bottle took the cap from the gas tank, uncorked the bottle, and emptied the contents of the bottle into the tank. Swiftly, then, he replaced the cap, dropped the empty bottle to the curb, and kicked a little dirt over it.

Fighting for composure, Mr. Bottle stepped around the car and into the view of Alice standing on the porch.

"Yes, dear?" Mr. Bottle shouted.

"Hurry over to the depot or you'll miss the three o'clock train," Alice told him. "You certainly took your time getting home. I thought you were through at noon today."

"I worked late," Mr. Bottle lied at the top of his lungs. He felt a little bit relieved. Pegasus had evidently just rolled up with him before the house when he'd emerged from his alcoholic nap. Probably no one had noticed anything.

"Well please hurry, Harold," Alice told him. "It's almost a quarter to three. It takes a good ten minutes to get over to the depot."

MR. BOTTLE nodded and started back to the door of the car. Then he remembered the strange antics of Pegasus, especially this last incredible demonstration of the car's weird animation. He went pale once more, hesitating with his hand on Pegasus' door-knob.

"Supposing I walk?" Mr. Bottle shouted to his wife. "It's a wonderful day, and, and, ah, Mrs. DuShong could see the village better."

From the porch, Alice glared at him.

"If you're thinking of saving tires, or of conserving Pegasus' parts, you aren't being subtle about it. Please get into that car at once and meet Mrs. DuShong."

Mr. Bottle sighed tremulously. There seemed to be nothing he could do. He couldn't very well explain to Alice that he didn't want to ride in Pegasus because he believed it was *alive*.

"But, dear—" Mr. Bottle tried one last game effort.

"Please hurry!" Alice snapped. There was an ominous tightness at the corners of her mouth.

Mr. Bottle gave up the battle. Like

a man stepping into the jaws of a carnivorous whale, Mr. Bottle climbed in behind Pegasus' wheel. His hands were shaking as he switched on the ignition and kicked the starter.

Pegasus awoke, roaring mightily as its fenders shook and its parts rattled. Mr. Bottle threw the machine into gear and turned out into the street.

It was then that Pegasus unleashed a deafening salvo of backfire. Thunderous snorts rent the air like tremendous explosions, and the car moved jerkily forward.

Alarmed, Mr. Bottle threw the gears into second. But the din of the exhaust bangings only grew louder.

In third gear, the backfire modified somewhat, but continued an intermittent barrage as Mr. Bottle drove through the sleepy suburban business section toward the station. And five minutes later, with many grave misgivings, Mr. Bottle pulled up and parked at the curb in front of the small suburban depot.

The train arrived at precisely 3.03, and Mr. Bottle, waiting on the platform, had no trouble in identifying Mrs. DuShong from the fifteen or twenty passengers who got off.

She was a tall, gray-haired, severe woman. She wore pince-nez glasses, a chalk stripe business suit of gray worsted, and carried a briefcase under her arm. Two redcaps followed respectfully with her luggage.

Mr. Bottle advanced toward her, identified himself, mumbled some standard banalities, and directed the redcaps to Pegasus, where they piled her luggage in the trunk.

On getting into the car, Mrs. DuShong asked Mr. Bottle, "What line are you in?" She used the same tone in which a man might ask another, "Have a cigar?"

Starting up the car, Mr. Bottle be-

gan to explain what line he was in, and was immediately drowned out by the shattering backfire blasts let loose by Pegasus.

Mrs. DuShong looked at Mr. Bottle rather sharply, but didn't try to shout above the din as they rolled out into the street. It was then that Mr. Bottle really began to encounter difficulty. Pegasus providing said difficulty, of course.

It was the steering wheel again. Liquid, twirling aimlessly in Mr. Bottle's hands as he tried futilely to direct the machine.

Pegasus was going where it wanted to go. Going with a constant and deafening accompaniment of backfire explosions. And following its chosen course none too steadily.

Pegasus was weaving.

Not weaving wildly, or dangerously. Just definitely skeetering from side to side enough so that it was noticeable.

CLINGING to the futile steering wheel, Mr. Bottle endeavored to keep a smile on his mouth and an expression of calm on his face. Both efforts were taut, and the expression on the face of Mrs. DuShong was one of growing annoyance.

Mr. Bottle was wondering where in the hell they would end up and what in the hell he should do about the situation. He couldn't turn to Mrs. DuShong and tell her to leap for her life because the car was *alive*. He couldn't clamber out himself and leap, leaving the woman alone in the mad machine. It was at this point in Mr. Bottle's wildly hysterical musings, that Mrs. DuShong managed to shout above the din of a backfire blast.

"Are you driving to your home by the shortest route, Mr. Bottle?" the woman demanded.

"Thought you'd want to see the

town," Mr. Bottle shouted in the middle of what, unfortunately, happened to be a second of silence.

"I am rather tired," Mrs. DuShong told him sharply. "I would prefer seeing your little suburb tomorrow. Please drive directly to your home."

And Pegasus, at that instant, chose to come to an abrupt stop.

Frantically, Mr. Bottle kicked the starter. There was absolutely no response. And then, looking past Mrs. DuShong's disapproving face, Mr. Bottle saw the store in front of which Pegasus had decided to stop.

"ROYAL LIQUOR COMPANY. BONDED RYES AND BOURBONS" was the sign across the front window of the store. And piled high in the window were innumerable exhibits of bottled delights.

Mrs. DuShong's voice came to Mr. Bottle icily.

"Have you any particular purpose in stopping here, Mr. Bottle?"

Mr. Bottle, giving up his efforts to rouse Pegasus to life again, swallowed hard. He turned a strained face to Mrs. DuShong.

"I, ah, just remembered a very important call I forgot to make. I, ah, hope you don't mind my running in there to put it through. It, aaahhh, was the nearest place with a phone booth that I could think of."

Mrs. DuShong didn't answer, but the look she gave Bottle was sufficient. Redly, Mr. Bottle clambered out of Pegasus and went around to the sidewalk. By now he felt quite certain *why* Pegasus had taken him here, and *why* the automobile had weaved and backfired so. It was that damned bourbon he'd poured into Pegasus in front of his house.

The stuff had made Pegasus tight!

And now the car had hauled him here to the biggest liquor store in the

village and stopped, refusing to budge an inch until Mr. Bottle filled it up with another quart of bourbon!

Mr. Bottle teetered weakly into the liquor store, made his purchase. The clerk began to swathe the bottle in paper.

"Don't bother to wrap it," Mr. Bottle said. And then, at the clerk's surprised expression, Mr. Bottle added unthinkingly, "I intend to drink it outside."

The clerk handed him the unwrapped bottle with a long and wondrously appraising stare. Mr. Bottle took it, hid it under his coat, and with a deep breath stepped back out onto the sidewalk.

DELIBERATELY skirting around the back of Pegasus, keeping the bulge beneath his coat from the eyes of Mrs. DuShong, Mr. Bottle paused before the gas tank cap and furtively unscrewed it. Then he brought forth the bottle of bourbon, removed the cork, and began to pour the contents into the tank.

Looking up, Mr. Bottle saw the clerk of the liquor store peering over the display stalls in the window at him. The clerk's jaw was agape, his eyes bulging.

Mr. Bottle forced a pleasant smile and nodded greeting. The pale face of the clerk vanished hastily from sight.

When Mr. Bottle, after disposing of the empty bourbon quart, climbed back in behind the wheel of Pegasus, Mrs. DuShong met him with a frostily puzzled stare.

"Have you been drinking, Mr. Bottle?" she demanded.

Mr. Bottle summoned up a passable counterfeit of reproach in his expression.

"Why, Mrs. DuShong!" he exclaimed.

"I just thought I'd ask," Mrs. DuShong declared with no noticeable thaw in her voice.

Pegasus came to life again, just as Mr. Bottle had expected it would. Came to life with a surprising cessation of backfiring and an almost happily submissive regard to Mr. Bottle's wishes concerning choice of direction.

The steering wheel was once more of use, and, although Pegasus lurched badly once or twice in turns, there was no further evidence of the machine's intoxication as Mr. Bottle drove the rest of the way home.

But this merely partially reassured Mr. Bottle. Pegasus was being nice because he'd acceded to the car's wish for a drink. Mr. Bottle was fully aware that he'd be foolish to count on absolute obedience from Pegasus under all circumstances. And as soon as he stopped plying the machine with liquor, he knew he could expect more trouble.

Nevertheless, it was with a deep sigh of relief that Mr. Bottle drew up before his home and helped Mrs. DuShong and luggage up to the porch.

Alice had been waiting, and she took her visitor in tow, giving Mr. Bottle a chance to clump upstairs to his bedroom for a session of grim brooding.

Pacing the floor restlessly, Mr. Bottle grappled with the problems presented by Pegasus. And as he waged the bitter mental conflict, Mr. Bottle managed, somehow, to keep a firm grip on his sanity. For deciding what to do about an old and trusted sedan which has suddenly come alive on you, takes no little skill in mental tightrope walking.

Some twenty minutes passed, however, with Mr. Bottle still no better off in regard to any sensible solution of the utterly impossible situation. And another hour passed in much the same manner.

Alice called up the stairs to him, then, informing Mr. Bottle that dinner was ready and asking him to please hurry down.

Throughout the meal, Mr. Bottle had plenty of time to continue his brain acrobatics, for Alice and the DuShong woman carried on a two-way running discussion of the problems of women in civilian defense. There would have been little opportunity for Mr. Bottle to enter into the conversation even had he desired to do so.

And when the meal ended, with Alice and Mrs. DuShong repairing to the living room, Mr. Bottle glumly removed the dinnerware from the dining room table to the kitchen sink, turned the faucets on the mess, and went out into the back yard to continue his meditations.

Mr. Bottle felt certain that he wouldn't be missed for quite a little while. Kicking up turf in the backyard added nothing to Mr. Bottle's efforts to solve his problem, so at last he decided to take a turn around to the front of the house and have a look at Pegasus.

For perhaps fully a minute Mr. Bottle stood there at the front of the house staring sickly at the curb where Pegasus should have been.

"My God," he gasped hoarsely, then. "The damned thing's gone off on a bender!"

FRANTICALLY, Mr. Bottle looked up and down the street, hoping, praying, for some sign of the vagrant vehicle. But there was none. Pegasus was definitely gone, positively among the missing.

Mr. Bottle thought of running into the house to announce this fact to Alice. Then he decided against it. After all, Alice didn't know the whole story. Hell, she didn't know *any* of

the story. Now, in front of the frigid Mrs. DuShong, would definitely be no time to try to tell Alice about it.

Taking a deep breath and mentally flipping a coin for directional guidance, Mr. Bottle started down the street to the right. It was all he could do to keep from breaking into a dead run. All he could do to saunter along at a moderate pace which would not arouse the alarm of his neighbors.

At last, however, when he had left his own residential district, Mr. Bottle was able to give the pursuit the necessary hysteria of pace it demanded. Up and down sideways and alleys Mr. Bottle sped. Breathlessly, he turned street corners at full speed, hoping to come unexpectedly on some sign, any sign of Pegasus.

It occurred to Mr. Bottle that he might telephone the police. He could report Pegasus as missing, probably stolen. They would then be able to aid him in his search.

But Bottle discarded that idea as soon as it was born. For he couldn't tell the police the story, either. And if they found Pegasus, driverless and wheeling along some boulevard, a nasty situation would evolve which would in no way enrich police opinion of Mr. Bottle himself.

So it was that Mr. Bottle was forced to carry on his desperate search alone. And after some thirty minutes of it, Mr. Bottle was just beginning to realize what a none too small community his suburb was after all.

Legs weary, wind spent, mind anguished, Mr. Bottle finally gained the suburban business district with still no trace of Pegasus to show for his searching.

It was in a gesture of heartsick despair that Mr. Bottle chose to enter the first saloon he encountered. And there he ordered a double slug of bourbon.

Downing the drink in a gulp, Mr. Bottle clung coughingly to the bar for temporary support, nodded once to the bartender and staggered out of the place. Mr. Bottle's stagger was due to a burning sensation in his chest and the worries on his mind. He was by no means intoxicated.

But when he emerged from the tavern he wished he were.

For it was then that Pegasus, horn tooting gaily, and chassis skittering wildly from one side of the street to the other, rocketed past the astonished Mr. Bottle.

Pegasus whipped around the nearest corner on two wheels in the next instant, and was lost once more from sight. But the shrilly challenging tooting of the horn kept up until it faded away some two minutes later.

Mr. Bottle clapped one hand to his brow and turned around, staggering weakly back into the saloon.

"Another double bourbon," Mr. Bottle croaked feebly.

The barkeep mixed it. Bottle downed it.

And then, through the open door of the saloon, there came the rising, unmistakable, shrill tooting of Pegasus' horn once more.

MR. BOTTLE dashed to the door, arriving just in time to see Pegasus, now rocketing in the opposite direction, come once again down the street in mad, pell-mell fashion.

Popeyed in terror, Mr. Bottle watched his inebriated automobile take another corner on two wheels with much screeching protest from the tires.

Mr. Bottle was turning sickly to re-enter the saloon when he heard the shrill sirens of Pegasus' pursuers.

The police motorcycles, three of them, came hell-bent around the corner and down the street in the direction

Pegasus had taken less than forty seconds before.

"Oh God," groaned Mr. Bottle. "Oh Godohgod!"

In no time at all the motorcycle policemen would overtake the pie-eyed Pegasus. And then there would be hell to pay. Mr. Bottle shuddered at the thought, and turned back into the saloon to order another double bourbon.

Mr. Bottle left the saloon ten minutes and four bourbons later. But he still was not intoxicated. Mr. Bottle was discovering that a good, terrible fear was an extremely sobering factor, and that a man scared half out of his wits needs three times the ordinary amount of liquor to get tight.

It was getting dark out, now, and Mr. Bottle wandered with a sick sort of indecision along a side street of the business district, his ears figuratively cringing in anticipation of any further shrill clamor that would indicate Pegasus was still racing around the village at large.

But such sounds were not forthcoming, and as minutes passed, Mr. Bottle began to dread the very absence of them. Now he feared that the very tranquility of the atmosphere indicated that Pegasus had been trapped.

Mr. Bottle was in the peculiar position of not knowing what in hell he wanted. He couldn't decide which would be the lesser of two evils: Pegasus' capture by police, or the car's continued tear throughout the community.

So deep was Mr. Bottle in this none too pleasant debate, that he almost failed to see the coy radiator snout of Pegasus peering out at him from an alley.

And when he did chance to see it, he almost fainted.

Pegasus—it could be no other! Pegasus silent and unmoving. Pegasus wonderfully tranquil.

"Perhaps Pegasus is sleeping it off,

like I did," Mr. Bottle thought eagerly. "And perhaps I'll be able to repay the favor it did me, by bringing it home during its snooze."

With this in mind, Mr. Bottle tiptoed eagerly down the alley, approaching Pegasus from the side. And the instant he laid his hand on Pegasus' door-knob, he sensed that he had been correct in his guess. The car had tired of its toot. It was, indeed, sleeping off the wages of its sin.

Mr. Bottle opened the door and was stepping in behind the wheel when the voice sounded behind him.

"You own that car, buddy?"

Mr. Bottle wheeled, to face three red-necked motorcycle policemen whose expressions indicated something deeper than mere annoyance.

Before he had time to check himself, Mr. Bottle replied.

"Yes," he told them. "Yes, of course."

"That, brother," said one of the policemen, "is all we wanta know!"

Mr. Bottle felt a pair of handcuffs snap over his wrists, and then he was seized roughly and hustled along at a rapid pace. . . .

THE Night Court Session for which

Mr. Bottle was being held, started at nine p.m. Consequently, this left him no little time in which to pace the stone floor of his cell and reflect on his woes.

From the very callousness of the motorcycle policemen's disregard for his protestations, Mr. Bottle had decided in advance that he was due for rough and highly unsympathetic treatment in the courts.

Mr. Bottle thought only once of calling Alice, and then he discarded the idea completely and for good. That was all the poor woman needed to show Mrs. DuShong what stuff her husband was made of, Mr. Bottle decided bitterly.

The appointment as President to the Defense Civilian Women's League, or whatever it was, was something Alice had her heart set on. And in spite of his sarcastic comments about it that morning, Mr. Bottle was sincerely pulling for his wife's appointment to the post if it would make her happy.

No, he couldn't call Alice. To do so would be to run the risk of the frosty Mrs. DuShong learning of his plight. What then would the woman think about assigning Alice to a post of such importance when her husband was a bum? No. Obviously Mrs. DuShong's opinion of Mr. Bottle was none too solid as it was. Better to be a martyr than to jeopardize his wife's happiness.

So Mr. Bottle sighed and resigned himself to scheming over ways and means to keep his good wife out of this and Mrs. DuShong unaware of it.

Mr. Bottle had encountered no one so far who had recognized him. In fact, he had the definite impression that, although they had checked his license plates, the police thought him nothing more than an automobile thief who became tight while working at his trade.

"As long as they don't know I'm Bottle," he reflected, "there will be no chance of Alice learning of this."

Thus having made up his mind on the course of action he was set to take, Mr. Bottle waited nervously for them to take him. It was less than fifteen minutes later when the turnkey opened his cell door and led him across the street to the Night Police Court.

The Police Magistrate proved to be a gruff, bull-doggish individual with a voice like slag sliding down a tin chute. He had the most baleful glare to his gaze that Mr. Bottle had ever seen.

"Well," said the Magistrate, "you Bottle?"

Mr. Bottle cleared his throat and spoke his lie.

"No, sir. I am Lightfingered Lifooksky."

The Magistrate turned to his Clerk. "The license on that car showed that it belonged to one Harold Bottle, didn't it?"

The clerk said it did. The Magistrate turned back to Bottle.

"Then what were you doing with Bottle's car?"

Again Mr. Bottle cleared his throat.

"I-I, stole it, Your Honor."

The Magistrate leaned forward. "What?"

Mr. Bottle repeated.

The Magistrate turned to the Clerk. "Add larceny to that charge of drunken driving, speeding, and resistance of officers."

Mr. Bottle gulped. "Resistance of officers?" he asked.

"Of course," the Magistrate growled. "You refused to stop when the motorcycle police went after you. That's resisting officers."

Mr. Bottle nodded. "I guess so," he admitted weakly.

The Magistrate cleared his throat. "Am I to understand that you plead guilty to the charges just read?" he asked.

It took all of Mr. Bottle's Spartan courage to nod yes.

"Good," said the Magistrate. "Let's get down to business, then. This court can handle only the drunken driving, speeding, and resistance to officers counts. The higher courts handle larceny, for which offense you will undoubtedly be given five years in the State Penitentiary."

MR. BOTTLE blinked in horror. He hadn't realized that small fact until this moment. Penitentiary—that was too high a price for any man to pay for his wife's appointment as President of the Women's Whateveritwas!

"Just a moment, your Honor," Bottle stammered. "I plead not guilty, on all charges. I'm not a thief. That's my own car. I am Harold Bottle!"

The Police Magistrate purpled. "What is this?" he demanded. "Whose leg do you think you're pulling, anyway?"

"But I *am* Harold Bottle. It *is* my car!"

"Sooooooooo," glared the Police Magistrate, "perjury, eh?"

"I wasn't sworn in under oath," protested Mr. Bottle, who was not totally ignorant of the law.

"Contempt of Court, then," the Magistrate said promptly. "I hereby fine you twenty-five dollars for contempt of Court."

Mr. Bottle's shoulders slumped weakly. "Put it on the bill," he said.

"Well, now, Bottle," said the Magistrate, leaning forward, "Now that we've snatched away the veil and know you for what you are, how do you plead to the charges of drunken driving?"

Mr. Bottle cleared his throat. "Not guilty," he said. "I was not drunk and I was not driving. That takes care of the other two charges as well."

"Not drunk, eh?" sneered the Magistrate. He beckoned to one of the three motorcycle policemen who'd arrested Mr. Bottle. The policeman approached the bench.

"Did you arrest this man, officer?" the Magistrate asked.

The policeman nodded. "Yessir."

"Was there alcohol on his breath at that time?" the Police Magistrate asked.

"You said it!" the policeman declared.

"Thank you, officer," said the Magistrate. He leered at Bottle. "What do you say to that, eh? Not drunk, eh? Hah!"

Mr. Bottle quailed. "But I wasn't

drunk! I'd had a few drinks, yes, but I was cold sober when—"

The Magistrate cut him off. "That's what they all say," he growled. Then: "And what was that second bit of nonsense you tried to hand me—that guff about not driving?"

Mr. Bottle spread his palms wide and put on his most supplicating expression.

"I wasn't driving, Your Honor. I swear I wasn't driving. The car was driving itself. It was drunk, dead drunk!"

The Magistrate donned his most sarcastic expression. "Ahhhh," he sneered, "I see. You weren't driving. You just sat in the back seat while the car drove itself, eh?"

There were tears in Mr. Bottle's eyes as he begged for justice and belief.

"No," he said. "No one was in the car at all."

THE few loungers in the Night Court snickered. Glaring, the Magistrate banged his gavel heavily down for order. He leaned forward again to glare at Bottle.

"I have had enough of this, this buffoonery. I hereby fine you twenty-five dollars for drunken driving, twenty-five more for speeding while intoxicated, ten dollars more for resisting the officers who demanded you stop—and," he paused for breath, "an additional twenty-five dollars for contempt of Court!"

"Eighty-five dollars in fines," intoned the Clerk.

"Plus three dollars costs," added the Magistrate.

"Total, eighty-eight dollars due from defendant Harold Bottle," the Clerk said sing-song fashion.

Mr. Bottle groaned. "I haven't got it," he said.

The Magistrate grinned cunningly. "I'll send an officer with you to your

home, Bottle. Have your wife give you the money for the fines."

Mr. Bottle shuddered in horror at the thought of such a spectacle.

"No," he declared firmly. "I won't bring my wife into this. I can bring you the money Monday."

"Certainly," the Magistrate agreed. "But in the meantime, you'll sit in the jailhouse over the weekend." He banged his gavel hard. "Take the prisoner to the lockup," he shouted.

Hands closed on Mr. Bottle's arms, and he was turned around and led out of the courtroom by two police jailers who walked on either side of him.

The fresh night air hit Mr. Bottle's fevered cheeks as he and his guards paused a moment at the top of the courthouse steps. Gazing at the jailhouse just across the street, Mr. Bottle shuddered at the prospects of spending forty-eight hours behind bars there. But lifting his chin and squaring his shoulders, Bottle started down the steps with firm tread and clear conscience, realizing that this grim sacrifice was made solely on behalf of his wife's right to happiness.

"It is a far better thing I do than I have ever done before," mused Mr. Bottle in the heroic words of Sidney Carton going to the guillotine.

"Huh, what's that?" the guard on his right asked.

"Nothing," said Mr. Bottle loftily. "I was but thinking aloud. Incidentally," he paused to smile cunningly and extend a folded five dollar bill to his guard, "do you think you could send a telegram for me if I told you what to say?"

The guard plucked the bill from Mr. Bottle's hand before the other guard could see it. "Sure," he said swiftly. "Whatcha want sent, and to who?"

Mr. Bottle, pausing there on the sidewalk, gave his guard his home ad-

dress and his wife's name.

"In the telegram," said Bottle, "say merely, 'Called unexpectedly back to city. Urgent work. See you Monday. Signed: Harold.'"

The guard nodded. "I'll send it right now," he promised. To his companion he said: "You take care of him, Joe. I'll run down to the telegraph office right away."

Mr. Bottle's remaining guard grumbled something under his breath, held tighter to his captive's arm, and started to steer Mr. Bottle across the street to the jailhouse.

Mr. Bottle scarcely noticed that he was walking, so noble did he feel and so clever at inventing the ingenious ruse which would keep his wife from worrying and explain his absence to the frosty Mrs. DuShong.

Least of all, did Mr. Bottle realize he was crossing the street. And his complete unawareness of the automobile headlights bearing down on him and his guard at breakneck speed was the most conclusive evidence of the trance he was in.

"LooooooookOUT!" Mr. Bottle's guard screamed shrilly, dropping his captive's arm, and racing madly for the curb.

MR. BOTTLE came out of the fog in time to turn and see the headlights rushing through the darkness at him from a distance of less than ten feet. He opened his mouth to scream, but no words came. He bent his knocking knees to leap aside, but he was frozen to the spot.

Mr. Bottle closed his eyes and covered his head with his arms.

There was a mad squealing of brakes and burning of tires as the automobile shaved Bottle by inches and came to a stop directly beside him.

Mr. Bottle opened his eyes to see that the door of the machine was open, that

there was no one in the car or behind the wheel, and that the vehicle was Pegasus!

The next instant was one controlled by Mr. Bottle's sheer instinctive reactions. His guards were no longer beside him. He was a prisoner on his way to jail. Escape beckoned temptingly.

Mr. Bottle didn't pause to think. He leaped in behind Pegasus' steering wheel and the door slammed automatically behind him, while the motor snarled angrily and the car shot off down the street in high gear.

His hands were on the steering wheel, and Mr. Bottle was going through all the motions of driving Pegasus as the machine shot along at breakneck speed. But of course the wheel was once again quite futilely liquid, and Pegasus was racing where it pleased.

For the first three or four blocks of wild flight, Mr. Bottle's heart hammered in excitement and he felt the giddy flush of madcap adventure.

And then, as Pegasus took a turn on two wheels at sixty-five miles an hour, Mr. Bottle's reason began to return.

"Ohmygod!" groaned Mr. Bottle suddenly. "What have I done? Whatever have I done?"

And cold sanity, of course, told him exactly what he'd done. He had fled the grip of the Law. He had accomplished a madly spectacular jailbreak!

Cold sweat beaded Bottle's brow, and his heart fluttered butterfly fashion around in his stomach.

He was an escaped convict, nothing less!

Being confined to a suburban jail for various offenses ranging from drunken driving to resisting officers was one thing. Dashing madly off in what must certainly have seemed to be a cleverly executed jailbreak was quite another. It lifted his crimes quite definitely from the misdemeanor status

into that of felony, or something equally horrible.

Mr. Bottle wondered sickly what they did to escaped convicts. In his mind there flashed grim scenes recalled from movies, wherein baying bloodhounds tracked frantic felons through swampland wastes. He visioned, too, the chains, lashes and sweatboxes that waited for the hapless fugitives when they were at last recaptured.

Mr. Bottle groaned aloud and was seized by an uncontrollable fit of trembling. He buried his hands in his face.

"Oh, Pegasus, Pegasus, look what you've made me do!" he moaned.

It came to Mr. Bottle after a few more blocks and an attempt to get a grip on himself, that there was only one thing for him to do.

"I must go back. Now. Before it is too late," Mr. Bottle decided. "I must throw myself on the mercy of the jailers. Perhaps I can tell them I only went to get a package of cigarettes—or something."

THUS resolved, Mr. Bottle felt a little better. His hands grabbed the steering wheel again, and in a loud, clear voice he tried to regain mastery of the car.

"Pegasus," said Mr. Bottle firmly. "Enough of this nonsense. I want to go back. I want you to take me right back where you picked me up, understand?"

But if Pegasus understood, it wasn't having any. The car continued to race madly onward while the speedometer flickered around seventy-five miles an hour.

Mr. Bottle tried turning the steering wheel this way and that. But of course it was no use. The thing was still liquid in his hands. He might as well not have tried.

"Pegasus!" Mr. Bottle shouted more

shrilly. "Pegasus, stop this instant. If you won't take me back I'm getting out right now!"

As if in answer, the speedometer inched up to eighty miles an hour. Mr. Bottle went pale.

"Pegasus!" he shrilled.

And before Mr. Bottle's horrified eyes, the speedometer went all the way up to ninety miles an hour—something it hadn't seemed able to do since the first year Mr. Bottle had owned it!

Pegasus had left the business district, now, and was taking a route which Mr. Bottle knew led to the main highway. The terrain was flying past them now, as the machine thundered along the streets.

Mr. Bottle had to reach his grim decision in a hurry. There was little time to dally, at the rate Pegasus was flying.

"I'll have to leap," Mr. Bottle groaned. "It's my only chance."

Several times Mr. Bottle reached for the door handle, and each time a flashing vision of houses and lightpoles flicking past them made him hesitate in terror. Leaping from a machine thundering along at ninety miles an hour is something to give any man pause.

But courage came at last to Mr. Bottle, and closing his eyes he seized hard on the door handle and gave it a vicious twist downward.

The twist almost broke Mr. Bottle's wrist. And the door handle didn't give an inch. Frantically, Mr. Bottle tried again, this time with both hands. There was the same result.

Wildly, Mr. Bottle threw himself across the car seat and grabbed for the opposite door handle. With almost inhuman strength, born of his desperation, Mr. Bottle tried to force that handle down.

It was useless. Sobbing, Mr. Bottle clambered back behind the steering wheel. He was trapped. Pegasus was

deliberately refusing to let him out. Those handles had never been stuck before. He knew that it would be foolish even to try the handles of the rear doors.

Pegasus had obviously made up its mind that Mr. Bottle wasn't leaving.

They reached the highway fork, now, and unhesitatingly Pegasus rocketed through a red-light, narrowly avoided collision with a huge truck that had the right of way, and thundered on along the broad concrete stretch.

Pegasus was heading toward the bright lights of the city.

FORTUNATELY there were few cars on the road for Pegasus to play tag with. There were few cars, that is, until Pegasus reached another highway crossing and a long, sleek, black sedan, obviously in a hell of a hurry and traveling at a right angle to them, made a sharp, screeching, two-wheeled turn onto their stretch of highway, and thundered along some two hundred yards ahead of them in the same direction.

A red flag might as well have been waved under the nose of a bull. Pegasus thundered angrily at the sight of the other machine now racing onward ahead of them. Thundered angrily and picked up speed.

Mr. Bottle blanched. The speedometer was crawling up to a hundred miles an hour! It was impossible for a car of Pegasus' years to attain such a speed. Utterly impossible. But the needle flickered steadily upward.

Pegasus' intention was obvious. The car ahead provided a challenge, and Pegasus was accepting it sportively. It was going to be a race!

Mr. Bottle cringed down behind the dashboard, expecting each instant to hear the terrible rending of one of Pegasus' worn tires, or the snapping of a vital part.

When he peered up through the windshield again two minutes later, they had gained almost a hundred yards on the car ahead!

And then, fearing to look at the speedometer, Mr. Bottle turned his head away and caught his first glimpse of the speeding automobile behind them.

It, too, was a long black, fast limousine. And it was some two hundred yards back of them, falling behind a little each second as Pegasus picked up speed.

And when Mr. Bottle turned back to look through the front windshield again, they were less than fifty yards behind the car ahead of them.

It was then that Mr. Bottle noticed that there seemed to be five or six men in that car, and that several of them were peering intently through the rear window at Pegasus' approach.

Mr. Bottle was wondering about this when one of the men opened the rear window and the second one stuck out a stick and pointed it at them.

In less than two seconds later, Mr. Bottle was aware that the stick was spitting flame through the darkness at them, and that the stick was not a stick, but a gun of some sort. Mr. Bottle digested this in open-mouthed amazement.

The crashing of the first shots through Pegasus' windshield brought home to Mr. Bottle the awful fact that he was the target of the fire.

Mr. Bottle then acted on sheer instinct. He clambered over the seat and into the back of the car, where he lay trembling on the floor.

The shots were louder and more frequent, now, and Mr. Bottle realized that Pegasus must be almost within a few feet of the other machine.

Curiosity is also an instinct, and it prompted Mr. Bottle to raise his head

ever so cautiously to the window level of the car.

And then Mr. Bottle saw that they were directly behind the other machine, and moving up in an effort to run side by side with it. He saw, from close range, the face of the man holding the gun.

It was an ugly face, a frightening face, hard and foreign in cast. But it was also a face that was considerably frightened.

The face turned away and shouted something up to the men in the front seat. And then Pegasus, in a neat spurt, drew around and up alongside the other machine.

Mr. Bottle had forgotten to duck down again, and so he saw the whole panorama.

There were six men in the car, and they all had the same hard, frightening casts to their features as the one with the gun. And like the first one Bottle had seen, they, too, were white with fright.

All of them were staring open-mouthed in terror at Pegasus. Five of them had guns which they held foolishly in their hands, making no effort to fire them.

AND then Mr. Bottle realized the reason for their terrified alarm. It was Pegasus and himself, of course. The fact that Pegasus was speeding along merrily with absolutely no visible hand in the front seat to guide it while its sole passenger crouched in the back peering out the window at them. Enough to terrify the hardest of individuals.

What happened then happened swiftly.

The car alongside of them went apparently out of control as its driver looked too long at Pegasus and not long enough at the road ahead.

Mr. Bottle saw it start to veer wildly off into the ditch beside the road, saw the frantic efforts of the others in the car, trying all at once to grab the wheel and right the machine. Efforts which only served to speed its course into the ditch.

And even as the other car crashed off the road into the ditch and started the sickening roll over and over through the weeds toward a telephone post, Pegasus blew a tire!

Pegasus, then, in the next split second, was skeetering toward the ditch some ten yards in front of the machine that had already plunged into it.

Mr. Bottle shouted wildly, grabbing instinctively for the rear door handle. And then there was a bouncing, jarring, twisting chaos, and Mr. Bottle was releasing his hold on the handle of the open rear door and flying through the air toward a clump of thorn bushes.

The thorn bushes and Mr. Bottle's nether extremities cushioned his fall—a most unhappy combination. Dazed, yowling wildly, Mr. Bottle scrambled from the bushes and slid down into the ditch.

Standing there, Mr. Bottle looked around in horror. Pegasus lay in a twisted mass of wreckage against a telephone pole some fifty yards ahead. The limousine which had gone off into the ditch before Pegasus had found a closer pole, and lay smolderingly twined around it. Its occupants were evidently trapped inside.

And then the car which Mr. Bottle had seen racing along behind them came screeching to a stop on the highway directly beside Mr. Bottle. Doors opened and men piled out. Grim, resolute, clean-cut young men carrying sub-machine guns in their arms. They swarmed around Bottle.

"Great work, old man! Tremendously courageous stuff. We saw it all.

We'd never have caught these devils if you hadn't come along. They were pulling away from us all the time!"

Mr. Bottle didn't know what it was all about, but he pointed a frightened finger at the twisted wreckage of the sleek sedan.

"They're still in there," he said.

Some of the grim young men set about the task of pulling the occupants of the wrecked limousine forth from the remains of their car.

"You've done the F.B.I. a turn that won't be forgotten," one of the young men told Bottle.

"F.B.I.?" choked Mr. Bottle. "G. Men?"

The young man nodded. "Of course. That bunch you overtook and ran off the road is the nastiest band of saboteurs operating in this part of the country."

"Saboteurs?" Mr. Bottle gasped.

The young man nodded. "That's right," he said. "For this you'll be something of a hero."

Mr. Bottle collapsed in a heap . . .

THE young F.B.I. man was correct. Mr. Bottle did, indeed, become something of a hero. The suburban paper ran a Sunday extra featuring his picture above the tale of his exploit. Alice, of course, floated on a cloud of sheer ecstasy.

Even Mrs. DuShong was impressed, and her attitude toward Mr. Bottle changed to one of respectful awe. Naturally Alice got the Presidency of the Women's Civilian Whatchamacallet.

Pegasus was carted off to the junk heap, which Mr. Bottle visited stealthily at night in order to place a small wreath atop the shattered remains.

And the matter of Mr. Bottle's being without a car was quite handsomely rectified. The Government presented him with a sleek, new 1942 super-de-

lux sedan, after ordering the priorities people to place him number one on their local list.

And this new car Mr. Bottle determined to treat kindly, but without pampering. For he was far too well

aware of the danger involved in allowing a mere automobile the attention deserved only by humans. Such treatment made them only too apt to get out of hand.

THE END.

FANTASTIC FACTS

By ELLIS WHITE

ARTIFICIAL HIBERNATION

THAT many warm-blooded animals hibernate in the late fall and sleep until spring is a well known fact. It is very interesting to note, therefore, the results obtained by Dr. Paavo Suomalainen, a Finnish scientist, who has been able to send European hedgehogs into hibernation artificially. He discovered that an injection of insulin, or a combination of insulin and magnesium chloride, in the hedgehogs produced a drop in their blood sugar content to about half of the normal content.

This condition is characteristic of the cold-blooded state of warm-blooded animals during hibernation—and so the animals went to sleep. Moreover, if they were kept at temperatures near the freezing point, the animals continued to sleep just as in natural hibernation. But just as soon as they were taken into a room where the temperature was from 70 to 75 degrees F, the animals awoke and returned to their normal warm-blooded state.

* * *

ANOTHER EVIL OF WAR

THE war has caused many shortages and the newest is hurting the field of science and medical research.

There is a growing scarcity of human skulls and skeletons in this country since most of them are imported from Europe and Asia and people over there are much too busy to ship them to us.

Moreover, even if they are available, shipping facilities are reserved for more important cargoes.

However, if you want a nice skull for a fraternity initiation, to "decorate" your den, or to get in the mood to write a detective story, you can still buy an A-1 skull with natural teeth for about \$35.00. If you're a young intern and can't afford the best, you can pick up a second rate skull only slightly defective for about \$15.00.

* * *

A FAST BALL

ATLEY DONALD, a member of the pitching staff of the New York Yankees, threw a baseball August 30, 1939 in the Cleveland, Ohio, Stadium at the rate of 139 feet per second, or 94.7 miles an hour. Donald's throw was the

fastest ever recorded on the speed meteor owned by the Cleveland Indians. The previous record was held by Dee Miles, of the Philadelphia Athletics, of 136 feet per second. Christy Mathewson was clocked at 134 feet per second by a ballistics measuring device in Bridgeport, Conn.

* * *

END OF THE SUN

TO quiet the fears of those pessimists who predict that the sun is burning itself up at such a rate that soon it will have burned itself up, scientists have agreed that the hydrogen content of the sun is so great that it will take at least ten billion years to burn it all up. The hydrogen burning produces the energy which enables the sun to give light, heat and energy to the earth.

* * *

GERMS THAT TRAVEL 100 M.P.H.

COMMON cold germs propelled by a sneeze, hunt new victims at a speed of more than one hundred miles per hour. The Air Hygiene Foundation reported in Pittsburgh, Pa., "An unstified sneeze sprays the air with thousands of droplets, some of which travel 12 feet and at a rate as high as 150 feet a second."

* * *

BALD MEN MORE MASCULINE

MOST people believe that a man with a lot of hair is a real "he-man." But according to Dr. James B. Hamilton of the Yale University School of Medicine, baldness in a man is a sign of real masculinity instead of extreme hairiness, at least after the earliest years are over.

Dr. Hamilton conducted his research on baldness by studying a large group of men who had been rendered sexless through accidents or necessary surgery or who had not matured sexually. Out of fifty-four permanently immature cases, not one had a bald head. Moreover, the men had less dandruff than normal males.

When male sex hormone was injected in some of these men, they began to lose their hair and develop dandruff. In two cases, the treatment was discontinued and the loss of hair stopped. Just as soon as the treatment was repeated, the loss of hair resumed.

The INCREDIBLE ANTIQUE

by BRUCE DENNIS

As far as gifts go, this antique was a perfect gesture—for a mother-in-law!

THERE'S an ancient adage to the effect that a man with a hobby is a chap you'll never find flirting with trouble. And like all such saws, it is about as accurate as the latest bit of hogwash from the Third Reich.

Any hobby, no matter how harmless it may seem apparently, is a perfect passkey to a closet full of trouble. I ought to know, for my own hobby, although just about as mild and gentle as

any collecting mania known to man, turned out to be—

Well, maybe I'd better start at the beginning . . .

It was the afternoon the two Roman battle shields had arrived and I'd hung them up in the dining-room and my wife, Gwen, had raised such a hellish stink.

"You can take those monstrosities up in the attic and pile them with the



Children screamed, women fainted. The cry of "witchcraft" rang through the air



rest of your junk, Tom Hastings!" Gwen exploded when she saw them.

"But they are ancient Roman battle shields," I said with thin patience. "They date back to the days of Julius Caesar and maybe further!"

"I don't care if they're the second-hand fig leaves of Adam and Eve," Gwen shrilled. "Get them out of my dining-room!"

As I grimly began their removal from the dining-room wall, Gwen came up behind me to watch. After a minute, in a small, tight voice, she asked: "And how much did you pay for these ancient Roman thingamahjigs?"

"They'd be cheap at twice the price," I answered evasively.

"How much were they?" Gwen asked determinedly.

"Twenty-five dollars," I muttered.

"Twenty-five dollars for those hideous blobs of metal!"

"Twenty-five dollars apiece," I corrected her gently.

"Fifty dollars!" Gwen sounded as if I'd just informed her casually that I'd been living a bigamous existence for the ten years of our marriage.

I continued to take down the shields as the silence curled into a nice tense ball of dynamite.

Then at last my spouse said in soft horror: "Do you realize what fifty dollars would buy?"

I leaned the shields against the dining-room table. "Fifty dollars would buy a hundred stingers or five hundred beers," I said, trying to put the light touch into the conversation.

But Gwen wasn't having any of it. She stared at me aghast. Then she glanced in incredulous dismay at the shields. I could see that she was on the verge of the weeps.

"Fifty dollars would buy Mother that new spring coat she's had her heart set on," Gwen said tremulously. The

tears were gathering in her lovely gray eyes and I knew that I'd be in for it if I didn't head her off somehow.

"You didn't tell me anything about your mother's wanting a new spring coat," I said swiftly.

"I—I didn't mention it because I didn't think we could afford it," Gwen said, her underlip beginning to tremble. The first tear was starting down her cheek.

"Now listen, honey," I told her. "All you had to do was mention it. Just mention it to me, and I'd have written a check for her coat then and there. You go in and tell your mother she can have the coat."

The tears stopped temporarily at least.

"Mother has gone out to the hairdresser's," Gwen said. "But I'll tell her the moment she comes home."

"That's fine," I said. "Now what about these shields? How about that spot over my desk in the study?"

THE glint came back to Gwen's eyes. She shook her head firmly.

"Take them up into the attic, Tom. They have no place around this house. And another thing; I want to talk to you about all this."

"About all what?" I asked suspiciously.

"About your collecting. It's just about time that we settle it once and for all."

"What," I demanded, "is there to settle?"

"It's sending us to the poorhouse, Tom. It will just have to stop. We have an attic cluttered up with antique knickknacks which you've collected over ten years. There's hardly any room for them, and they just lie up there gathering dust. Mother and I decided that it would be a wonderful thing if you'd get rid of them all, sell

them to another collector, and stop this nonsense."

At last it was becoming clear. Mother and Gwen. How ducky. How too, too nice. It wasn't enough that my dear sweet uncomplaining mother-in-law had maneuvered me into a new spring coat promise; she had also been at her favorite topic with Gwen again—the extravagance of my hobby. I began to do a slow burn.

"Listen. We've covered this ground before. It is all too familiar. Your mother would please me greatly by minding her own business. I like collecting antiques, even if no one around this damned house has brains enough to understand the value of them. When the day comes that your mother isn't getting enough to eat around here, or can't have two new coats on me each year, she can start worrying about my personal expenditures!"

Gwen gave me a shocked, hurt stare.

"Tom," she gasped, "why, Tom!"

I picked up the shields and started for the stairs. Behind me I could hear Gwen beginning to sob. I knew that she expected me to drop the shields and race madly back to her side to apologize profusely. But I continued toward the attic.

That was perhaps the sixth time in ten years of marriage that I'd ever sounded off to Gwen about her mother. And Gwen's mother had been with us ever since we returned from our honeymoon ten years ago. If I recall correctly, she came to help Gwen get the house in order, "just for the first few weeks." She'd stayed with us ever since.

The common conception of a mother-in-law is a big, ample-bosomed thunder-voiced, dominating woman. At least that's the way they are in movies and comic strips. But Gwen's mother is nothing of the sort. She is by far the most insidious variety of mother-in-law

imaginable. She is small, demure, sweet-faced and gray haired. She just wouldn't *think* of trying to run things. She only *suggests*, sweetly, and without apparent malice. Give me the movie and comic strip variety any day!

When I came down from the attic I could hear Gwen in our bedroom. She was still sobbing, but I was damned if I'd go in there and recant. I slammed around in the hall looking for my hat, and then I got the car out of the garage and raced the motor defiantly as I drove past beneath her bedroom window.

A long drive in the country usually served as my refuge from mother-in-law trouble, and so I headed out for open highway the minute I reached the outskirts of town. Once on the broad white concrete stretches I didn't pay much attention to where I was going. I just drove, and let the air swoosh in through the side-window vent and cool off my face and my emotions.

THEN I came to the little wayside village that had the big roadhouse with the neon sign advertising a popular brand of beer. I decided to stop for a few drinks.

The bartender in the roadhouse made excellent stingers, and after about six or seven of them I decided to head back home. I was buzzing most pleasantly when I stepped out into the sunlight and noticed for the first time that there was a ramshackle little store across the road that brought all my troubles back to mind.

The sign out in front of the little store read:

ANTIQUES FOR SALE

I put my car keys back into my pocket and crossed the road.

The windows of the little shop were cluttered with the usual array of spinning wheels and other standard antique items, but that didn't stop me. You can

never tell what's inside.

The shop was dark, almost dingy, and had that marvelous musty smell to it that affects a collector the same way smoke does a fireman. A bell jangled as I opened the door and stepped inside, and a prim, long nosed, bald headed little man came out from the back as I stood there looking around.

"How do you do?" he asked.

I told him I did pretty well, considering, and mentioned my curiosity at finding this little shop like I did. He agreed that it wasn't generally well known, but said that he had a pretty steady trade of collectors coming from the city every weekend.

We got to talking, and he showed me some things which had just been shipped to him in a load from New England. Some of them were interesting enough, others run of the mill. I was beginning to get a little bit disappointed at not finding anything that struck my fancy to the extent of making me want to buy it, when the little shopkeeper said:

"A very interesting thing came in with this last shipment. It wasn't classified, and I've found myself at a loss to figure out exactly what its origin was. Perhaps you might know. Would you like to see it?"

"Yes. Sure. By all means. Where is it?"

"Back this way," the little shopkeeper said, waving his hand toward the rear of the store.

I followed him to a particularly poorly lighted corner in the back, where he pulled something out from an assortment of dusty furniture.

It was a chair.

Specifically, it wasn't quite a chair. It was sort of a stool with arms on it. It had four spindly legs and was about as high as the ordinary straight backed

chair you have in your dining-room. It was well worn, but the wood seemed still tough and undecayed.

It was an ugly piece, but it was fascinating.

I got that love-at-first-sight feeling peculiar to antique collectors and automatically reached for my wallet. I knew I was hooked. The little shopkeeper was bending over it and commenting on design and period and a lot of other technical appraisal, but I was scarcely listening to him. I was staring at the chair, and the chair seemed to be staring at me.

"So you see," said the little shopkeeper, "I am quite at a loss to say exactly where it fits."

"Eh?" I was startled. "How's that? Oh, yes. Sure, I see what you mean. I agree with you. It's a puzzler. I don't quite think I could make any guesses at it myself. But I like it. Have you price tagged it yet?"

THE shopkeeper saw that I'd taken out my wallet. Naturally he was startled. Collectors don't run around picking up pieces about which they know admittedly nothing. He gave me a shrewd glance.

"Are you sure you can't classify it, sir?"

I shook my head. "Positive. Beyond a rough guess at New England, maybe sixteenth century, I couldn't say further."

"But surely, sir," the little man protested, "you don't want to buy a piece that has such an uncertain origin, do you? Wouldn't you care to wait until I write the shipper and find out what he knows about it?"

Again I shook my head. "I just like the damned ugly thing," I said. "I want it. Now. I'll take it along with me. What's your price?"

I hadn't been shrewd. Stupidly, I'd

aroused the shopkeeper's suspicions. Perhaps he thought I'd realized something especially significant and valuable about the ugly little chair at first sight. Maybe he figured I was trying to hoodwink him out of a valuable piece. At any rate his answer almost knocked my hat off.

"A hundred and fifty dollars, sir."

"What!"

"A hundred and fifty dollars," the shopkeeper repeated firmly.

I waved my hand in disgust. "No sale. Why should I pay such a price for an unclassified piece?"

The shopkeeper shrugged. "I am only trying to protect myself against the possibility that it might have great value."

I started toward the door. "Suit yourself. You're only talking yourself out of a sale."

He saw that I wasn't bluffing.

"What price would you think fair, sir?" he said, following quickly after me.

I stopped. "Thirty dollars," I said.

The shopkeeper looked pained. "I will let it go for a hundred," he said.

"Thirty bucks," I repeated, starting toward the door again.

The little shopkeeper took a nimble two-step after me. He plucked at my sleeve and I stopped again.

"Eighty dollars, sir. That should be fair."

"I'm wasting my time," I told him, "and my money. But I'll give you forty."

"Fifty," said the little shopkeeper.

Fifty bucks, I thought. Fifty bucks. Five hundred beers. A hundred stingers. A new spring coat for my mother-in-law. The last suggestion did it.

"Okay," I said. "Fifty bucks. Wrap it up. I'll take it along."

The shopkeeper beamed. . . .

WHEN at last I emerged from the tiny antique shop, it was with the chair in my arms—all wrapped and paid for. I had to cross the road again to get to my car. And my car was parked right beside the roadhouse. And this was a little bit of an event, this purchase of a new piece. And the roadhouse had good stingers. And—I went in.

The lights were all on in my house when I got home. A fact I thought damned peculiar, inasmuch as it was almost midnight. Gwen and her mother made a practice of hitting the downy never later than ten p.m. It never occurred to me that I'd been gone more than eight hours, missed dinner, and never even called. It never occurred to me that the lights were so gaily aglow all because of yours truly.

I had fallen halfway up the front porch steps before I remembered that I'd left the chair in the back of the car. It was easier falling down the steps than up, and pretty soon I'd tugged the antique from the back cushions and was well on my way to getting it up the steps.

The front door opened, then, and I looked up to see Gwen standing there, hands on hips. The expression on her face was just about what you'd expect under the circumstances, only worse.

"Well!" Gwen said. She ground the word out between her teeth, then spat it at me.

"What're all the lights doing on, m'love? Having a party?" I asked brightly. At that moment my feet betrayed me and got tangled in the chair. I just made the porch in my sprawling lurch, saving my new possession from what would otherwise have been a splintering crash.

"What do you have there besides an alcoholic fog?" Gwen demanded, voice rising.

"Shhhhhh!" I put the chair down, looking carefully around the streets. "The neighbors. Do you want them to hear?"

"I don't care what they hear!" Gwen grated.

"But if they knew how damned good I felt," I giggled, "they might get insanely jealous!"

I picked up the chair in my arms and started through the door. Gwen moved to one side, staring at me as if deciding on which side of my skull she was going to bury the axe.

And then I saw her mother.

Quiet, sweet-faced, sad-eyed and oh-so-glad to have the chance to be shocked, she stood in the living room staring out at me as if I were Jack the Ripper through special permission of Atilla the Hun.

"Mother-in-law!" I bellowed joyously.

Gwen's mother retreated several steps, looking for all the world as if she expected my next move to be an attempt at murder.

"I brought you a present!" I boomed happily. "The neatest little gift you ever saw. It's an antique. I know how well you love antiques."

Gwen had followed me into the living room, where I'd put down the chair and was starting to remove the wrappings.

"You drunken bum!" she said.

I paused to smile sweetly at her. "But of course." I went back to unwrapping the chair.

No one said a word. I could hear Gwen's incredulous gasp and her mother's shocked but happy squeal of horror. Then I tore the last wrappings from my *object d'art*. I stepped back from it with a rapturous sigh of admiration and waved my hand in a sweeping gesture.

"Regard," I told them. "My chair!"

THERE wasn't a word. You could have skated on the silence.

I looked first at Gwen. Her jaw was grim. Her eyes flashed sparks like a welder's torch.

"This is the end!" she said grimly. "This is absolutely the last repulsive bit of furniture you are ever going to drag into this house."

I looked at her mother. Her face was wreathed in Good and Kindliness and firm Disapproval. She wouldn't have missed this scene for all the world. It was her moment. Tomorrow she could tell Gwen sweetly that she had told her so all along.

"Well?" I demanded. "Well, what do you think?"

Gwen's mother shook her head sadly.

"I am afraid you have been drinking heavily, Thomas. I have never been so shocked in all my life. But tomorrow, when you are, ah, feeling better, I will accept your apology for this conduct. Although," she added, "you cannot expect me to plead with Gwen for you this time."

That was almost too much. Plead with Gwen. The old hypocrite was insinuating that she'd saved me from many a marital smashup by her kindly intercession. I just gaped at her with my mouth open.

Gwen spoke up.

"Mother," she said grimly, "would you leave me here with Tom? I don't want you to have to stand this disgraceful scene."

My dear sweet mother-in-law was obviously reluctant to go. She looked from Gwen to me to the chair.

"Don't you need my help, Gwen, dear?" she asked.

"Yes," I piped up. "Be sure to stick around. I might beat your daughter at any moment."

Gwen's mother gave me a sad, disap-

pointed look. She shook her head, sighing.

"Obviously Thomas doesn't know what he's saying," she told Gwen. "But I will be in my room if you need me, dear." She turned and made a lavender-and-old-lace exit.

Gwen turned on me, then, with both barrels.

You've heard the routine. Working fingers to the bone. Slaving and toiling to make ends meet. Best years of life. What she ever saw in me. Drunken cad. Impossible bounder. This is the end. Leaving tomorrow. It took five minutes, and she was breathless when she finished.

"I'll help you pack," I volunteered sweetly.

Gwen glared at me in astonishment and indignation. Then she stamped out of the room.

I turned back to the chair, patting it kindly on the back.

"Only friend left in the world," I mumbled. I pulled it around and sat down—on the floor.

I remember feeling extremely glad that both Gwen and her mother were no longer in the room. Had they witnessed that chair-missing sequence, they'd have been even more firmly convinced that I was tighter than Goering's girdle.

I scrambled quickly to my feet, looking sheepishly around to make certain I hadn't been seen.

Then I sat down again—on the floor.

I got up more slowly this time. Steady there, I told myself. You aren't that drunk. You couldn't be that drunk. You've just got a little glow on. That's all. Just a little glow. Take your time on this one.

I put one hand on the back of the chair, then eased myself around slowly to a sitting position, suspended several inches above the chair seat. Then

I released my grip on the back and sat down—on the floor!

This time I knew why. *The chair had moved!*

I SAT there on the floor, gaping at it incredulously as I realized what had happened. The chair had moved. The chair had moved each time I'd tried to sit down in it. Moved just enough to plank me on the floor!

Of course, if it hadn't been for that little glow I was feeling, all my common sense would have come to the fore to assure me that the chair couldn't have moved of its own accord. If I'd been completely cold sober, it would have taken me much longer to digest the incredible truth of the matter.

But now, sitting there on the floor and staring up wide-eyed at the chair, I had absolutely no doubt as to what had actually happened. The impossibility of the thing never occurred to me.

I got up slowly now. Cautiously. I stepped back warily keeping my eye on it.

Once, twice, I circled it. Airily, nonchalantly, as if I didn't have the slightest idea in the world of trying to sit down on it. It made me think of that march-around-the-chair game, going to Jerusalem, we used to play when we were kids.

Then I stepped in quickly, grabbed the back of the chair tightly with both hands, swung it around, and planked myself down hard—*just as it literally wrenched itself from my grasp and shot away sideways!*

I landed on the floor.

For a moment I was too stunned to comprehend what had happened. Missing a chair which skeeters as you're trying to sit on it is one thing. *Feeling* it yank itself free of your grasp is quite another.

I must have been making quite a little noise, for now I heard voices, Gwen's and her mother's, coming from upstairs. I put my head in my hands, took a deep breath, and got a grip on my sanity. Then I looked up at the chair again.

There it was, planked at least four feet away from the spot where I'd held it when trying to sit down.

Maybe it was just my imagination, but I'd swear the damned thing was leering at me!

Very slowly, I got up off the floor. I went over to the divan, found a cigarette on the coffee table and lighted it, then sat down. It felt marvelous to be able to sit down on something that didn't mind.

The voices upstairs had died down, and I heard a door slam hard. I knew that Gwen, by way of going home to mother, was spending the night in her mother's room.

But I wasn't concerned with any of that now. The chair was by far the greatest object of my concern. I got up again and walked casually over to it, half expecting it to shy away at my approach.

It didn't however, and I was able to place my hand gently on its back. Slowly, ever so tenderly, I turned it around so that it faced me. I took my hand from it, then, and turned away—as if to start back to the divan—then wheeled madly and planked my nether extremities frantically on the seat of the chair. Or where the seat of the chair should have been.

Once more I found myself sitting on the floor. I didn't have to look to know that the chair had skipped aside again. I was finally convinced. The chair would not tolerate being sat on.

Enough was enough. I was beginning to ache all over and one place in particular. If the chair didn't want me

sitting in it, it didn't want me sitting in it. That was that.

But in spite of my somewhat alcoholic glow, I was very well aware that it was the damndest impossible situation I had ever encountered. I got up and went over to the divan and sat down again, gratefully. A sort of moody chill was stealing over me.

I SAT there for perhaps half an hour, smoking cigarettes and staring at the chair and wondering what in the hell this was all about and where it was going to end.

My glow was fading fast, now, and I knew that it was the single factor which had kept me from becoming actually afraid of my newly bought antique. There was a very simple solution to this, however, so I called a nearby liquor store and ordered a fifth of my favorite.

The delivery boy arrived with the stuff inside of ten minutes, and I was recapturing my glow inside of another fifteen. Another half hour passed and I was developing a belligerent attitude toward the chair. I was finding that I could look it squarely in the eye—so to speak—without a tremor or chill.

"What makes you think you're better than any other chair?" I would demand loudly at five minute intervals.

"A chair is to sit in. Hasn't anyone ever told you?" I growled between drinks. "If you expect to stay around here you're going to have to learn your playsh."

"Shilly damn attitoosh," I decided still fifteen minutes later. "'Fraid of a li'l damn chair!"

I remember vaguely that that was about the time that I became physically belligerent. I must have tried to hurl myself into the chair on at least a dozen occasions after that. The thumping and cries and shouting as each succeeding

effort failed must have been terrific. I know that the bruises on my body the following morning certainly were.

The rest of the events are too hazy to try to recall precisely. Maudlin emotion took command of me a little later, I know, and I wept bitterly before the chair, demanding to know what it had against me, insisting that I was a good fellow, and trying to buy it a drink. There must have been more efforts on my part to sit in it, and additional loud crashes as I failed.

And then, of course, everything blotted into an indistinguishable pattern . . . until the following morning. . . .

GWEN'S voice was saying something, and I opened my eyes to see that she was standing over me, and that I was in my own room and in bed. The expression on her face was alarmingly peculiar. She was smiling sweetly, tenderly!

"How do you feel, dear?" Gwen asked.

I looked at her with bloodshot eyes. My head was splitting. And the twin demons of hangovers, Nausea and Remorse, were in complete command of my body and brain.

"Rotten," I groaned.

"Silly boy," Gwen said. "You just had a little too much to drink."

I tried to sit up, but I couldn't raise my head. Gwen handed me a glass of something, and I took it feebly.

"Drink it down, dear," she said.

"What is it?" I groaned.

"Milk and gingerale. It always picks you up."

With shaking hand, I managed to raise the glass to my lips without spilling too much of it over the covers, and gulped it down. I handed her the glass and stretched back on the pillow again.

"What's up?" I moaned. "Why are you being so sweet to me?"

Gwen's smile was honey. "Mother and I talked everything over and we agreed that one of us must have done something to hurt you terribly to make you act the way you did last night." She paused. "We agreed to let bygones be bygones and start with a clean slate for all of us."

It was beyond my powers of concentration. I was too sick, too weak, to figure it out.

"Do you want me to take your little friend out of bed and downstairs?" Gwen asked with a sweet, understanding smile.

My heart did a terrible flip-flop.

"What?" I choked hoarsely, turning my aching skull far enough to look beside me. And then I saw it, tucked neatly under the covers, its top resting on the pillow next to mine. The chair!

"You must have grown enormously fond of your chair last night," Gwen laughed kindly.

I closed my eyes and shuddered. The memory of my unsuccessful battle to seat myself in the chair returned.

"I'll get up in a little while," I muttered. "I'll be all right. Leave the chair here."

"Are you sure there isn't anything I can do for you, dear?" Gwen asked.

I shook my head, and it almost fell off.

"No. I'll be all right."

"Will you want breakfast?" Gwen asked.

I was smart enough not to try to shake my head. "No," I muttered, chilled by the thought. "No. I'll get along without breakfast."

It was then that my mother-in-law poked her head into my room.

"Well, well," she simpered sweetly. "Are you feeling bad, Thomas?"

I turned red eyes on her, but didn't

answer. Gwen moved to the door.

"Whenever you feel like it, dear, get up," she said. "If you want anything, just call."

I groaned an affirmative answer, and she left. I could hear her voice and that of her mother's murmuring conversationally as they went downstairs. Then I turned my head for another look at the chair.

IN the cold light of morning it seemed peaceable enough. Aside from the fact that it looked rather ludicrous tucked neatly under the sheets, there seemed nothing about it which would indicate its peculiar aversion to being sat upon. In fact, it looked like nothing more than an antique chair.

I began to wonder just how drunk I'd really been. I knew that I could recall most of the night's events with fair clarity, but such recollection wasn't any guarantee that I hadn't been boiled enough to have imagined that the chair wouldn't let me sit in it. I could think of at least three or four occasions when I'd been certain that I was fairly sober, only to find out later that my own estimate of my lucid poise was greatly at variance with that of the people who'd been with me.

Somehow I managed to get up. I stood there clutching the bedpost while the inside of my head pounded like kettle drums and the room seemed to sway madly back and forth. And then a small degree of steadiness returned. The pick-me-up which Gwen had been thoughtful enough to provide was taking hold.

In the bathroom I gargled noisily, eliminating the wads of cotton which had grown beneath my tongue. Then a cold, brisk shower, a vigorous scalp massage which threatened to tear off the top of my head, and a none too steady shave, all did their bit toward

returning me to a somewhat remorseful degree of normalcy.

I was able, then, to walk back into the bedroom and remove the chair from the bed. Something prevented my trying to seat myself in it immediately. Perhaps it was merely the thought of the floor jarring I might get and what it would do to my hangover.

I stood there for a little while, staring at the chair and doing a lot of foggy rationalizing. By now I was pretty damned well convinced that whatever had happened concerning the chair the night before was nothing but the result of my terrific binge. My hangover was all the final conviction I needed on this score.

"God," I muttered, "and I thought it moved!"

I shook my aching head slowly, despairingly, pondering on the weird effects of alcohol on the human mind. The impulse to sit in the chair was quickly stifled by a counter impulse which told me not to make myself ridiculous by dignifying my mad imaginings of the night before.

"Of course it didn't move," I muttered, absolutely convinced that it didn't by now. "And if I plank myself down in it I'd only be capping last night's damn foolishness with the supreme proof of my mental incompetence. I hope I haven't reached the stage where I have to prove to myself that the impossible never happened."

And having so neatly tied up all the loose ends of some very loose reasoning, I began to get dressed.

Once dressed, I left the chair in the bedroom and went downstairs. Gwen was happily at work in the kitchen, and had left another glass of milk and gingerale on the dining-room table next to the morning paper. Her mother was evidently in her room, for I didn't see her around.

I downed the second pick-me-up, disregarded the newspaper, and went into the kitchen. There were more things puzzling me around that house than the chair. Gwen smiled brightly at me as I came into the kitchen.

"FEELING better, dear?"

"A little," I said. Then I got immediately to the point. "Look, Gwen. There's something I want to know."

"Yes, dear?"

"What's up?" I demanded.

Gwen frowned prettily in bewilderment. "What do you mean, dear?"

"I mean what's up. I got drunk last night. I said a number of things at the time which—incidentally—I still don't regret. You were furious. Your mother was sweetly boiling. I wake up this morning after a furious bender and find you and your mother dripping with kindly solicitude toward me. What's the idea?"

Gwen smiled and came over to me. She put her arm around my waist and her head against my chest.

"I told you, Tom," she said. "We're starting everything with a clean slate. Mother and I both agreed that we should not try to boss you the way we might have done occasionally in the past."

I still didn't get it.

"But you were all set to walk out on me," I protested.

Gwen nodded. "Hasty words, spoken in anger, Tom. I'm sorry. My mother made me realize what a terrible thing that would be."

And then, all of a sudden, it was quite clear. Her mother. Why, it should have been immediately apparent. If Gwen had walked out that would have meant that her mother would be packing, too. And the old girl was far too smart to kick over a nice soft berth in my house just be-

cause her daughter had a mad on. Ahhhhh — very clever. Exceedingly clever!

All of a sudden it occurred to me what a sap I'd been these ten years. Here I'd been letting two women dominate my entire existence, my wife and her mother, for all of a decade just because I hadn't been smart enough to put my foot down sooner. I'd called the old girl's bluff, and she knew it. And from now on in, things would be decidedly different.

"Mother will leave if you don't go right upstairs and apologize," had been one of Gwen's stock phrases on at least a hundred occasions in our ten years of marriage. And on each occasion, I had gone upstairs to mumble apologies to the old witch.

"Mother is packing. She won't stay another instant, unless you say you're sorry." That had been another of Gwen's favorites. And I had always rushed up to stop the old girl from packing and to tell her I was sorry.

But the ironic truth of the matter was actually that Gwen's mother couldn't have been pried loose from my house with a steam-driven block and tackle!

Suddenly I grinned. Even my hangover seemed to fade into a role of minor importance.

"That's fine, honey," I said. "That's swell. I think I'll go upstairs and bring down a few of my things from the attic. Incidentally, I think the new antique chair would look swell in the living room corner by the fireplace."

Gwen nodded, and I could see it wasn't easy for her to do.

"Certainly, Tom, but don't try to fit them all into the living room. We just haven't space for everything."

"Just a few odds and ends," I assured her. Gwen looked at me dubiously, but forced a smile of agreement. I walked out of the kitchen on clouds.

The enemy was routed and fleeing in all directions. It took ten years before I accidentally stumbled on the formula for victory. But now the battle was mine, and my triumph knew no bounds. Everything was wonderful—I thought. . . .

BY mid-afternoon the house looked just the way I had always wanted it to. At least ten of my favorite antiques had been added to both the dining-room and living-room scene. My recently acquired Roman shields hung proudly over the buffet, and my newly purchased chair stood in the corner of the living-room by the fireplace.

Gwen had watched my busy rearranging with a tight smile and no comments. And even her mother, who popped out of her room now and then to see what was going on, made sweetly hypocritical comments on how nice everything was looking.

I was oh-so-busy, and oh-so-triumphant. Which was the reason for my not being aware of what was going on in the kitchen until about four o'clock.

Gwen and her mother had been out there for perhaps an hour, fussing around with the dinner, when I happened to wander out in search of a hammer. I walked in to find the kitchen groaning with festive dinner delicacies, and almost all our best dinnerware spread around in preparation for the table.

"Well, well," I observed smugly, "some feast for tonight, eh?"

Gwen nodded, exchanging a conspiratorial glance with her mother.

"Oh, yes, Tom. It will be quite an occasion. Mother hasn't seen Alice in all of ten years."

I was munching an olive, and almost swallowed the pit.

"Alice?" I bleated. "Who's Alice?"

Gwen's mother gave me a sweet

smile. "An old school-girl chum of mine, Thomas. We were such great friends for the longest time, and I just got the letter from her yesterday."

"Letter?" I wasn't getting any of this.

Gwen nodded. "Mother's friend is passing through town. We invited her out here."

"Oh," I said, "for dinner, eh?"

Gwen smiled sweetly. "You didn't have anything planned for tonight, did you, Tom?"

Her mother broke in with her act of sweet resignation.

"If you don't want her here, Thomas, I can tell her—"

I cut her off with a triumphant wave of the hand. Hell, I could afford to be magnanimous.

"Not at all," I said. "Glad to have her. When's she arriving? On what train?"

"The five o'clock," Gwen's mother said. "I told her how to reach us by the trolley bus." Her smile was sad. "Even though it will be hard for her to have that walk from the bus, I didn't dare think of asking you to pick her up, Thomas."

This was an old routine. Gwen was looking at me expectantly, and I could have bitten off my tongue for the automatic answer that popped unbidden to my lips.

"Why, how ridiculous," I found myself saying. "Of course I'll pick her up."

Gwen beamed, and her mother joined. Then they both said, as if in once voice, "It's after four now. Don't you think you'd better get ready?"

I nodded, feeling somehow uneasy. This all seemed far too much like the old, old pattern. But then I shrugged away my suspicions. After all, I was still cock of the roost. And it didn't hurt to do an occasional favor. . . .

THIS Alice friend of my mother-in-law's proved to be a spinster of enormous proportions whose full name was Miss Alice Longwood. She was as short as she was fat, which meant plenty of both. It took two porters to cram her through the passageway and off the train. And it wasn't until all her baggage, two trunks and four grips, had been dumped off after her that I saw the lap dog she had in tow.

It was one of those tiny, fluffy, evil-tempered dogs with a snub nose and a definite superiority complex.

After I had introduced myself, this Alice shrilled:

"So you're Gwen's husband?"

There was something about the way she said that which made it sound unflattering.

I admitted that I was Gwen's husband, and suggested that she could check the bulk of her luggage at the station. She gave me a funny look, and said but of course not. She had to have her luggage with her.

We piled the trunks in the back seat, and the grips in the rear compartment. This Alice creature sat up in front with me, holding the dog in her lap. His name turned out to be—so help me God—"Bity"!

"Bity and I are so glad to have this pleasant interlude on our trip," spinster Alice told me. "Bity and I are just exhausted. I am positively ravenous, and I know Bity is, too. Funny the way I recognized you right off. Of course Gwen's mother told me what you looked like, so's I'd recognize you when you met me at the station."

My jaw went a trifle grim at this last, and I asked politely: "How long did Gwen's mother expect this pleasure?"

"Oh, weeks," shrilled Alice. "Simply weeks." Her graying hair had been slightly, though not successfully, bleached. She wore it frizzed up

around the back of her red, plump neck.

I remembered the line that had been given me. Directions as to how to get to the house by bus. Letter just came yesterday. I had been taken in as neatly as I'd ever been.

It wasn't necessary to say much on the way to the house. Alice did all the talking. She reminisced shrilly about the fun she and Gwen's mother had had as younger belles, discussed the horrors of her train ride, related in detail the victory she won over the railroad porter when he'd tried to put Bity in the baggage car.

"Can you imagine that?" she demanded. "Wanting Bity to travel as if he were an animal or something?"

I said I couldn't imagine that, and a few minutes later we pulled up in front of the house.

Gwen and her mother met us, or I should say Alice, at the door. I was busy breaking my back with her baggage; and by the time I got into the house they were all in the living-room.

"Where'll I put the bags?" I asked.

Gwen's mother smiled sweetly at me. "Why, in the guest room, Thomas, dear."

I didn't catch on, even then. I carried the works, trunks and bags, upstairs to the guest room.

When dinner was served I had the chance to see the world's greatest appetite at work. Alice's ability to carry on an endless stream of chatter while stuffing her mouth with everything she could get her plump red hands on was strictly phenomenal.

And Bity sat at the table.

I mean it. The damned little monster sat atop telephone books on an extra tall chair, lapping his food from a plate placed conveniently near the edge of the table for him!

Once when I went out into the kitchen to refill the water pitcher, Gwen

followed me. Her eyes were smiling in pure girlish delight, and she hugged me warmly.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she whispered.

"Wonderful? What?"

"Mother," Gwen whispered. "Don't you see how having her old friend here has made her brighten up a hundred percent? She's been so lonesome, Tom!"

I gagged a little on this. The only change I'd noticed in my dear mother-in-law had been an interest in someone's business besides Gwen's and mine.

"Oh, Tom," Gwen said, not noticing my lack of reply. "I am so happy when mother is happy!" She sighed. "It's been ages since she's seen any of her old friends."

I started toward the dining-room, and Gwen followed.

BITY had finished his dinner, and with a savage little yelp, leaped from his seat to the floor and trotted for the living-room.

"Isn't Bity cute?" Alice demanded. "He's all through, and now he's going into the living-room for a nap by the fire." And then she went on to repeat her victory over the porter who wanted Bity to ride in the baggage car like a bum.

But some sixth sense made me uneasy. I excused myself, saying I wanted to get a smoke, and went into the living-room.

Dear little Bity wasn't taking a nap for himself. He was doing something far removed from that. He was proving that he hadn't been housebroken any too well. And proving it against the leg of my newly purchased antique chair!

I stood there aghast, my jaw slack, unable to move for fully a minute. And during this time, little Bity went right

on with his mission, all the while staring insolently at me as he performed his sacrilegious gesture!

I let out a shrill bleat of anger. But Bity had finished, and after a deft scratch of his hind paws, had leaped atop the chair itself, and sat there triumphantly leering at me.

For some reason I turned back to the dining-room, possibly thinking to summon Alice to remove her indecent little pet from the house that instant.

And then I heard Bity's weird howl.

Alice heard it, too, and so did Gwen and her mother. They all looked bewilderedly at me. The expression on my face didn't clear things up for them.

"Bity!" Alice shrieked. "Where is he? What's going on? What's wrong with him?" And then she was up from the table with incredible speed and dashing past me into the living-room. I wheeled and followed her, almost colliding with her wide back-quarters as she skidded to an abrupt stop.

Bity wasn't in the chair any longer.

"Bity!" Alice shrieked, "where are you, darling?"

There was no answering yelp, and that first solitary, weird howl seemed to linger still in the air.

I looked quickly around the room. There was no sign of the small flea muff. And then something was suddenly tugging at the sleeve of my mind. Bity had jumped up into the chair; jumped up into the chair on which I had found it impossible to sit the night before!

Alice was down on all fours, presenting an extremely large target which would have made excellent kicking practice. Down on all fours, yelling wildly for Bity and seeking him under every conceivable nook and cranny.

But Bity wasn't anywhere in the room. Any fool could see that. Any fool but Alice. And there was abso-

lutely no way he could have made an exit other than right past me. I knew he hadn't done that.

Gwen and her mother were in the living-room now, wondering vocally what was wrong, what had happened. Hysterically, Alice told them, and for a little while they joined in her search.

I lighted a cigarette, watching the frenzied search with a sort of pleased detachment. I had the firm conviction that Bity wouldn't be found, that he had never left the chair after he'd leaped onto it, but had merely—through the strange power of the chair itself—*been whipped off into some never-never land!*

DON'T ask me how I knew this. I didn't *know* it. I just *felt* it. I'd never had such a certainty about anything else in my life before. I decided to prove it to myself. I broke in on the search.

"Now, now," I announced, "he isn't in the room. He didn't run past me. He might have crawled outside through the window. It's partly open, y'know."

The living-room window actually was partly open. But I knew Bity hadn't made his departure through there. It had been in my line of vision all along, and I'd have seen him.

"He might get hit by a truck!" Alice wailed.

I walked over to the fireplace and, ignoring the desecration Bity had performed on its leg, pulled the chair over to Alice.

"Sit down and relax a moment," I suggested. "Nothing has happened to Bity. He's just outside irrigating the landscape. I'll run out and look for him."

Red faced, wild eyed, Alice obeyed my suggestion as if hypnotized. Or at least she tried to.

I had stepped back and was standing

a good three feet away from the chair when Alice made her effort to sit down.

She landed on the floor.

It hadn't occurred to Gwen, her mother, or the massive Alice to watch the chair. But I had done so. And now I was positive as to what had happened. So fast as to be scarcely noticeable, the chair had skeetered just out of range of her bulky posterior.

I was certain now that I hadn't been so drunk the night before as to have been unable to sit on that chair. I wouldn't have been able to do so, drunk or sober. The chair wouldn't stand to have anyone sitting on it.

Following the deafening thump of Alice's near-miss, there was, of course, her shrill cry of pain and the startled cries from Gwen and her mother.

I stepped in quickly and helped haul our massive visitor to her feet and then to the couch. She was still whimpering wildly about Bity and insisting that he be found instantly.

"Stay right here, everybody," I said. "I'll run out and find him right now."

I needed to get outside, even though I knew Bity wouldn't be found. I had plenty of thinking to do—plenty. There was no doubt in my mind, now, that the chair was exactly what I had found it to be in my solo drinking bout the night before. My willingness to dismiss the facts as preposterously fantastic on waking with a hangover this morning had been nothing more than a subconscious fear of the incredible truth. My mental refusal to try again to sit on it was also a subconscious expression of fear.

I had heard that the human mind was a strange thing, and now I was quite willing to believe it. For throughout this entire day I had been deliberately closing my mind to the truth of what had happened the night before. I had been telling myself that I'd been

so wildly drunk that the events concerning the chair had occurred in my imagination rather than reality. I had forced myself to believe those words, and now I was faced with the problem of eating them.

But this fantastic truth was not so difficult to accept. Subconsciously I had believed it all day, ever since my first experience with the chair the night before. Only in my conscious mind, a mind ridden with the barriers and taboos of the conventional, had I doubted the chair's witchery.

I TOOK my time, smoking and strolling along the street and trying to figure out what it all amounted to.

"All right," I told myself. "The chair moves. It won't let anyone sit on it. It's alive, or possessed, or something."

I turned a corner and lighted another cigarette.

"But Bity sat on it," I told myself. "Bity sat on it without a bit of trouble, and now the fleabag's gone."

This was a little tougher knot to gnaw. But I loosened it in surprisingly short time. The answer came in the middle of my next cigarette.

"Bity acted in a most ungentlemanly manner toward the chair!" I exclaimed. "So the chair let Bity sit on it in order to get even!" I became a little excited as I followed through my premise. "The chair wouldn't let anyone sit on it, more than likely, if it didn't have anything against that person."

There was, of course, the final disturbing enigma to face. Where was Bity? Where did the chair take the mutt? What other world or hidden dimension was the chair the door to?

I had myself there. I'm not a psychic guy. I've never even been able to figure out the theory, let alone the practice, of occult mumbo-jumbo. But I tingled

with excitement, nonetheless, at finding out. And my mental debate from then until the time I returned to the house some ten minutes later, was chiefly concerned with how I was going to find out.

A scene of mad hysteria in which Alice was the center greeted me when I returned to the house. I learned that she had telephoned the police stations, the hospitals and the morgue in her frantic search for Bity. Of course none of them had any trace of the mutt.

Alice was weeping with loud enthusiasm and explaining just how and why she would never be the same again without her Bity. I listened to all this for perhaps ten minutes, during which time I couldn't get a word in edgewise. Then it occurred to her to ask me had I seen the mutt.

"Brace yourself," I told her. "The last anyone saw of Bity, he had leaped into a boxcar at the railroad junction, just before the train pulling the boxcar started up and on its way to New York. Bity is heading eastward without benefit of guide or first class accommodations."

It was a neat little lie, and came to me in a flash. Alice's reactions to this bit of news were just what I had expected them to be.

"My hat, my coat, my grips, my trunks!" she shrieked.

I started up the stairs.

"But Alice!" The piteous cry came from Gwen's mother. "Alice—you promised to stay six months with us!"

The heat of the moment had forced my dear mother-in-law into an unwitting betrayal of her little plans! She caught my eye, and I looked straight into hers, giving her a cold leer.

"So!" I said.

But Alice blubbered on. "I can never stay anywhere until I have my Bity back. I will search the ends of the

earth for him if need be!"

I turned my cold leer to Gwen. I made it say, "So you were in on this, too? That's why you were so sweet, eh? Six months visitor, eh?"

Gwen crimsoned and turned her eyes from mine. I went upstairs and got the trunks and hand luggage of Bity's distraught mistress and brought them down again as fast as I could. Then I called a taxi.

"There's a New York train leaving in half an hour," I told Alice. "It will beat the slow freight Bity's riding by at least four or five hours. That will give you time to locate him when his train pulls into New York."

Alice gave me a wildly grateful look.

"I'll never forget you," she shrilled.

I bowed from the waist. "Nor I you," I said.

THE taxi came fifteen minutes later, and I bundled Alice and baggage into it. Gwen watched wordlessly from the window as Alice departed, and my dear mother-in-law wept copiously.

I came back into the house.

"Tom!" Gwen said. Her ears were burning, her cheeks flushed with embarrassment. "Mother didn't even tell me she'd invited Alice for six months."

"No?" I said coldly.

"She only told me Alice would be here a month," Gwen said pleadingly.

I crossed the living room. "That's thirty days," I said grimly. I picked up the chair gently and turned to leave the room, holding it in my hands.

"Tom!" Gwen's voice was pleading for forgiveness. She looked bewilderedly at the chair. "What are you going to do?"

I was at the living-room door. "I don't know yet," I told her.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"And why are you taking the chair?"

"Upstairs. To the attic." I started

up the staircase, then paused, remembering that I needed some rope. I left the chair on the first landing and trotted down to the hall closet, where I found a thick length of stout manila. Then I started back of the stairs. Gwen was watching me wide-eyed.

"Tom," she gasped, "what on earth are you going to do?"

"Nothing," I said, "that concerns earth!"

ONCE in the attic I locked the door behind me. I stared around at the friendly array of my antique collection piled high in every corner. There was a single bulb in the center of the attic, and I snapped that on. Then I found my hammer and nails.

I worked quickly and thoroughly. Two nails through the foot of each of the chair's legs, driven straight through into the floor. Then I got to work on my length of rope, looping it loosely under the chair and fixing it into a sort of self operating noose.

Undoubtedly it didn't occur to the chair what my intentions were until I stepped quickly around to the front of it, slipped down into its seat, and pulled the noose to bind my thighs fast to it. And then hell broke loose!

The chair was trying to rock, to tear itself free of those nails I'd driven into its feet to hold it to the floor. I was hanging on for dear life, my heart pounding in wild excitement as the sound of an eerie whistling began to grow from a faint whine into an angry shrill. Everything was growing black. I felt as if I were in the center of some vast ebon whirlpool.

And still the chair was trying to free itself from the floor, wrenching and straining so that it could hurl me from it before I learned what I would.

Sight, sound, sense of time and space, everything began to pattern into a

whirling blot of black confusion. The whistling noise began to dim, and the blackness grew gray and grayer yet until light was almost at hand.

I suddenly felt myself rising in a great arc through the air. I knew I still sat on the chair, and I suddenly realized that my eyes were closed. I opened them to find myself blinking hard in the glare of bright sunlight!

That rising sensation was still in my stomach, and I realized that my arms were tied to the chair and that only my head was free. The shrill, catcalling, derisive voices broke into my consciousness then. A moment later I saw the faces grouped around the pond of water down below me.

They were as mad an assortment of faces as I have ever seen. The faces of men and women and children who wore the costumes of early New England pilgrims! Hard faces, intolerant and fanatical. Brightly gleaming eyes and tightly bared teeth. And then the sense of what they all were shouting came to me.

"Sorcerer! Sorcerer! Devil's advocate!"

My sensation of height suddenly vanished before one of swift, nauseating dropping. The air rushed past my face, and the shrill cries of those around the pond grew louder. The water was rushing up at me, and suddenly I hit it; hit it hard, splashingly, and kept going down.

Even as I started to burble underneath the surface of the pond I knew what this was all about. Ducking stool! The treatment for sorcerers and witches and people with fresh ideas. This was New England, hundreds of years in the past!

I had no time for quiet contemplation of my weird predicament, for I was far too busy keeping my lungs from bursting underneath the surface of that

pond. Seconds passed, and I felt sure I would never be brought up again, when suddenly my ducking chair began to rise.

Again I was free of the water and rising upward, drenched, scared half out of my wits, the screams of the witch-hunting spectators strong in my ears. I had a half glimpse, as my feet shot up an instant, of the quaint buckled shoes I wore.

I remember thinking desperately, "What a hell of a way to die!"

Then I was reaching the peak of my upward swing, and I knew that in another instant I'd be plummeting down into that pond again.

"Devil's advocate!"

"Sorcerer!"

"Tom!"

"Sorcerer!" The sun became a little less bright.

"Devil doctor!" But the voices were still shrill in my ears.

"Spell caster!" The whirlpool of blackness seemed to return.

"Tom!" This voice was growing louder than the others.

"Devil dealer!" Faintly, very faintly, almost inaudible.

"Tom, Tom, darling!" I was back in the torrent of blackness, and the universe spun madly around inside my skull.

"Tom!"

I OPENED my eyes. Opened my eyes to see Gwen, face white in horror and tears streaming down her cheeks. I was on my back and she was bending over me. The chair lay on its side a few feet away. It had torn itself free from the floor. I was back in the attic.

"Tom—are you all right? Speak to me darling!"

I put a hand tentatively to my shirt. It was dry. I raised my head enough

to stare at the tips of my shoes. They were my own, no buckles on them. I looked up at Gwen and sighed.

"Darling, darling," she murmured, holding my head in her lap. "Why didn't you say something if we'd made you that miserable? Why did you ever try to hang yourself?"

"Huh?"

"Oh darling, for almost five minutes I didn't realize. The chair, the rope, your hammering. And then it made sense. I rushed up here with the cellar axe and broke the door down. Your rope must have snapped at that moment, for I heard the chair crash and your body hit the floor. I broke the door down an instant later."

I looked over at the door. Gwen hadn't used the axe sparingly. It was in wooden tatters. I looked back at Gwen, debating about telling her the truth. I decided to let her go on believing what she did. It was probably the best way. . . .

You would be astounded at the peace and serenity that reigned over my

domicile after that. Gwen was a wife such as you read of only in books. Even my dear sweet mother-in-law knew and kept her place. And for at least eight months I was convinced that this would be the new order in the Hastings household henceforward. For at least eight months.

But you can't keep a mother-in-law down. Not my mother-in-law, at any rate. As I said, the first eight months after that were fine. But these last six have become increasingly troublesome. Gwen's mother is returning to the meddlesome state of mind she was born with. And the situation grows steadily worse.

For you see, I still have the chair. It's in the attic, under lock and key. And I have a hunch it wouldn't like Gwen's mother any more than it liked Bity. I have a hunch it would let her sit down, if I arranged it that way. The temptation grows stronger. I wonder how she'd take to old Salem—and a witch's ducking chair!

THE END

A LONG TERM DEBT

YOU have all heard of loans that are repaid in 99 years because they run into millions of dollars, but would you believe that a judgment for only \$69.30 will take 572 years before it is marked "paid in full."

The judgment is against John J. O'Connell of Buffalo, New York, who is 66 years old. His lawyer recommended to Judge F. Bret Thorne that

his client be ordered to pay something each Leap year on the judgment.

Judge Thorne decreed that Mr. O'Connell pay fifty cents on the 29th day of February until the judgment is satisfied. Accordingly, the last payment will not be due until the year 2512 and this allows for the fact that the 100th year in each century is not a Leap Year.

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LEFTY FEEP and the SLEEPY-TIME GAL

by ROBERT BLOCH

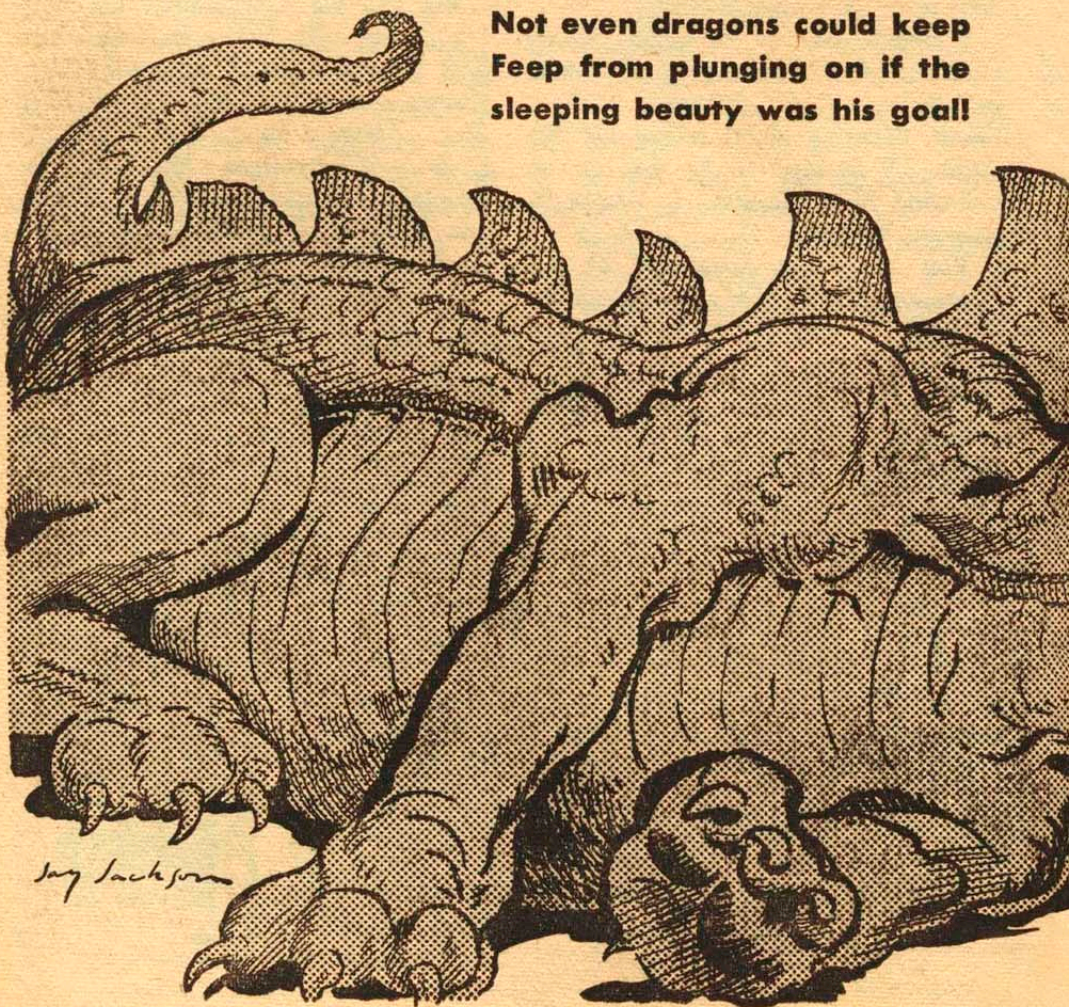
IT was almost two o'clock in the morning when I stumbled into Jack's Shack and wearily gave my order to the waiter. I had spent a very tough day and a gruelling evening of work. Now I was so groggy I could almost see spots before my eyes.

As a matter of fact, I did see spots before my eyes. Very loud purple spots, on a very loud yellow suit.

Lefty Feep sat down opposite me.

I opened my mouth to yawn, and then let it hang that way in astonishment. The tall, gloomy-looking man-

Not even dragons could keep Feep from plunging on if the sleeping beauty was his goal!



about-downtown was dressed in this shrieking suit, topped off with a bright orange shirt and a blue necktie. This outfit certainly didn't harmonize with anything but *delirium tremens*.

"Why, Lefty!" I greeted him. "What are you doing all dressed up, and at this time of night?"

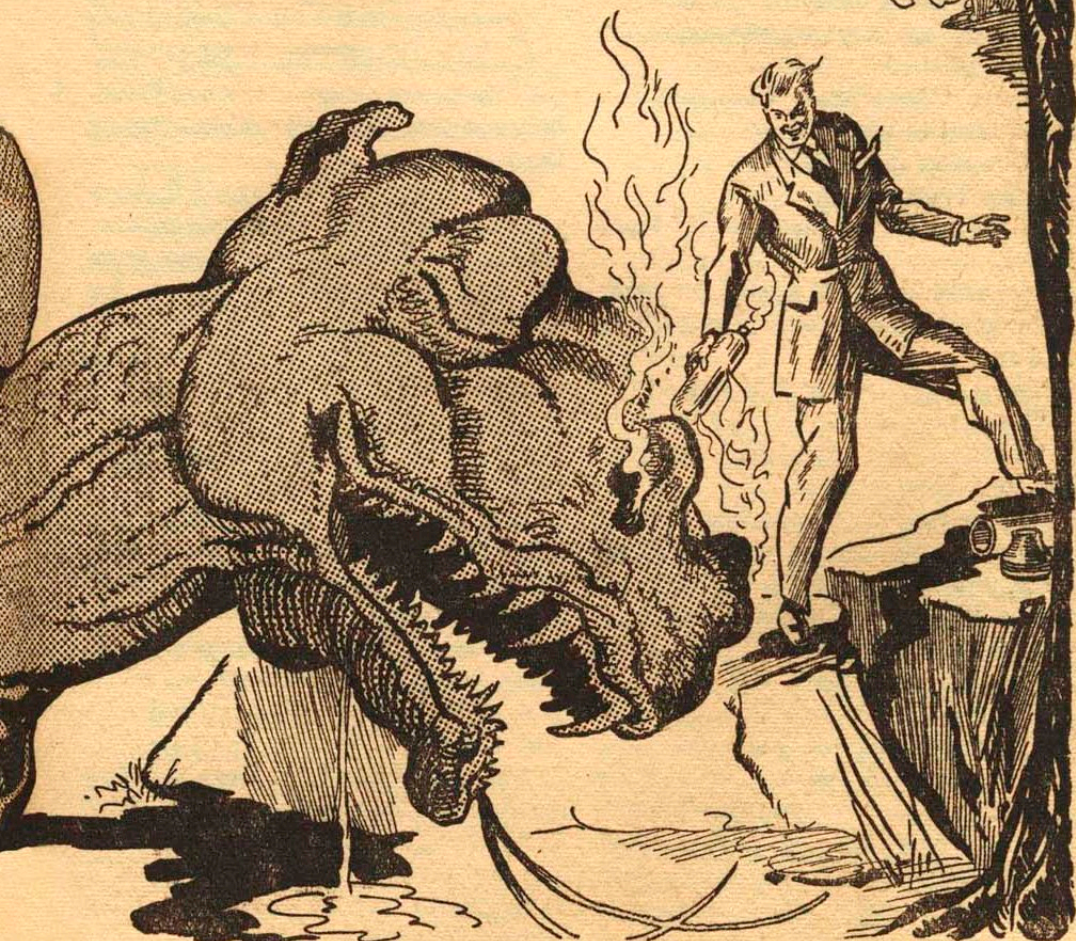
"I am sitting opposite you in a restaurant," Feep answered. "And the reason I am all dressed up is because they do not allow you to come in here naked."

This was a reasonable answer, but it didn't satisfy me.

"I mean," I continued, "why aren't you in bed and asleep?"

Feep gave me a bitter stare.

"I do not lay in the hay today be-



Lefty Feep thrust the coffee bottle into the flame from the dragon's nostrils

cause I am just a lunk in the bunk," he told me.

"What's that mean in English?"

"Like I say, I am no score with the snore. My forty winks are on the blink."

"How's that?"

Feep sighed.

"I am up because I got insomnia."

"Insomnia? Too bad!" I stared at his haggard face.

The waiter appeared and Feep turned the haggard face towards him.

"Bring me a cup of black coffee," he moaned.

I stared at Feep in amazement. "If you have insomnia, why order black coffee?" I asked him.

"It will just keep you awake."

Feep grinned.

"Sure. I know that. I got insomnia and I want to keep it."

"You *want* insomnia?"

Lefty Feep nodded.

"But why not get some sleep?" I persisted.

"Because if I go to sleep I am liable to meet the girl of my dreams," he told me.

"Well, what's wrong with that?"

"I already met her."

"Already met the girl of your dreams? How could you?"

"From walking in my sleep," Feep answered. He sighed again. "Ever since, I wish very much to stay wide awake. Because if I dream about her it will give me a nightmare."

I scratched my head.

"Lefty Feep, you've told me some pretty wild yarns in your time—but I've never heard you talk in screwier riddles than the way you talk tonight. You say you met the girl of your dreams, and now you're afraid to sleep because you might dream about her and it would be a nightmare."

"That's my story," said Lefty Feep.

"And you're stuck with it."

"I don't understand at all."

"Then I'll tell you."

Stifling a yawn with a piece of toast, Lefty Feep leaned across the table and told me the story.

And I was stuck with it.

EVER since I am a tiny tot I am a great guy for the shut-eye. I am a big number in slumber, and you never meet a deeper sleeper. When I am a moppet I sleep in school. After I grow up, I go to sleep on the job. Whenever I get a chance I head for a bed. I hit the hay some nasty blows in my time.

But up to a little while ago I am not the type of personality who walks in my sleep.

Once in a while I walk in other people's sleep. For example, when my landlady sleeps I walk out without paying the back rent.

Then, about a month ago, I find out that I am marching in the arms of Morpheus. I wake up from a sound slumber and find myself standing on the fire escape outside, or waltzing around in the hallway. Once I am even out on the street in my pajamas, which is very embarrassing to me because on this particular night I do not happen to wear any.

So I sit down and try to figure out this matter. Maybe I walk in my sleep because I can not stand the lousy mattress on my bed.

I shake the rocks and gravel out of it and make the landlady get me a new one, or at least one that is filled with soft stone.

But two nights later I am standing on the main stem during the early a.m. and snoring so loud I do not even hear the bell on the patrol wagon when it comes up to cart me away for walking around in public in my shorts.

I tell the judge I am a marathon

runner, but the old beak still fines me five and costs. And not having any pockets in my shorts, I spend the rest of the night in the old clinkeroo. Even there I am always walking in my sleep and bumping into the bars.

So when I get back to my dump, I am very much down in it.

"Feep," I tell myself, "this has to stop. You can't take a hike every night. Maybe you better go see a morgue-booker."

Now one of the morgue-bookers I know is a doctor by the name of Sigmund. Being a psychologist, he is usually called Subconscious Sigmund. I meet him a while back and I figure this sleep-walking problem is right up his alley.

So I go right up his alley to his office.

SUBCONSCIOUS SIGMUND is sitting behind a pair of goggles when I come in.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Feep?" he inquires, getting out a straitjacket with a gleam in his eye.

"Put away the goof-overcoat," I snap. "I am not whacky. I only want to talk to you."

Subconscious Sigmund looks plenty disappointed when he hears this, because he is very fond of finding out what ticks in lunatics and he collects nuts like a squirrel.

"Too bad," he sighs. "I always figure, Feep, that some day you will be a fine patient."

"I am only impatient now," I tell him. "But maybe you can help me solve my problem."

So I slip him the story about my sleep-walking. He listens, and nods his head and pulls at his chin.

Then he gets out a little hammer and hits me on the knee with it, and he measures my skull, and he holds lights up in front of my eyes, and he is just

getting ready to give me the hot-foot or something when I stop him.

"Cut out all the monkey business, Doc," I say. "All I want to know is what's wrong with me."

He gives me a dirty look.

"That," he says, "would take hours to tell."

"Meaning what?"

"Feep," says Subconscious Sigmund, "I'm afraid I have bad news for you."

"I can take it."

"I'm afraid you are a somnambulist."

I tear off my coat.

"Nobody can call me that," I yell, and dive for his neck. He holds me off.

"There's nothing wrong in that," Sigmund gasps. "It merely means you are a sleep-walker."

I groan.

"I know that! I tell you that! What I want to find out is how to cure it."

Subconscious Sigmund shakes his head.

"It cannot be cured unless we discover the cause. Perhaps I might ask you a few questions about your slumber."

"You want to hear bedtime stories?"

"No. Just answer a few simple inquiries. Do you snore?"

"How else do you suppose a lovable guy like me gets divorced three times? All my wives get Bingo at Reno on the grounds that they can't stand my snoring."

"Aha!" Sigmund taps his head. There is a hollow echo. "Maybe that is the secret. Perhaps you walk in your sleep because you cannot stand the sound of your own snoring."

"Try again, Doc," I suggest. "You can do better than that."

"Well, how do you fall asleep, then? Maybe there is some subconscious manifestation there with a psychopathological connotation."

"The hell there is," I tell him. "I never am sick a day in my life."

"I mean, maybe there is a clue to some mental disturbance in the method you use to go to sleep."

"I just count sheep."

"SHEEP?" repeats Subconscious Sigmund. "Sheep? Wool-gathering? No. Domestic fetish? No. Ah—I have it!"

"Well, give it to me, then."

"Sheep have legs, haven't they?"

"I do not know," I answer. "I never notice. Now if you ask me if blondes have legs, then I am an expert—"

"Of course sheep have legs," Sigmund interrupts. "And that is the clue. You count so many legs on these sheep that you get the impulse to walk. You fall asleep dreaming of movement. Locomotion. That is why you are a somnambulist."

"I wish you would not use that word," I sigh. "But suppose that is true? What am I going to do about it?"

"Stop counting sheep," Sigmund tells me. "Count something else. Something without legs."

"What would that be?"

"Well—snakes, for example."

"I should count snakes? But how do you manage to see snakes?"

"I don't know," says Sigmund. "That's your problem. Ten dollars please."

So I walk out of the office with ten dollars worth of advice. I should count snakes, he says. And he doesn't know how I can see snakes, either.

But I do.

There is only one way to see snakes around this town, and that is to take a drink at the Y-Go Inn.

So I go to the Y-Go.

It is quite a walk, and I am very tired from hiking in my sleep, but I manage to trundle my bunions down the

street to the Y-Go Inn and shove my torn corns on the brass rail.

The Y-Go Inn is a very unusual tavern. At most places they serve you a shot, but here you get an explosion. The whiskey is not only frisky but risky, the beer is queer, and the only chaser you get is a guy with a black-jack who runs after you when you don't pay.

To be frank, the Y-Go Inn is not the kind of a place you want to be found dead in, and you have a very good chance of that if you dare to take more than two drinks.

But I am dying for a little honest slumber, and I know that if I have to see snakes this place has what it takes.

To make a long story censored, I spend about two hours and five bucks in the Y-Go Inn. One drink makes me shrink, two make me turn blue, three is enough for me, four and I can't find the door, five and I don't know if I'm alive, six and I'm doing tricks.

I sit there and doze away at a table, wishing I had a knife to fight the snakes off with. Because they are certainly coming.

The rattlesnakes aren't so bad. At least you can hear them. It is the cobras and the pythons I don't like, also the vipers. In a little while I am in the anaconda stage. Just before I fall asleep completely a crowd of dragons and dinosaurs come in and begin to do the conga.

But I remember what Subconscious Sigmund tells me, and I do not look at their legs. This is pretty hard to do, because I get the idea they are stepping on me. They push me right down into the dark, and I am falling, falling—

WHEN I wake up again I am walking, walking.

I know I am awake, because if I wasn't, I wouldn't feel it when I get hit

on the head with a hammer.

And that is the way it feels. There is a lot of clamor with a hammer and so I know I am coming out of a hangover.

But what am I doing walking?

Where am I?

For a minute I am afraid to open my eyes. Evidently counting snakes does not cure me of sleep-walking. Evidently I get up from my chair in the Y-Go Inn and roll for a stroll.

Evidently.

Because when I finally do open my eyes I am lost. Absolutely and completely lost.

It is daylight, and I can see very plainly that I am walking down a country road like a barefoot boy with shoes on.

Now if there is one thing I know about this town, it is that there are no country roads in it. Therefore I am out of the city. Either that or out of my mind. Maybe both, because it certainly looks screwy around here.

There is nothing on either side of me but hills. The road I am following is nothing but a little winding trail. It isn't even a State Highway for goats. But here I am, climbing up in the hills like a mountain-william.

So I figure I must walk in my sleep all night at least. Maybe several days, because the stuff I drink usually puts you away for that long, if not forever.

Where I am does not matter so much to me, because there are two other things on my mind. My feet.

They ache very severely. I stop and examine my shoes and see that from now on I will wear them for spats. Because I walk the bottoms right off them.

This disturbs me because now I am actually a barefoot boy. I am lost in the hill country. I am tired. And I need all my strength to keep my tongue from hanging out so far it drags in the dust of the road.

But there is nothing to do but keep going until I come to a sign or a marker that tells me where I am marooned. So I pedal my extremities along and mumble unkind remarks under my breath about Subconscious Sigmund's advice and the Y-Go Inn's liquor and my sore feet.

THE higher I climb up the lower I feel. The more altitude I get the worse my attitude is. To say nothing of my bunions.

Then I see the sign. It is just a chalk-mark on some rocks, but I stop and read it with interest and sore eyes.

PRIVATE!

KEEP OUT!

NO TRESPASSING!

ABSOLUTELY NO VISITORS!

GO AWAY!!!

NO DOGS, CHILDREN, OR

HUMAN BEINGS ALLOWED!

Well, I am not a dog, and I am not a kid, either. And after all my troubles, I hardly feel human.

So I turn off at the little path behind the rocks and head into some woods.

All at once I nearly run head-on into a big cave. It sticks out from the rocks and the shrubbery up there and I almost fall into it. But I do not like the look of it, which is black. So I stand there and decide to see if it is empty.

"Hey," I yell. "Anybody home?"

Sure enough, a voice comes out.

"Go away," howls the voice. "I hate you!"

"But I want to talk to you."

"No visitors," snaps the voice.

"I'm not visiting. I just want some advice."

"Advice, eh?" snarls the voice. "I advise you to go jump in the lake."

"I would if I could find it, but I'm lost."

"Well, go and be lost someplace else."

"Come out and talk to me—I won't bite."

"No, but I will," the voice yells back.

"Please," I mumble.

"Well—" says the voice. "I dunno. Who are you?"

"Lefty Feep."

"Animal, vegetable, or mineral?"

"Name it and you can have it," I yell back.

"Oh, all right, then," the voice grumbles. I hear something stirring around at the back of the cave, and in a minute this personality comes out.

HE is a very unusual-looking specimen, and if I ever get him on the end of a hook I would toss him back.

The guy is very tall, and he wears a very short burlap bag. He is also extremely thin, and so is the bag. I am so busy counting his ribs that I hardly notice his face. When I get around to that, I still can hardly notice it, because his face is all buried by a beard.

In fact, his whole face is nothing but a bush with a tomato sticking out. This seems to be his nose.

He stands there in the entrance of the cave and pulls the wool back from over his eyes. Then he squints at me and grunts.

"Goodbye," he says.

"Goodbye? Why I haven't said hello yet."

"Then why bother? Go away."

"But I'm lost!"

"You are? I'm Kermit the Hermit."

"Pleased to meet you."

"Why should you be?"

"Well, it's good to see a human face again," I tell him.

"Wish I could say the same about you."

I do not like to take insults from this slap-happy pappy, but I have to find my way back to snivelization somehow. So I try to make friends.

"So you're a hermit, eh?" I remark. "I often wonder why various personalities become hermits."

"I am a hermit because I am allergic," says the guy.

"Allergic? What are you allergic to?"

"Human beings."

"You mean you don't like people?"

"You talk too much," Kermit the Hermit tells me. "Why don't you go away?"

"Because I do not know which way it is," I say, very candid. "I am lost."

"What of it? I don't think anybody will miss you."

"But I want to get back to the city."

Kermit the Hermit gives me a sour look.

"What I do not figure out," he says, "is how you get up here in the first place.

"When I decide to become a hermit, I spend three years just looking for a spot like this where nobody ever goes. I go to the back woods and then I look for a place back of that. Why this place is so deserted I never even see a Fuller Brush man! And then you arrive. I can't figure it out!"

"Neither can I," I tell him. "But I do not wish to figure it out. I just want to get out."

KERMIT the Hermit shakes his beard and several woodticks jump out.

"I fear I cannot give you any directions," he says. "I have no knowledge of what paths exist around here. I just sit in my little cave and hate people all day long."

"Never mind your hobbies," I shriek, getting plenty irritated. "I can't waste any more time around this part of the country."

"Plenty of time," Kermit the Hermit grumbles. "Time is longer than anything."

All at once his eyes light up.

"Now that you're here," he says, "I think I have an idea. Why don't you become a hermit too?"

"Me, an uptown boy, a hermit?"

"Certainly. It's a wonderful life. Maybe you won't like the isolation at first, but you'll enjoy the solitude. The loneliness is good, too, particularly if there isn't anybody around. Besides, the emptiness is so deserted."

I begin to see for the first time why this knave lives in a cave.

It is so the squirrels won't get him.

But I certainly don't want to pick raisins off this fruitcake. So I shake my head.

"I don't care to become a hermit just yet," I tell him. "Alimony or no alimony. All I want is out. If you can't give me a road map, at least you can tell me how to find my way through these hills."

"Very well then," says Kermit, scratching the bottom of his burlap bag. "Maybe I cannot tell you where to go, but I can at least warn you where not to go."

He stabs his skinny finger off in the direction of the trees to his left.

"Keep away from the valley beyond those trees," he says.

"Why?"

"Don't ask questions. I do not like questions because it is not good to talk about it."

"What are you being mysterious about? What is in that valley?"

"Never mind. Just stay away."

"Look here, my fine feather-brained friend," I tell him. "I am not afraid of man nor beast, and I know plenty of both. Why, one time I even play around with the dwarfs that Rip Van Winkle knows up in the Catskills."

Kermit the Hermit scowls.

"Beyond those trees is something worse than Sleepy Hollow," he tells

me. "It is a place where nothing stirs. That is why this country is so deserted. You are the first wideawake fellow I see here."

"What do you mean?"

"There is a legend connected with the valley beyond," he whispers. "They say the land is enchanted. Everyone there is fast asleep."

"Are they pretty fast awake, too?" I ask. But he only sneers at gags.

"Do not mock," he mutters. "I once ventured to the edge of the valley, and I can see that it has the look of a doomed place, a place to shun."

"Well, give out the dope, ditto," I request.

So Kermit the Hermit tells me the legend of the valley.

"A MIGHTY king resides in the valley beyond," he tells me. "He dwells in a great palace and is rich beyond men's wildest dreams. Servants and slaves attend him and keep his treasures. But his greatest riches is his beautiful daughter, the princess. She is a girl as beautiful as a dream.

"All this is long ago, remember. For a time comes when an enchantment falls upon the land. A wicked enemy of the king condemns the monarch and his daughter and all his people to an unending sleep.

"Now all in the castle, all in the village, and all in the land around lie in enchanted slumber. The legend foretells of the coming of a Prince Charming who will win through to the castle. His kiss shall awake the Sleeping Beauty who lays asleep in the castle and cause the enchantment to dissolve."

Of course, when I hear this from Kermit the Hermit I immediately know several things. First, that he is screwy. Second, that what he is giving me is an old kid's yarn about the Sleeping

Beauty. And third, that maybe there is some truth in it at that.

I try to translate his line of gab into English again and that way it makes some sense.

Some old moneybags builds himself a fancy mansion back in the hills a long time ago. This tycoon goon lives there with a flock of flunkys. His daughter is a pretty fancy frail. Then all at once the whole gang goes down with some kind of sleeping sickness and there they lie.

But I decide to humor my cave-man companion a little.

"Sounds plausible to me," I tell him. "But why don't you ever go there yourself? You could be Prince Charming and pull this frail out of her Mickey Finn-ish with a smack on the puss and win yourself a honey with money."

Kermit the Hermit smiles.

"Don't you understand? The region is enchanted, I tell you. That is why it is deserted around here—because of the enchantment. Anyone who ventures into the valley falls asleep at once, like all those in it."

"I see."

"Besides," scowls Kermit, changing his tone of voice, "I do not like women anyway, because they are so feminine. And beautiful women are much too attractive and pretty."

"The Princess is a real ginch, eh?"

"She's the girl of every man's dreams," he tells me. "Imagine a maiden of about eighteen, with alabaster skin, hair like spun gold, a neck as graceful as a swan's—with ruby lips and eyes like stars."

"Wow!" I remark, imagining same.

"What would anyone want with a girl like that?" he grunts.

I do not tell him.

BUT I am beginning to think over his little bedtime story.

A beautiful ginch like that, with money too—in a slumber beyond the lumber. Just waiting for a Prince Charming to come along and kiss those ruby lips of hers!

Maybe it is true, after all. Maybe it is destiny that makes me walk in my sleep, as well as bad liquor.

Maybe I am supposed to wake the Sleeping Beauty!

You see, there is something I do not tell Subconscious Sigmund when he psychoanalyzes me. Something I do not tell Kermit the Hermit, either. I am just a wee bit ashamed of it.

After all, at my age, and with my experience with various tomatoes I run around with and marry, it will sound foolish to confess that I walk in my sleep because I dream of some Jeanie with light brown hair.

But it is the truth.

Ever since I start this sleep-walking I have this dream about a beautiful ginch. She is a blondie, and looks just like the number Kermit the Hermit describes in his report on local gossip.

Can it be that I dream about this number in my slumber because she is the Sleeping Beauty?

Anyhow, it is worth finding out.

So I stride off through the woods in the direction that Kermit the Hermit is pointing.

"Hey!" he yells. "Where are you going?"

"I'm off to see this Beauty cutie," I reply.

"But it means your death—you'll fall asleep like all the rest and be put under enchantment."

"Listen," I tell him, "I am an up-town boy and I will not be caught napping."

"I warn you!"

"And who are you? Just a wart in this neck of the woods!"

"Is that so?" yells Kermit the Her-

mit, jumping out of his burlap sack in excitement. "And just who do you think *you* are?"

"Me? I am Prince Charming, of course!"

All at once Kermit the Hermit gives a little grunt and trots after me.

"I must admit I admire your courage," he says. "So you really are going to take a chance?"

"Why not? It isn't far to the valley—only a sleeper jump."

"But how do you expect to keep awake?"

"I don't," I tell him. "Only you forget there is one thing that makes me different—one thing which makes me think I can get through to the castle even if I fall under the spell of this supernatural Mickey Finn and doze off."

"What is that?" he asks.

"Well, I can walk in my sleep. I'll just keep right on going, whether I'm awake or not!"

Kermit the Hermit grunts again.

"You know, I think you might do it at that," he cackles. "Here—wait a while and maybe I can help you."

"How?"

"I'll just step into the cave and brew something up for you."

So I sit down, wondering what the old goat is going to do, and pretty soon a smell breezes out of the cave.

"What's cooking?" I yell.

"Coffee!" says Kermit the Hermit.

"SURE enough, in a little while he runs out with a couple of thermos jars filled with coffee.

"This might help to keep you awake," he says.

"I appreciate it," I answer. "If I win the princess I will come back here and build you a swell new cave with inside plumbing."

"Bah!" sneers Kermit the Hermit.

"I don't want anything. Now go away. I'm beginning to like you, and if there's anything I hate it's liking people. The trouble with knowing people is that after a short acquaintance they become friendly."

I can see he is getting one of his dizzy spells again, so I pick up the thermos jugs and march off into the distance.

The last I see of Kermit the Hermit, he is waving goodbye to me with the end of his beard.

Then I get into the trees and it is over the river and through the woods for me. As I mention before, the country is plenty wild around here.

Now it gets wilder. And so do I, because I am always tangling my trousers in the underbrush, or getting my coat caught on the bushes.

After about half an hour of hiking, I begin to feel tired, so I stop and open one of the thermos jugs to take a gulp of hot coffee. This sets me right, and I wade on some more.

By this time I am practically lost again. Nothing around me but trees. For a minute I am tempted to turn back, but there are two reasons I do not do so.

The first reason is I want to see if there is anything to this yarn about the snoozing cutie. The second reason for not turning back is that I no longer know which way is back.

So I tramp further and further and it gets darker and darker.

Then, all of a sudden, there is a change in scenery.

I feel it first before I see it.

The air is suddenly very still. The little breeze that runs through the woods dies down to nothing. The trees stop rustling their leaves and the grass doesn't blow.

That's what I feel. Stillness.

Then I see the stillness.

THE branches over my head just droop without any swaying. The bushes under my feet hang down. The flowers are all closed up.

At first I think these hunks of vegetation are dead. Then I realize they are asleep!

More and over, I notice that there are ants on the bark of the trees—and the ants don't move. Even when I reach out and touch them, they stay still. Fast asleep.

Looking up, I can see birds hanging upside down from the trees. Other birds are lying in their nests with their feet in the air, dead to the world. Sound asleep.

I am beginning to droop myself. So I swig some more coffee, finishing up the first thermos jug, and go on.

All at once I hear something. A noise. A terrible noise. There is an awful grunting sound from in back of the bushes. I step ahead right on tiptoes and peek around.

And so help me Little Red Riding Hood, I see a big grey wolf!

His mouth is open, but his eyes are shut. He is also sound asleep, and what a sound! Because the noise I hear is the wolf, snoring.

I walk on, and now I notice a lot of little things I overlook before. Squirrels in the trees, asleep. Rabbits and gophers and chipmunks making a try at shut-eye. Minks catching forty winks. Woodchucks sawing wood.

And all the while the trees are getting thicker and thicker. So are my eyelids. There is nothing to do but stop again, open the second thermos jug, and inhale black coffee.

Then I resume my ramble through the brambles.

I go a few feet between some very thick trees with moss on them, and I see this guy.

He is a fat little personality, and

his belly hangs on the ground. This is not as bad as it sounds, because he is sitting down. To be exact, he is propped up against the base of a tree, snoring away for dear life.

It is not his looks that intrigue me so much as the clothes he is wearing. I examine them very closely—a high bowler hat, a choke collar, and a checkered suit that looks like it gets rained on during Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

To be brief, this sleeping citizen is dressed like the old family album characters of 1860 or some such annum.

Naturally this puzzles me plenty. I walk up to him and tap him politely on the derby. Nothing happens. So I take off the derby and tap him impolitely on the noggin. Still nothing happens.

Then I give him a diplomatic kick. He doesn't stir. He snores on. I shake him and jump back a foot because something sticky falls into my hand. It is a spider-web, hanging from his nose!

Another look and I even see the spider. But the spider is asleep!

FOR the first time I realize that there is actually some truth to what the hermit tells me. This specimen looks as though he is sleeping here for the last 80 years!

I just have to take another swig of coffee on that, and I only wish it is something stronger.

Then I march on. By this time there is a thicket twining around all the trees and I almost need to cut my way through. So I bring out a little knife I carry around with me in case of trouble or crap games, and slice the vines in front of me in order to keep moving.

In a little while I stumble across another exhibit for the sandman, another, and what a, man.

Only this one is lying right across the path. He is wearing one of those coonskin caps and buckskin breeches like this historical character, Daniel Goon. He carries a squirrel rifle, but it is plenty rusty from lying on the ground. And the citizen is plenty dusty from the same cause.

I run across him so fast I actually step on him. But he doesn't stir.

One more gulp of coffee and twenty yards later I spot two items in white wigs and brass button coats. They are right out of Washington's time—as a matter of fact, they look like a couple of Valley Forgers to me.

This time I do not bother to shake or wake them. I know it is useless, and besides I need my strength. I am very bleary and weary.

But I hack along, and down under the vines ahead I kick my foot against some armor. This armor is worn on the chest of a Spanish-looking greaser with a beard like the youngest Smith Brother. I do not even like to think about how long he sleeps here. Maybe two or three hundred years.

I realize more than ever that Kermit the Hermit is right when he says Rip Van Winkle is an insomniac compared to these lazybones.

Now, with my own eyelids trying to make an open-and-shut case out of me, I more than ever long to turn back.

But I think of the Sleeping Beauty. All of these finks try for the jackpot and fail. Will I be caught asleep at the switch? Never!

So I hack on.

NOW I see a lot of guys lying all over the woods—drowsy but frowsy. The place resembles an outdoor flophouse. But no flophouse ever has such residents as these.

Because they are evidently going

further and further back in history. There is an old duffer in tights and a cap such as they prance in France in about 1600. Then I spot a couple of English soldiers with long bows. Pretty soon I come to a knight in full armor with a broadsword. He has it up in the air, plowing away at a branch, and evidently he falls asleep standing up, because the sword is still in the air.

When I think of how he must step right out from the center of the Middle Ages, cold chills run up and down my spine.

More coffee.

When I put the thermos cap back on there is only a little left. I wonder how much further I have to go. Not too far, I hope, or I will probably run into sleeping ape men and dinosaurs.

I cut my way into the brush another stretch, getting wearier and wearier. One more yawn and I know I'm gone.

I open my mouth, but no yawn comes out.

Instead, it's a scream.

Because just when I think about seeing dinosaurs, I do see one!

At least I see a long green tail. It is too long and too thick to belong to a snake. It curls out from behind a giant tree up ahead.

I approach very slowly, because how can you walk fast with your knees knocking together?

One look at what is behind that tree and I am back in my hangover.

It is a dragon!

As I exist and inhale, curled up behind the tree in those deep-sleep woods.

It is a *dragon*!

The meanest, greenest dragon you ever want not to see!

The minute I scream, I regret it greatly. Because I do not desire to attract the attention of anything like a dragon at this time.

But nothing happens. I notice then

that the dragon is fast asleep, like everything else in the forest. It does not snore, but with every breath a little jet of smoke and flame spouts out of its nostrils. Seeing as how the dragon has a head the size of a blast furnace, this is not remarkable.

I decide to go away from there with quick swiftness, just in case the dragon does wake up. So I move my legs. Nothing happens.

I can not move. I am too tired to go on.

So I open the thermos jug for coffee.

IT is all I can do to unscrew the lid, I am so weary. But I get it off. One gulp of nice hot coffee will wake me up again.

Only I do not get a gulp of nice hot coffee. I get a mouthful of cold coffee!

This I do not even swallow, because I am already falling asleep.

"You must stay awake, Lefty!" I tell myself. "Once you lay yourself down to sleep you'll never get up."

But I can't help it. I am getting numb all over.

I try to grope in my pockets for a match. Maybe if I light a fire and heat the coffee in time—

There are no matches in my pocket.

What to do? Fall down and snooze in the ooze? I try to think, but all I do is blink. Hot coffee—

In between blinks I look back and see the dragon. He is still breathing.

"Saved!" I yell.

I muster up all my bluster and manage to drag myself back to the dragon.

Then I pull out the thermos jug and hold it up. I take out the inside part with the coffee in it and stick it over the dragon's schnozzola.

Every time he breathes the fire comes out. And in a minute or two it boils my coffee again!

I just manage to raise the jug to my

kisser and swallow the coffee.

Immediately I get hep to a little pep.

I stride off and make a slash and dash on through the woods.

From now on the Boy Scouts will have nothing on me! At least, not when I have a sleeping dragon handy.

I creep along like the Last of the Moe Hickans, or whatever his name is, and my final burst of speed wins the day.

All of an instant I am chopping my way clear of the woods and coming out on the other side.

I stand on a little hill, looking down at a valley. In the valley is a small town. It looks like a typical hick burg, except for one thing.

In the center of the town is a castle.

Not a millionaire's mansion, but a genuine, authentic castle—like the ones Warner Brothers build for Errol Flynn. It has battlements and turrets and bastions and all that kind of nonsense on it, too.

I KNOW at a glance that this is where the Sleeping Beauty is making lazy like crazy.

Down the hillside I go, all keyed up. I do not mind my weariness any more.

Pretty soon I am walking right through the village.

The streets are made of cobblestones and the houses are very ancient. They look like the ones in old picture books, with stork's nests on top. In fact, I see a stork in one, standing on one leg, sound asleep.

Some of the doors of the houses are open and I can look inside. Sure enough, the whole village is filled with slumberlanders!

A cook is asleep over his oven. Three brats are asleep hunched over a marble game. An old man snoozes under a tree. A milkmaid is snoring at the business end of a cow.

Down next to the village hall, the

town cop is sleeping in his chair. But then, there is nothing so unusual in that.

What is unusual is the costumes these personalities wear. They are all ancient vintage stuff, like they wear in Europe during the time of the early-number Louies in France.

Here in the village the drowsiness hits me again, and I am ready to go down for the count. But I drag along to the big moat in front of the castle, because now I must not fail.

After all—I walk in my sleep, I yearn for this girl of my dreams—and here is the chance to make it all worth while. The chance to make it all come true for me.

I mumble Kermit the Hermit's words under my breath for encouragement. "Hair like spun gold, a neck as graceful as a swan's." Perfect! And rich, too.

So, drowsy but lousy, I head into the big stone castle.

From then on it all seems familiar—just like in the yarn they hand the nursery brats.

In the castle kitchen the knaves are asleep over their tarts. The scullions are resting their skulls on the tables. The page boys are lying on the floor with a pack of wolf hounds.

I ignore them and creep upstairs. There, in a long hall, sits an old geezer with a beautiful purple robe, trimmed with vermin. There is a crown on his head, and I know that he is the king.

But the fatigue has got old fatty, and he leans back on his throne and snores.

Next to him is the queen. She will not make such a bad-looking mother-in-law at that, I figure.

I do not waste any more time.

Because I am beginning to get impatient to see my future brawl-and-chain.

Besides, believe it or not, I am actually beginning to feel more and more

at home here! It all seems natural enough now, that I should come high-tailing into a fairy-tale and double for Prince Charming.

Who knows? Maybe it is Fate. Maybe I am meant to meet my dream girl face to face.

Anyway, I am going to have a try at it.

SO I bounce up the steps to the second floor of the castle and start looking for the bedroom of the Princess.

The first bedroom has nothing in it but wolf-hounds again. I let sleeping dogs lie.

The second bedroom houses a couple of dignified-looking old babies who I take to be the court ladies.

But the third bedroom!

I can tell from the handsome carved door that this is it.

So I stop and slick my hair down, straighten my tie, and pick a few of the burrs out of my bustle.

Then I pucker up my lips a few times for practice, and walk in.

Sure enough! There, in the big room, lying on a huge canopy bed, is the Princess.

I can tell it is her at a glance, even though she is sleeping with her head under the covers. The sheets are thin, and the pattern of the body underneath them would win any beauty contest.

I tiptoe over to the bed and look down for a minute.

Just during that second I have a little qualm in my mind.

Should I wake the Princess?

I never believe in fairy tales, but this one seems to be true. Should I spoil it all by waking her up and passing myself off as Prince Charming?

* Then I think of the girl of my dreams—eyes like stars, ruby lips, that alabaster skin, the neck as graceful—oh nuts! I am not much on the poetry.

But a beautiful blonde, with money!

So I bend down very gently, pull the covers back, and kiss the Sleeping Beauty.

SHE turns around. She stirs. She throws the covers off her head. She is awake!

She sits up.

I look at her.

All at once I am not tired any more.

I am peppy enough to give a loud yell.

I am also peppy enough to run like hell out of there—down the stairs, through the village, and all the way through the woods.

When I get into the woods, I am encouraged to run some more. Because when I wake the Princess, everybody else wakes up, too. The castle and village people are awake, and the personalities asleep in the woods also rise and shine. And so does the dragon—only he must sneeze when he does so, on account of the woods are suddenly on fire.

That is why I hop through them in such a hurry. And just in time, too. They burn very swiftly, and I know that the woods, the village, and the castle will be going up in smoke behind me.

I come out somehow on a road, way down past the cave of Kermit the Hermit. By this time I am quite a sight with my torn clothes and singed hair, to say nothing of the horrified expression I must register on my puss.

It is enough to make the truck-driver compassionate when he comes bouncing down the road at this time. He gives me a lift and asks no questions, and so I arrive back at the city.

You might think I am pretty tired because of all these experiences, and you might think right. But I do not wish to sleep. It's like I say—if I

sleep I may see the face of the Sleeping Beauty, and that I cannot stand.

* * *

LEFTY FEEP sank back in his chair.

"There is one thing I cannot stand," I remarked.

"What is it?"

"Your story," I told him.

"What is wrong with it?" Feep inquired, through a yawn.

"What is right with it?" I countered. "First of all you try to make me believe that an old fairy tale is actually true! That's bad enough. Then you make it worse."

"Worse?"

"Of course. You say you actually were the party who woke up the Sleeping Beauty. And you ran away."

"Naturally."

"Naturally, eh? How do you explain that?"

"Well—"

I raised my hand and silenced Feep.

"I think I know what you'll tell me. You'll tell me she wasn't the Sleeping Beauty at all, but some ugly old woman."

"Not at all. She is the Sleeping Beauty and the story is true. That's the whole trouble," Feep answered.

"The story is *too* true."

"*Too* true?"

"Yes. She is too much like the descriptions of such a fairy-tale Princess. That is why I cannot stand to look at her. Because when a fairy tale comes true, it is pretty awful."

Feep sighed. "I run away, and so would you."

"Why," I snapped. "Just what did she look like?"

Feep grinned.

"You remember the description of the dame that Kermit the Hermit hands me? A maiden of about eighteen, with alabaster skin, hair like spun gold, a

neck as graceful as a swan's—with ruby lips and eyes like stars?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is what she looks like. And I ask you," said Lefty Feep. "Would you marry a girl with white

stone skin, hair like gold wire, a swan's neck, and a lot of jewelry where her lips and eyes should be?

"Give me a taxi-dancer, any time!"

"Give me some of that black coffee," I sighed. "I think I need it, too."

PROTECTING PRODUCTION METHODS

A CONSTANT problem to companies who have perfected a new process is how to prevent other companies from learning the secret of the process and reproducing it. Even trusted workmen can often be bribed to give away vital production information.

A very excellent protective method now in use in many companies is the false face plan: Weighing devices and thermometers are graduated with scales that have no meaning without a code. This code is only known to top management. Thus

one unit on the scale can mean one pound, three pounds, or any other unit that is convenient. The only prerequisite is that all devices have the same scale. The workmen are instructed to heat the solution to a given point on the thermometer or to mix the material weighing three units without knowing the exact temperature of the solution or the correct weight of the material. A competitor could not reproduce the conditions under which the product was prepared unless he had access to the code.

HELPING THE ANTI-NOISE CAMPAIGN

HAVE thoughts of murder ever entered into your mind when your heavenly Sunday afternoon snooze was interrupted by some young squirt who impatiently "sat" on his automobile horn as he waited for the girl next door?

If such has been the case, you had better sit down right now and write a "fan" letter of undying thanks to Mr. Joe White of Anderson, Indiana, who has invented and patented a device to prevent a horn from being operated while the car

is parked. This innovation is an electrical control system that only allows the driver to use his horn as a warning signal while the car is in motion.

Even if the car is standing still and the motor is running, the device prevents the horn from blowing.

This should prove to be a very effective "squelcher" for that pain-in-the-neck who starts to blow his horn madly when the traffic signal turns yellow because he has no time to wait for the green light.

THE GORILLA FAMILY

THE typical gorilla family is made up of one old male, about three females, and the children. Authority in the family rests in the one male who is able to beat up all the other members of the family. He is given his due respect.

When the young males reach the breeding age, they break away from the family and mate with females who have also broken their family ties. These unions result in new families which follow

the exact pattern of all gorilla families.

The head of the family continues to rule only as long as he is the strongest. As he gets older his sons will challenge his authority and he can only maintain his leadership by beating them in battle. Just as soon as he loses one battle, the victorious son drives him out of the family. The remaining days of his life are spent in lonely wanderings about the jungle.

OLD AGE OF A PARACHUTE

A WORKER has to wait until he is 65 years old before he can retire on his government Social Security pension, but an army parachute only works for seven years before it reaches the retirement age.

The date each chute goes into use is recorded and exactly seven years later the chute is retired from any further use by army personnel. However, the chutes find other uses in the army.

If the chutes are found to still be in good con-

dition they become cargo chutes which are used to drop supplies, weapons, tools, and other essentials for the army's parachute army and to posts not easily accessible by land routes.

If the chutes can't pass the cargo requirements, they are cut up into white scarfs for the flyers. When the supply of scarfs begins to pile up, the women of the army post step in and use the chutes to make underthings from the silk and nylon.

The

The singer's open palm smacked
against the startled diva's cheek



OUTLAW ECHO



by CLARK SOUTH

When the diva complained of the echoes in the opera house she asked for open warfare

AND they call this an opera house!" the lumpy Signorina Helena Wenkelstein cried angrily, black eyes flashing. "They expect me to sing *Carmen* here! Me, Helena Wenkelstein, who has performed at La Scala—the Metropolitan—the Opera Comique—"

Young Allan Carruthers squirmed

nervously under the tongue-lashing. Handling jittery stars was tough business for any director, let alone one as youthful as he. Further, he still was more than a bit awed by the prima donna's fame, not to mention her impressive display of temperament.

So it was Margaret Johnson—the lovely lyric soprano who played

Micaela, the second lead—who spoke.

"I know it's difficult to work under such conditions, signorina," she soothed timidly, "but after all, we're on tour—"

Director Allan Carruthers sighed wistfully. If only all singers were like Margaret—sweet, gracious, thoughtful of others . . .

But Signorina Wenkelstein apparently thought otherwise. She turned on the girl.

"Who asked your opinion?" she flamed. And then, raging on: "The place has the acoustics of a drafty barn! And the echoes—! Listen!"

The pudgy diva vocalized an octave: "Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah!"

By the time she hit the eighth note, the first already was bouncing back from every corner.

"Do you hear?" she shrilled with a melodramatic flourish of her plump hand. "Do you hear those echoes? And they ask me to sing here!"

"Nuts!"

Fortunately for the prima donna's peace of mind, this disgruntled comment was snarled in Echoese, a language whose tones are so high and thin as to be completely inaudible to the human ear. It exploded in a sour snort from the throat of Benny the Echo, on duty at his post in the highest gallery.

So there were only two who heard him.

The first was Nysa, the echo who occupied the shadowy niche to the right of Benny's. She was a gorgeous creature, slim and sylph-like and beautiful as the nymphs from whom she took her name.* Almost always her brown eyes were warm and soft when she looked at Benny. But just now she was shocked.

"Benny!" she exclaimed.

"IT'S to be expected, my dear," broke in the second listener snippishly.

She, too, was a woman; but what a difference! For where Nysa was the soul of charm, this echo had all the undesirable characteristics of a professional spinster. She radiated prim propriety, and even her sharp, bony features seemed to point to a pica-yunish nature. Her niche was on Benny's left.

"To be expected, Griffina?" Nysa's big brown eyes showed puzzlement.

"Of course," sniffed Griffina. "What can you hope for from Benny? There's a rebellious streak in him. He has no respect for authority or tradition." She bobbed her head in a persnickity nod. "That's it. No respect for authority or tradition. He's bound and determined to cause trouble. Just mark my words!"

Scowling, Benny turned to face her. He was a husky young echo with a good-natured face. But he had a stubborn jaw, too—and right now it was jutting like a battle cruiser's ram.

"Why shouldn't I say 'Nuts!'?" he demanded disgustedly. "Did you ever see such a sight? To listen to her talk, you'd think that fat lump of *wiener-schnitzel* down there was Schumann-Heink, Galli-Curci and Alda, all rolled into one. Or even better, maybe—they all sang in this house without doing any kicking."

"Temperament must be expected from great stars," Griffina retorted primly.

"Temperament!" Benny snorted. "It's temper, for my money. The way she called down that nice girl who's doing Micaela!" Another snort. "'Sig-

* Nysa, in Grecian mythology, was earth's most beautiful valley. In it dwelt the famed Nysaeans nymphs. Legend has it that Zeus eventually transformed these lovely creatures into the Hyades, stars supposed to bring rain when they hang near the horizon, as their reward for caring for his son, Dionysus.—Ed.

norina,^{*} indeed! Her title should be '*Dummkopf*'!"

"Benny!" Nysa remonstrated again.

"No respect!" Griffina broke out again. "There'll be trouble, Nysa. Mark my words! Benny is—"

But new tumult from the stage cut her short.

"If we're going to rehearse—" Margaret Johnson was saying.

"When did you become director?" the plump Miss Wenkelstein slashed fiercely. "Who are you, to order *me* around, you little upstart?"

"Really, signorina, I didn't mean it that way—"

"You think you can impose on me because Allan Carruthers likes the shape of your legs!" the diva raged. "Don't think I haven't seen it—"

"Oh!" gasped Margaret, flushing to the roots of her golden hair. "Signorina Wenkelstein, you can't say such a thing! You can't mean it—"

"Oh, I can't, can't I?" The diva's dark face was aflame with anger. "Well, let me tell you, I won't stand for it! The way you two carry on is a disgrace—"

"Ladies! Ladies!" shouted Allan.

He might as well have yelled at the wind. Neither of the two singers paid him the slightest heed.

But now Margaret sprang forward, her lithe young body tense with fury, the humility gone out of her.

"Star or not, you can't say those things about me!" she cried.

Smack!

Her open palm lashed out. Connected squarely with the prima donna's plump cheek.

"YOU!" shrieked the diva. Her stubby fingers clawed for a hand-

ful of Margaret's hair.

The next instant the two of them were rolling on the floor in a wild flurry of feet and fists.

"Atta girl, Margaret! Give 'er hell!" whooped Benny, high in the gallery, jumping to the back of a seat in the last row in his excitement. "Show that spaghetti soloist where to head in—"

"Benny!"

Even as Nysa spoke, other members of the opera troupe sprang to separate the two embattled singers.

"Wasn't it swell?" enthused the echo, hopping back to his niche. His face was aglow. "Boy, that American girl sure called Signorina Sausage's bluff!"

But from the stage rose Helena Wenkelstein's angry, half-hysterical voice.

"She attacked me!" she raved. "That hussy attacked me!"

"Please, signorina!" begged Allan. "You mustn't—"

The prima donna's pouter pigeon bosom heaved.

"And let me tell you something, Mister Director Allan Carruthers!" she cried. "You can get rid of that pet of yours right now! I won't sing on the same stage with her!"

"Please, Signorina Wenkelstein—"

"You heard me!" The woman's dark eyes flashed. "Fire her! Fire her right now, or I quit!"

Allan's face hardened. His lips thinned.

"I'm still director of this company, signorina," he reminded Miss Wenkelstein a bit coldly. "Also, you have a contract—"

"A contract!" The star's sneer was a masterpiece of contempt and rancor. "Are you silly enough to think you can hold me to it? Whose name is putting this show over, mine or that Johnson

* "*Signorina*" is Italian for "Miss." As used by Helena Wenkelstein, it is clearly an affectation. "*Dummkopf*," freely translated from the German, is equivalent to the American "Dopey."—Ed.

creature's? And as far as your being director is concerned, how long do you think it will take the New York office to remove you when they find your attitude has forced me to leave?"

"Nevertheless, you'll obey orders or be charged with contract violation!" snapped Allan. But his face was white.

"That's telling her!" approved Benny from the gallery. "Keep it up, buddy!"

"Then I leave!" flared Signorina Wenkelstein. "Good-bye!"

With a swish and flourish, she stalked toward the wings.

"No!"

It was Margaret Johnson. Her face was pale.

"You can't do it!" she cried. "I'll quit. Right now."

"Margaret!" choked Allan.

THE girl turned to him.

"The signorina's right, Allan," she told him earnestly. "It's her name that's making this tour a success. If she leaves, you'll lose your job as director, and the New York office will hire her back on her own terms. I'd rather quit now than to see it turn out that way."

"You can't, Margaret—"

"My mind's made up," the girl answered determinedly. "I'm leaving."

And, to the prima donna, who had halted at the interruption:

"Will that satisfy you, signorina? Will you sing?"

A grin that was positively ghoulish in its triumph rippled over the diva's round face.

"I shall stay!" she proclaimed. "But you must go at once!"

Slowly, biting her lip to hold back the tears, Margaret left the stage.

Up in the gallery, Benny the Echo lathered with rage.

"Are we going to let that fat phoney get away with this?" he yelled. "Are we going to see that nice Margaret Johnson driven out of the company?"

"Humph!" Griffina sniffed primly. "A lot we can do about it!"

"It *is* too bad, though," commented Nysa regretfully. "She's such a fine girl, giving up her role and everything just so that young director won't get in trouble."

"Well, then, let's do something about it," hammered Benny. "Let's help Margaret—"

"But how, Benny?" Nysa's lovely face was worried. "What could we do? Humans can't even see us."

"Well . . ." Benny paced the floor furiously, his good-natured face lined with concentration.

"Echoes aren't supposed to intervene in human affairs," spoke up Griffina austere. "We're only allowed to repeat what humans say. That was Hera's ruling."*

"That's it!" whooped the irrepressible Benny. "We'll just echo that loud-mouthed Swiss cheese. Oh, will we echo her! We'll echo her right out of this opera house!"

"You mean—" started Nysa, wide-eyed.

"There are hundreds of echoes living here," Benny rushed on. "We'll get them all together. Then, when that woman tries to sing *Carmen*, we'll all echo. We'll make her sound like a bass with a head cold singing in a cave!" He drew a deep breath of satisfaction.

*The original Echo was the loveliest of the forest nymphs. One day Hera, Zeus' wife and sister, came hunting for one of the nymphs with whom she believed her husband to be in love. But Echo's bright conversation occupied the goddess until the other nymphs could steal away. To punish Echo, Hera condemned her never again to speak, save to repeat others' words. And so, to this day, the lovely nymph is reputed by the Greek myths to live, repeating always what others say.—Ed.

"Oh, we'll teach her to be ugly! We'll show her what happens when she kicks about us echoes—"

"It's against the rules!" snapped Griffina. "I've studied every standard text on mythology ever written, and not once does it even imply that we're allowed to do such a thing. It's against the whole Greek tradition—"

Benny turned on her.

"So what?" he demanded caustically. "Our branch of the echo family hasn't lived in Greece for a thousand years. Records prove that some of us came ashore with Columbus, and I've heard rumors that a few landed with Leif Ericson. So I think it's time we forgot all that silly Greek twaddle and took out our citizenship papers."

HE GLARED at the horrified spinster.

"And besides," he went on, "there are lots of things that don't get into your blamed mythologies in the first place. Us, for instance. If you depended on books for information, you'd never even know that Echo married and raised a darned big family before she died."

"Oh!" gasped Griffina. "Such blasphemy! Don't listen to him, Nysa! I've never even heard such talk before. He's an anarchist! An outlaw! He'll end up in trouble, mark my words—"

For a moment Nysa hesitated. Then:

"Oh, Griffina, I'm sure it isn't really so bad," she countered. "And I do want to help that nice soprano, Margaret."

Ignoring the other's horrified lamentations, she darted off. Benny, at her heels, expressed his own opinion of Griffina in typical succinct fashion:

"Nuts!"

"All right!" called Allan Carruthers irritably. "Let's get going. We've only got time for one rehearsal, and

we're certainly going to need it, with an understudy playing Micaela."

Dragoons and cigarette girls hurried to take their places on the stage in response to his call. In less than a minute all was ready for the familiar first act of *Carmen*.

Elsewhere in the house, too, there was frenzied activity.

"Hurry up!" shrilled Benny. "Take your places, all of you! Madame Mudhen, down there, says she doesn't like echoes. So let's be ready to give her a good, warm reception when she opens up with the 'Habanera'!"

In every corner of the vast, empty house, his fellow-echoes leaped to do his bidding. They were in the gallery and the balconies, the boxes and the pit. They swung from the chandelier, and they clambered about the frescoes. They scampered over the proscenium and slid down the draperies. One and all, they prepared to distort *Carmen* in a manner the like of which no theatre had ever heard before.

On the stage, Allan turned to the orchestra.

"All right," he called. "Let's take it from the beginning of the 'Habanera.'"

Music rose from the pit. Swelled, and filled the auditorium. Signorina Wenkelstein moved forward, spreading her fan.

"Ah! love, thou art a wilful, wild bird—"

Her rich voice grew in power.

At his post high in the gallery, Benny the Echo brought down his hand in a sidewise slash that would have done credit to any baton-twirling drum major.

"All right, boys!" he shouted. "Let her have it!"

IT WAS perfectly timed. As one man the echoes hurled their shrillest

voices at the plump diva on the stage. Overtones mounted, one atop the other, like the squeals of a horde of fat pigs stuck under a fence.

The effect was startling. Instead of sounding like honest, legitimate reflections of sound waves, the echoes gave a hideous caricature of a second, and shriller voice singing in direct and antagonistic competition to Signorina Wenkelstein.

A shocked expression leaped to the prima donna's moonlike face. She jumped as if someone had suddenly unleashed an air raid siren directly into her ears.

But Miss Wenkelstein was never one to give up without a fight. Heedless of the incredulous gasps from the rest of the company, she let go with the second line—and this time under a full head of steam:

"And none may hope thy wings to tame—"

"Turn on the heat, gang!" Benny roared. "Show that plump penguin what us echoes can do!"

From every crevice and cranny and nook and niche came the screaming answer. It smashed at the stage like the blast of heat from a stokehold furnace.

"If it please thee to be a rebel—" shrieked the apoplectic diva.

"Louder!" bellowed Benny. "Louder and funnier!"

The echoes let loose in earnest.

Allan Carruthers looked like a man who has just seen his wife and three small children run through a meat grinder before his very eyes.

"Stop!" he roared. "For God's sake, shut up!"

Slowly, like a timid thing, silence crept back into the house.

"It's this abandoned warehouse that they call an auditorium!" raged the prima donna. "No one could sing—"

The director ran nervous fingers through his hair.

"All right, all right," he grated. "We'll try something else." He turned to the mousy little girl who acted as understudy to Margaret Johnson. "Here, you. Let's have your aria."

In the gallery Benny commanded:

"Lay off, fellows. Let her sound good."

The singer playing Micaela began: "I'll not confess that I tremble—"

Sweet and clear, like the note of a silver bell, the girl's voice rose. On it went, and on, to that last high B flat that climaxes the aria. Died away in the softest of mellow echoes.

Allan Carruthers nodded.

"Nice going," he complimented. "You'll do." He turned back to the still-flushed Signorina Wenkelstein. "You, now. Try the 'Sequidilla'."

Benny the Echo said:

"O. K., boys! This is it! Knock her off the stage!"

G RIM-FACED and defiant, the star stepped forward.

Exactly three notes later, she stepped back.

"It's a plot!" she screamed as the echoes died away. "It's sabotage! Someone's hiding back there with a foghorn!"

"It's a voice," Allan retorted icily, "a voice that apparently isn't designed for this field."

The diva glared at him. When she spoke, her voice trembled with anger.

"Are you trying to tell me that I don't know how to sing? I, Helena Wenkelstein, who have performed at La Scala—"

"—The Metropolitan and the Opera Comique," the young director finished disgustedly. "Yes, we've all heard that before. The important thing, however, is that you can't seem to sing here. And

the audience is going to be attending this house, not La Scala or the Met."

"Do you think I'd be found dead in this hole?" screamed back Signorina Wenkelstein. "Do you think I'd sing for you now for love or money, you puling pipsqueak? I'm leaving, do you hear? Contract or no contract, I'm leaving!"

With a wild flurry of rage and skirts, she stormed from the stage.

Allan let go a sigh of relief.

"Well, that's that!" he grimaced. "Now we can get to work."

"Using what for a mezzo-soprano, Mr. Carruthers?" queried one of the dragoons.

The director stopped short.

"What do you mean?"

"Miss Larrimore, the understudy, left with La Wenkelstein," the man reported. "The kid studies with her, you know."

Feet spread wide apart, Allan stared out over the darkened parquet. He stood there in grim silence while ten long seconds ticked by. Then, at last, he swung back.

"I guess that ends it, friends," he announced in a voice suddenly gone thick. "We're minus a Carmen, and there's no one in the outfit good enough even to make a stab at singing her role."

In the gallery, Griffina sniffed smugly.

"There you are!" she crowed. "I told you all this defiance of authority and tradition would cause trouble, Nysa! Do you see what's happened? All those people are going to be out of jobs, just because Benny was too smart to listen to me!"

"Oh, Benny!" wailed Nysa.

"They're not either going to be out of jobs!" fumed the frantic Benny, bouncing all over his niche in a dither of worry. "I'll think of something, Nysa—"

His light-o'-love's face was wreathed in a halo of melancholy.

"I do hope so, Benny," she answered anxiously. "Because—"

"Because if they are, I'm going to hold you to your promise, Nysa!" cut in Griffina.

"Her promise?" Benny whirled. "What promise, Nysa?"

"OH, BENNY—"

"Her promise to me to keep away from you in the future if this crazy scheme doesn't work out!" Griffina exclaimed triumphantly.

"Nysa! It isn't so!"

But the lovely sprite hung her head.

"I'm afraid it is, Benny. You see, I was so confident . . . I had so much faith in you . . ."

"But I knew what would happen!" gloated Griffina. "I knew no good could come of this straying from tradition. And if you think I'm going to see a beautiful girl like Nysa throw herself away on an outlaw like you—" The old maid sniffed contemptuously. "'Benny', indeed! Who ever heard of a respectable echo with a name like that? What your harum-scarum parents could have been thinking—"

Benny turned on her fiercely.

"Who asked you to stick your long nose into our affairs?" he demanded. "And as far as names are concerned—well, I suppose the best anyone who gets her monicker from a bird-beaked dog can hope to do is to go around muttering about tradition like a poll parrot—" *

"Oh!"

"Benny!" chided Nysa in a shocked voice. "That's not kind—"

"Well, then, why does she go calling

* The Griffins had the bodies of dogs or lions, the heads and wings of eagles or other birds. They were called "the hounds of Zeus."—ED.

my folks harum-scarum? And what's wrong with my name? I understand it was mighty popular back in Brooklyn, where our family came from—"

But by now Griffina had recovered her poise.

"I'll still have the last laugh!" she gloated. "Remember, Nysa: you promised me you'd have no more to do with a certain riffraffish person if his scheme didn't work out—"

And just at that moment, from the stage came Allan's voice:

"If we only had someone who could sing Carmen!" he groaned. "Even if she were bad, we might be able to salvage something—"

"I can try!"

The voice was sweet and clear and carrying. It came from the black fastnesses at the rear of the house.

The young director spun about.

"Who—?"

"Me. Margaret." The girl came forward down the aisle. She was smiling.

"Margaret!" Sudden hope sprang into the director's eyes. Then died again, as he helped the girl onto the stage.

"No," he said slowly, shaking his head. "You're a lyric soprano, not a mezzo—" *

"Lyrics have done it before," the lovely Miss Johnson retorted in a businesslike tone. "Besides, I know Carmen's role as well as I do Micaela's almost. The acting and everything."

Allan stared at her through narrowed eyes.

"It's worth a try," he decided finally. "Let's go through the 'Habanera'."

* Roughly speaking, a mezzo-soprano voice has a full, deep quality which places it between the lyric soprano and the contralto. The lyric soprano is lighter; thinner. Thus, Micaela (whose role is sung by a lyric soprano) is an innocent country girl; Carmen, the mezzo, a woman of the world.—Ed.

And then, in a low voice that only she could hear: "Oh, Margaret, I'm so damned glad you didn't leave town! And not just because of this jam, either. I don't know what I'd have done—"

The girl flashed him the briefest of smiles.

"But I didn't go!" she whispered. "I had to see you first, so I sneaked back —"

IN THE gallery Benny the Echo radiated exultation as a seltzer bottle does bubbles.

"See? It's all working out! I told you it would!" he chortled.

"Oh, Benny, you're wonderful!" breathed Nysa.

But Griffina remained prim and unmoved.

"Don't be too sure yet!" she sniffed. "Maybe that girl can sing Carmen's part, and maybe she can't." Another sniff. "I've been around this opera house for a long time, but I've yet to see the lyric soprano who could do it."

"Sour grapes!" grunted Benny.

Now the orchestra struck up the opening strains of the "Habanera". Slowly, with all the seductive grace for which the role called, Margaret moved forward.

"Ah! Love, thou art a wilful, wild bird—"

"Too thin!" gloated Griffina aloud. "She can't do it!"

"Give her a chance, you old goat!" snapped Benny savagely. "She's getting along all right."

But the husky young echo's face was clouded with worry, and beads of perspiration dotted his forehead.

"And none may hope thy wings to tame—" sang Margaret.

"Stop! Stop!" shouted Allan. "Relax, Miss Johnson. You're among friends. Let your voice have some body, some richness—"

Griffina nodded approvingly.

"That young man knows his business," she announced. And then, smugly: "Do you see, Nysa? That Johnson girl can't work into Carmen's part. So the whole company will be stranded. And your promise—"

"Keep quiet!" raged Benny. "It isn't over yet."

Nysa's lovely face was strained straight.

"All right," ordered Allan. "Again, now. From the beginning."

"Ah! love, thou art a wilful, wild bird—"

"No! No! That's not it!" The young director stamped across the stage in a frenzy of exasperation. "Miss Johnson, your voice is just too thin. It hasn't the fullness, the richness, for Carmen's part. I'm sorry—"

The girl's lower lip began to quiver.

"You see?" cried Griffina gleefully. "She's failed—"

Benny fidgeted all over the gallery like a Mexican jumping bean dusted with itching powder.

"Oh, Benny!" wailed Nysa, beginning to cry.

"Allan, you've got to give me another chance!" cried Margaret Johnson. "Just one more time! I'll make it! I swear I will!"

"It's a waste of time!" grated the director. "You just haven't the voice for the role, Margaret."

"Please, Allan—"

The other gave vent to an exasperated sigh.

"Oh, all right, then." To the orchestra: "Music!"

"IT'S all over now," declared Griffina primly. "Come, Nysa. And I hope you appreciate the fact that none of this would ever have happened if it hadn't been for Benny's insistence on flouting tradition—"

The sobbing girl echo managed a nod.

"Stop!" shouted Benny.

"What—?"

Already music was rising from the orchestra pit.

"Gang! Give her undertones!" shrieked Benny. "Build out her voice! Make her a mezzol!" Sweat was streaming down his face.

"Ah! love, thou art—"

A few straggling echoes joined in at Benny's command. The girl's voice took on a richer timbre.

"More!" screamed Benny. "Help her, boys! Warm up her voice! Give it some color!"

"—a wilful, wild bird—"

There was a new glow to Margaret's tone. It swelled, took on depth, while the other members of the troop stood spellbound.

"Turn on the heat!" whooped Benny, jumping from one end of the gallery to the other in a frenzy of excitement. "Come on, you baritones! Open up, you contraltos!"

And from every corner of the house, the echoes joined in. They brought Margaret Johnson's voice to life. Gave it the richness, the color, the dramatic quality, that it needed. Built it to a throbbing, vibrant thing that brought gasps from the throats of her fellow-singers.

Then, at last, the song was finished. The gorgeous, glowing voice died away.

For a long, tense moment there was silence. Then:

"You did it!" shouted Allan. "Margaret, sweetheart, you did it!"

"Oh, Benny!" sobbed Nysa. But now they were sobs of relief. "You're wonderful!"

Benny swaggered back to her side.

"I told you I'd fix things up!" he declared.

"Hmmp!" sniffed Griffina. "You haven't fixed anything up. You've just

postponed the trouble."

Nysa turned, startled.

"What do you mean, Griffina?"

"Use your head!" snapped the elder woman caustically. "The Johnson girl will get along all right while she's here, yes. But when the company leaves for its next engagement, they'll be right back in trouble again. Because that singer is still a lyric soprano, and nothing anyone can do will change her."

WORRY sprang back to Nysa's lovely face. Mutely, her eyes big brown question marks, she turned to Benny.

Benny frowned. Jittered nervously from one foot to the other.

And then, like the breaking of an ocean dawn, relief flooded his face.

"We'll go with them!" he cried. "After all, we're opera house echoes. There's no reason why we shouldn't do a little touring, too."

"It's against all tradition—" began Griffina.

But Nysa wasn't listening.

"Oh, how thrilling!" she exclaimed, her eyes aglow. "It's a *marvelous* idea,

Benny—"

Down in the wings, young Allan Caruthers drew Margaret Johnson to him.

"Oh, darling, I'm so happy!" he whispered. "I love you so—"

High in the gallery, Benny's super-sharp ears pricked up at the words. A light of mischievous devilment sprang into his eyes. He drew a deep breath. Echoed the last phrase in his very deepest voice—

"... I love you so—"

It boomed out through the empty house like the roar of breakers on a rocky coast. A little ripple of laughter rose from the departing singers, and Margaret and Allan suddenly flushed and smiled just a little sheepishly.

And as the echo faded, like a whisper, the words came again to Benny's ears.

"... I love you so—"

He turned.

It was Nysa, her eyes dancing with merriment, yet tender. Her warm lips were smiling, half-parted.

Chuckling, Benny slipped his arms around her.

"And I love you!" he said.

THE END

WOODEN CLOTHES

A PATENT recently issued covers a process whereby the bark fiber of the redwood tree is converted into a wool substitute. At present over five tons of this "Fiber A" is shipped daily to eastern textile mills by the Pacific Lumber Company, of San Francisco.

Officials of the lumber company claim the redwood fiber can be used to replace 40% of the wool now used to make blankets, clothes, etc.

Several years ago, it was discovered that the short fibers in the bark that collected in mats and spun balls on the screen-belts that separate the long fibers possessed felting characteristics. The short fibers were of little value, while the long fibers became insulating material.

The research staff of the company developed machinery to recover and segregate the new fiber and also conducted experiments on its felting property with the idea of finding a market for the by-product. In collaboration with a large woolen company, the staff made many tests which

proved that the redwood bark fibers would interfelt and intermat with wool fibers to form a strong fabric. Wool shortage caused by the war speeded up tests until they were perfected.

The textile mills are now able to produce a fabric by combining the short fibers with natural wool fibers. The blend is carded, combed, and spun into yarn which can be woven or knitted into fabrics which closely resemble pure wool fabrics. The wood fiber in the material ranges from fifteen to sixty per cent of the combination and will produce a lighter weight cloth than pure wool. The combination fabric not only saves wool, but also is cheaper.

It was not so long ago that the bark of the redwood tree was all waste when the tree was only used to produce lumber. Today, thanks to scientific research, the long fibers of the bark are used to make Palco Wool, an insulator for cold storage and meat packing, and the short fibers are processed into a wool substitute.

IT'S AN INTERESTING WORLD!

By WESLEY ROLAND

SPIDERS AID THE WAR EFFORT

ABOUT two hundred spiders are working overtime to fill Uncle Sam's requirements for hair-lines used in making gun sights and periscopes.

The spider's silk is obtained by permitting the spiders to "escape" one at a time from a community cage. The spiders immediately head for the window where they are recaptured. During their "escape" the silk is formed.

* * *

FAT WOMEN MORE JOLLY

IT IS a common belief that fat women are better natured than thin ones and now Dr. Winfred Overholser of St. Elizabeth's Hospital at Washington gives a scientific explanation for this belief.

According to Dr. Overholser, the plump person possesses a feeling of security and well-being which makes them feel free to laugh and be gay. Lean people as a rule have less vigor and less sense of security, which forces them to feel that they must take life more seriously. Moreover, stout women feel that they are not so attractive as slim women and try to offset this handicap with good humor and a reputation of being good company.

* * *

FLORIDA TREE OYSTERS

MANY strange things live in the Florida swamps and one of the strangest are the oysters that live in trees. The oysters usually live in groups and each group attaches itself to the root of a mangrove tree. Half of their life is spent submerged in water and the other half is spent on "land" depending upon whether it is high or low tide.

The tree oysters differ in structure from ordinary oysters, which would not be able to live if they were regularly out of water for six hours at a time, which is the tide interval. The oyster group looks almost like a plant and is often mistaken for some sort of fungus growth by those not familiar with it.

* * *

THE GARBAGE PAIL IS DOOMED

A NEW device has been put on the market which should soon prove to be a welcome addition to every woman's kitchen. It is manufactured by the In-Sink-Erator Manufacturing Company, of Racine, Wisconsin, who claim that it can do away with the need for a garbage pail in the kitchen.

The device is attached to the drain of the sink

and is so simple that any plumber can handle the installation. The main works of the device consist of an automatic reversing motor and rotor shredder which grinds, shreds, and pulverizes any food wastes put into it. Instead of having to throw bones, scraps, peelings, cigarette butts, and the like in a garbage pail, all the housewife does is throw them into the sink and turn on the water. The device grinds up the refuse which is flushed away by the water into the sewer system without clogging it.

Moreover, the invention is self-sharpening and self-cleaning, which definitely puts an end to the garbage problem. The only things the device cannot handle are metal and crockery.

* * *

MOVIES MIRROR LIFE

MOVIE producers continually strive to make their pictures portray life as it really exists. The major studios have therefore issued a general rule that in every crowd scene depicting the present day in the larger cities, one extra in every fifteen should be dressed in a military uniform, which is the average proportion of soldiers, sailors, and marines seen among the civilian population in actual life.

* * *

A LARGER CROP THROUGH SCIENCE

EXPERIMENTS with the effects of plant hormones have brought about larger yields per acre of several field crops. Satisfactory results were obtained by treating the seeds before sowing and by spraying the plants with plant hormones while they grew. According to Professor J. C. Ireland of Oklahoma A. and M. College, who supervised large-scale tests, the plant hormone he found to be most beneficial was levulinic acid, which is made at low cost from waste material.

Cotton seeds and cowpeas responded the best when treated with levulinic acid, showing a fifty per cent increase in yields over untreated seeds. In addition, it was discovered that dusting the plants with soyflour mixed with one per cent levulinic acid during the flowering periods aided in the setting of bolls.

First results show that the process is highly profitable for the farmers. The costs of materials needed to effectively treat an acre of crops with levulinic acid runs around \$3.00, but the treated acre will yield about 840 pounds of cotton valued at \$134, while an untreated acre yields only 581 pounds valued at \$93. If results continue to be good, the cotton farmer will reap huge benefits.

Madagascar



He drew a careful bead on the figure in the boat

Ghost

By CLEE GARSON

Into the harbor came a boat
and in it rode a passenger
who was Terror's incarnation

FOREWORD

ALTHOUGH this narrative concerns the fall of the port of Diego Suarez to the surprise attack of the British in the early part of 1942, the action of that memorable battle is but a background for the weird, though authentic, story that was enacted on the island of Madagascar during the attack on that vital French naval base.

This story was gleaned in part from two British Marines who were in the action which gained a certain obscure beachhead on the coast below Diego Suarez; from the papers that were found on the bodies of three Japanese naval officers after the battle was over; and from the tragic official history of a once brilliant soldier in the army of France who learned many years too late what patriotism meant.

Parts of this narrative are supposition. The bulk of it is fact. And the suppositions fit so flawlessly into the few breaches in the facts that it seems hardly fair to consider them purely imaginary. Certainly there is no supposition in what was told to us by the British Marines. The records of the French Military Courts will also show, beyond any doubt, the veracity of our description of the case of Colonel Jacques Chambreaux. There are volumes obtainable in any library on the rites and witchcraft still prevalent in



certain tribes of the Malagasy natives who inhabit many desolate sections of Madagascar.

However, though the background of the story occurred against the struggle for the naval base at Diego Suarez in the early part of 1942, the chain of circumstances which began this incredible narrative date somewhat farther back. It is best that we start at the very beginning therefore. . . .

* * *

THERE were some who said that the sentence imposed on Colonel Jacques Chambreaux at the conclusion of his trial before the Military Court in Paris, 1927, was far too severe. True, the handsome colonel had been guilty of certain indiscretions in revealing matters of some small military significance to the agents of alien powers. And true, he had been paid well for his perfidy to his fatherland.

But it must be remembered France was not then at war, and even the thought of another war, another bloody, draining conflict with any alien power for the centuries to come was ridiculous. Had not the final war been won? Were not the enemies of France beaten so utterly that they would never rise again?

"The colonel betrayed his uniform, his country and himself," many said. "But in fact he has not harmed France. Strip him of his uniform, therefore. Sentence him to penal servitude, then exile. That will be enough."

But the military tribunal was not of this mind. The sentence they imposed upon the shaken, gray-faced ex-officer was that of lifetime imprisonment in the bleakest of France's African penal colonies. Lifetime imprisonment in such a place was the same as a death decree.

And thus, in 1927, Jacques Chambreaux, ex-colonel of the French Mili-

tary Intelligence Service, looked for the last time at the land of his birth as he was taken in chains to the certain death that waited in the festering heat of an African prison hell.

Somehow, through the bitter years that followed, Jacques Chambreaux, a gaunt, sunken eyed ghost of a man who had aged a hundred years in eight, clung frantically to life, planning, plotting, waiting for the day of his escape. And after ten endless, hellish years, that day arrived.

There were three of them; a thin, rat-faced gangster from the Paris slums; a bald, fat, pig-eyed murderer from Bordeaux; and Jacques Chambreaux.

They made their escape at dawn, and cut their way through the treacherous jungles for twelve days, seeking the eastern coastline of Africa. A crocodile tore the leg from the rat-faced Parisian thug; and Chambreaux and the murderer from Bordeaux went onward, leaving their dying companion to be eaten by white ants.

At the end of the ten days the last of their water gave out. And on the eleventh day, the big-bellied, pig-eyed Bordeaux murderer, collapsed in a whimpering agony of thirst and fatigue. Jacques Chambreaux, eyes glazed with fever sheen, stumbled on, leaving his last comrade where he fell.

On the twelfth day, Chambreaux found the coastline and the small, scantily provisioned boat that had been left there by natives who'd been bribed before the escape.

He had done excellently, succeeded in the impossible. He'd had but a small compass and a knowledge of stellar reckoning. But of course this Jacques Chambreaux had once been an officer in the army of France. His training had given him some advantage.

Chambreaux lay there on the beach

for a day regaining his strength. It was all the time he could allow, in spite of the fever which was now raging through this parched body. He was not foolish enough to think that pursuit didn't follow. And so he dragged himself into that small, leaky, open boat, and with nothing but his pocket compass, set out to cross the Mozambique Channel to Madagascar, a distance well over two hundred miles.

THE voyage that followed could not be counted in days. Agony of fever, the broiling brutality that was the sun, a storm in which the small remaining water cask was lost—these things were each an eternity of torture for Jacques Chambreaux. It was through chance and nothing more that his small boat was blown into a desolate cove on the western coast of northern Madagascar. And it was also by chance that boat and occupant were discovered by a band of scarcely civilized Malagasy jungle tribesmen.

Chambreaux was beyond delirium when these natives carried him from the beach cove into the jungle. He'd been unconscious for many hours before they had discovered him.

And so the penal fugitive, the bearded skeleton who had once been a colonel in the army of France, was beyond knowing or caring what was happening to him as these Malagasy tribesmen, eyes weirdly agleam in the torchlight, carried him along the jungle pathway to the throbbing drums sounding forth from their distant campfire.

Chambreaux was dying. The natives were aware of that. But the drums boomed, and around the fires the tribal witch doctors waited. This spectre of a white man must be brought to them. For had not the tribal Gods given this creature to them?

The Malagasy hurried on through

the jungle blackness toward those booming drums, carrying ever so gently this strange offering from the Gods. The witch doctors would know. . . .

CAPTAIN MATSUKI of the Imperial Japanese Navy was impatient. The blundering fool was already several hours late, and even though the distance from Diega Suarez through the jungle to this meeting point was considerable, the idiot should have reckoned with it and started on time to arrive as scheduled.

The captain was tall for a Japanese, lean and stiff-backed. His face was clean shaven, even though he had been here in the jungle for a number of weeks. He wore glasses, a pith helmet, brown military shirt and brown military shorts. His legs, to just below his ludicrously skinny brown knees, were encased in expensive leather boots.

Around the captain's waist was strapped a cartridge belt and a holstered automatic pistol. A canteen, slung from his shoulder, dangled at his waist on the side opposite the holster.

From a distance, and ignoring the pistol, Captain Matsuki would give you the impression of a bewildered oriental Boy Scout. But that smooth shaven face was hard, and his thin lips viciously sadistic in their set expression of anger. Even the thick lenses of his spectacles could not completely hide the arrogance and fanaticism that burned in his button eyes.

The captain had two companions, both lieutenants in the Imperial Japanese Navy. As befitting their lower rank they stood apart in the jungle clearing, watching their captain silently and with a little fright.

"The time passes," hissed the plump one of the two lieutenants, a short, moustached young Jap named Kushamo. "The time passes and that per-

son is not yet here. Our captain's anger grows great."

The other lieutenant, small, dapper, and as young as Kushamo, nodded fearfully. "Perhaps he has been apprehended."

Lieutenant Kushamo shook his head. "It is not possible," he said firmly.

The dapper lieutenant, Tokamo by name, sucked his breath doubtfully and said nothing to this.

In the foreground of the clearing, Captain Matsuki turned in impatient irritation on his young lieutenants.

"Fools!" he snapped. "Must you hiss and gossip like younger sisters?"

Dapper little Lieutenant Tokamo coughed, averting his eyes. Fat young Lieutenant Kushamo removed his pith helmet and mopped his brow with his sleeve, concentrating his gaze on the trees overhead.

Captain Matsuki turned his attention back to the jungle pathway, reaching for a cigarette, lighting it, and glancing again at his wrist watch.

And at that instant the breathless messenger stumbled from the trail into the clearing.

HE WAS an older man than the captain and the lieutenants. He was small, almost incredibly thin, with flesh that was arriving at the dryness of parchment. He was Japanese.

"So!" Captain Matsuki snapped. "At last you come!" He glared at the breathless, scrawny older man who stood gasping before him.

"I could not help myself, honorable Captain," the messenger gasped pleadingly. "Much happens in the port of Diego Suarez. Rumors are everywhere and the French have doubled the guards throughout the city."

The captain's lips went flat against his teeth in an expression that was not intended for a smile.

"The Americans," he said. "They expect them, eh?"

The messenger shook his head doubtfully. "None know," he panted. "Some say it will be the pig English who will come. But attack is expected, and soon. Of that there is no doubt."

"Then we cannot leave too quickly," Captain Matsuki declared. "You arranged for the boat that will pick us up?"

The messenger nodded. "That has been arranged."

"How far distant from here will it be?"

"A day and a half journey," the messenger said.

The captain turned, waving his hand for Lieutenants Kushamo and Tokamo to join him. To them he repeated what the messenger had told him.

"It is therefore imperative that we return with the information we have gathered," the captain concluded, "before any such attack by either the British or American dogs is made on Diego Suarez. Had my suggestions before the Imperial Strategy Board but a month ago been heeded, Japan would at this moment be ready to strike before the dogs of the United Nations. Madagascar would then be ours."

"You think the attack is coming, honorable Captain?" plump Lieutenant Kushamo had the temerity to ask.

Captain Matsuki turned on him with biting sarcasm. "Do you think the words of this fool messenger are jest?" he demanded. "Do you think the fact that I persuaded my superiors to permit me this secret mission was based on anything else than the assumption that the United Nations will try to seize Madagascar? Do you think that the refusal of the French swine at Diego Suarez to accept Japanese or German troops to help them should

such an attack be ventured was based on anything more than their own realization that the attempt is near?"

Lieutenant Kushamo bowed before the lash of the captain's words, not venturing reply.

But Matsuki continued, apparently releasing some of the rancor that he'd felt at the stupidity of his superiors in not realizing the clarity of the picture as well as he had.

"But you could be excused for your ignorance, Kushamo. You are after all but an underling. My superiors were inexcusably negligent in not heeding my advice. Through their deafness, they will find that the United Nations will seize this island before our forces have time to act."

"But our very mission," put in dapper young Lieutenant Tokamo, "that of finding suitable territory for parachute invasion, has been successfully accomplished. When we supply the information we have gathered here to our superiors, they will be pleased."

Captain Matsuki glared at his underling. He had long considered Lieutenant Tokamo almost insolent and far too ambitious. It occurred to the captain that perhaps he had been unwise in criticizing his superiors before one as likely to talk as Tokamo. But his anger forced him to snap a reply.

"They will be pleased," he said, "and able to take this island from the United Nations at great cost and at a later date. But had they planned to beat the British or Americans to its seizure, they would have found the cost incredibly small, the capture easy."

Dapper Lieutenant Tokamo said nothing to this. He smiled slightly, and the Captain's irritation and suspicion was increased by that smile.

The captain turned on the messenger.

"It is decided, then, that we start at once for our meeting with the vessel

which will take us from this accursed island before it falls into completely hostile hands. You will guide us."

The messenger nodded. "As you wish, honorable Captain. But perhaps if we were to wait until nightfall, we would find that we'd time our journey so as to pass through a slightly dangerous marsh section by day."

"We will start immediately," Captain Matsuki declared in cold irritation. He turned to the Lieutenants Kushamo and Tokamo, as if defying them to suggest any other course.

"I shall break our camp, Captain," Lieutenant Kushamo said meekly. Lieutenant Tokamo merely smiled faintly again, to the growing irritation of Captain Matsuki. . . .

THE British Marines on the deck of the low-slung little troop carrier, sat with backs against a series of starboard hatch covers, cupping their cigarettes in their palms as they smoked, in compliance with general dimout orders aboard the ship.

Tension had been high throughout the carrier all that day, for all the men were completely aware that they were very close to their destination.

A wiry little cockney corporal voiced the sentiments of his regiment conversationally.

"The blinking zero hour's creeping up on us, m'lads. We'll have our spot of action before another night is over."

A Canadian youth grinned at this.

"I've wondered what sort of scrap those Frenchies are capable of putting up. We'll know damned soon."

"Blyme, they'll fight orlright," the cockney corporal promised. "They'll fight to beat hell, for the principle of the thing if nothing more. We'll have a tiff of it."

"They made a mess of it in France," the Canadian youth ventured. "I can't

see how they'll do much more here."

The cockney corporal shook his head. "In France they was sold down the river by their own politicians, my boy. They was too confused to know right from left, an 'itler's panzers ran over 'em before they found out. 'Ere it's different. These 'ere are French colonials. The best French fighters. You'll find out."

"If you ask me," persisted the Canadian youth, "they ought to be glad to see us coming instead of the Japs."

The cockney corporal grinned. "If you ask me, they *will* be glad to see us as is coming, instead of them Japs. But they'll fight nonetheless. Them Frenchies is all tangled up in their minds. They've been sold out at 'ome, and 'aven't got it quite clear now as to wot they're fighting for. But they'll fight."

The Canadian youth grinned.

"I hope so. I'm itching for a real go," he declared.

"You've not long to wait," the cockney corporal promised. . . .

GASTON PRENEAU, soldier of France, lounged nonchalantly against the side of a machine-gun emplacement just at the fringe of a remote Madagascar beach.

Preneau was calm enough for a man who had listened more than two months to the rumors of a possible attack on this colonial possession of his country.

From his superior officers Preneau had learned to scoff at such rumors and, although admitting their possibility, deride their probability.

"Not right now," he told himself. "Not at this time. We are not a strong garrison, but we are well defended. There are the shoals, and mines and reefs to protect any possible landing beachheads from invasion."

Preneau told himself this again, as

he turned lazily to peer out at the heavy fog mists that shrouded the beach. Told himself again, while wishing with all his heart and soul for the simple pleasure of a cigarette.

Ever since the entrance of the Jap dogs into the world conflict, when the British blockade of Madagascar had begun, Preneau had felt increasingly the lack of such luxury-necessity items as cigarettes. True enough, there were occasional cigarettes to be had in the shops at Diego Suarez itself. But here on outpost duty, one had little chance to keep a sufficient supply on hand. And now, with his own stock already exhausted over a week, Preneau found himself rather wishing that somehow all this would end. The fever point of excitement in Madagascar had lasted too long already. The speculation as to who would strike at them, and when, had gone too far for mere speculation.

As for himself, Preneau felt more and more with each passing day that perhaps an invasion—by forces other than the hated Jap—would be a welcome relief.

There would be the necessity of defending French honor with battle, of course. Preneau knew this. He had been a colonial soldier of France too long to think of smokeless surrender.

"Yes," he thought aloud, "we will fight if the British come. If the Americans come," he shrugged, "perhaps not. But in any case, we fight to the death should the yellow Jap come."

Preneau speculated on how good a cigarette would taste, and realized that the coming of either the Americans or British would mean a dropping of the blockade and a return of plentiful supplies for the garrison and the people in Diego Suarez.

He sighed and stretched, and turned completely to gaze down at the beach cove, leaning on the sandbagging of

the emplacement with his elbows.

To his ears, faintly, came the throb of jungle drums. He frowned. The Malagasy tribe in this locality had been hard at their stupid rites for over two days and nights, now. He'd heard those drums off and on ever since then.

"At least," he told himself wearily, "we have no trouble from them. A small boon for which one can be thankful."

And as if in answer, the drums continued to throb dully in the distance. Gaston Preneau sighed. Such an annoyance to one who slept as lightly as he. . . .

THE small party had halted for rest at a fork in the jungle trail. Captain Matsuki, sitting apart from the rest, fixed his guide, the Jap messenger of that afternoon, with a contemptuous gaze.

"Tell me, my muddle-head," the captain asked sarcastically, "why is it you find territory you are supposed to know well so confusing?"

The messenger, eyes fixed on the ground, answered without looking up.

"I have tried to explain, honorable one, that something has been changed in the trail markings. The Malagasy tribe in this vicinity obviously is engaged in some strange rites. And on such occasions they sometimes unaccountably—perhaps to hide their tribal camp—tamper with trail markings. I am forced to go more slowly than usual because of this fact."

"Your hide will be worthless should you so delay us as to miss contact with the boat," Captain Matsuki said angrily. "Keep that in your slow mind, fool."

Captain Matsuki saw his lieutenants, Tokamo and Kushamo, whispering together a few yards away. His anger grew greater. He rose to his feet and

stepped swiftly across the trail until he stood above them.

"I shall find much to report on the aides assigned me when we return!" Matsuki flared. "Neither of you has been capable of anything but stupidity and woman gossip since we have been here!"

The captain wheeled to the old guide.

"We must get on again. There is no chance for rest since you are so slow. I cannot risk missing that boat."

Suddenly, as the others rose, from deep in the jungle came the throb of native drums.

"The Malagasy rites again," the old guide said. "The drums sound nearer than before."

"We have not time to be concerned with the ignorant monkey ceremonies of natives!" Captain Matsuki snarled. "Please remember that. And speed your doddering steps, ancient one!"

Wordlessly, the lieutenants fell in behind their captain, who in turn had stepped behind the old Japanese who guided them along the trail. The night had deadened some of the oppressive heat of the jungle, but inside of a hundred yards each of the party was once more drenched in sweat.

The drums continued to throb ceaselessly during the next two hours of their trek; and on two occasions the old guide stopped, as if listening, gulping nervously before going on.

Another hour passed, and it was shortly after this that the old guide at their lead stopped suddenly in a small clearing, his eyes wide with fear as he turned back to face Captain Matsuki.

He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came.

"Well?" Matsuki spat.

The old man found voice. "The drums, honorable Captain. Do they not seem louder, clearer than before?"

Captain Matsuki's lips went tight.

"Of course, fool! What has that to do with our route?"

The old Japanese seemed to choke on the words he stammered. "I am afraid, honorable Captain, that we are lost!"

Captain Matsuki stared at the old man for fully a minute, his eyes flashing cold hate behind the thick lenses of his spectacles. Save for the drums in the distance, throbbing more loudly now, there was nothing but silence.

"Dog!" Captain Matsuki hissed. "This then is the climax of your ten bungling years on this island as a secret servant to the Son of Heaven?"

"The tribal—" the old man started.

But the captain had his pistol from its holster in a split second. He fired from the hip, twice, both shots burying themselves within a quarter inch of each other in the old man's forehead. The old man fell face forward to the jungle path.

CAPTAIN MATSUKI replaced his smoking gun in its holster, his eyes flashing wrath as he turned on his open-mouthed lieutenants.

"We have our compasses," he grated. "They will serve us better than the fool of whom we are now rid. If we reach the coastline we can follow the beaches to the rendezvous arranged. The old fool told me its location."

Lieutenant Tokamo answered him. "We have our compasses, truly, honorable captain. Nonetheless, between the coastline and ourselves lie swampland and many lagoons. It might have been wiser to let the old man live, since at least he was aware of the terrain."

Captain Matsuki blinked at this arrogant defiance. Then his lips went tight, and his hand slipped toward his holster. His dapper young lieutenant, however, imitated the gesture, dropping his hand to his own gun.

"The captain will forgive my sugges-

tions," Lieutenant Takamo said silkily. "But I believe you have needlessly endangered our mission and our cause."

Captain Matsuki's eyes were fixed on his underling's gun hand, still held inches from his holster. He wet his lips, his eyes moving to the plump, round faced, moustached Lieutenant Kushamo. Young Kushamo's expression, somewhat frightened, nevertheless indicated that he was playing a strictly neutral role.

"If you imagine—" Matsuki began, turning his eyes back to dapper Lieutenant Tokamo.

Lieutenant Kushamo's gasp cut off the sentence his captain had started. The eyes of both Lieutenant Tokamo and Captain Matsuki went to the plump lieutenant.

Kushamo was pointing, jaw agape, at a figure standing in the darkness of the trail bend just ahead of them. Pointing and staring in wide eyed horror.

They stood there, all three of them, numb with astonishment as a figure advanced, lurching toward them, as if operated puppet-like by wires.

The figure was a creature of rags and filth, a bearded skeleton of a human being; a staring, expressionless spectre of a man. And as he moved toward them, his lurching robot-like walk seemed to have affinity to the rhythm of the jungle drums in the distance.

Captain Matsuki was the first to speak.

"Halt!" he cried. "Who are you? Identify yourself!" Forgetting himself he spoke in Japanese. Now he repeated his command in French.

The creature continued toward them, apparently unhearing, and the captain, his voice rising a notch, squealed his command in English.

But the strange figure didn't halt. His deep, sunken hollows of eyes stared straight ahead, his shambling steps

lurched ever forward, the death mask that was his face fixed vacantly on nothingness.

He was less than a dozen yards away when Captain Matsuki whipped his gun from the holster at his side, pointing it dead bead on the tattered spectre.

"Halt!" Matsuki shrieked, "or I fire!"

IT WAS Lieutenant Tokamo who stepped quickly in between his captain and the advancing stranger. Stepped in between to knock the barrel of Matsuki's gun aside.

"Do not be a fool, captain!" young Tokamo grated. "This strange person is unarmed. He cannot harm us. He looks to be the ravages left of a white man long gone jungle mad. We can force him to guide us to the coastline!"

The captain glared at his lieutenant, lips working in wrath and indignation at what amounted to open rebellion by young Tokamo.

"He is right, captain!" It was fat little Kushamo's voice that broke forth now. "This strange person can well guide us to the coastline, through the stinking lagoons and past the worst swamplands."

Captain Matsuki did the only thing he could; he nodded, shoving his gun back into its holster.

"Perhaps you are right, Tokamo," he said. "I will question this person." But the captain had lost face, and all three of them knew it.

Matsuki turned to the still slowly advancing tattered stranger, holding up his hand.

"Halt!" Matsuki shouted in French. And for the first time the gaunt, filthy travesty of a human being seemed to hear. The shuffling, robot-like steps of the creature slowed draggily, then stopped. He stood there in the clearing, perhaps six feet from the three Jap-

anese, swaying slightly, those sunken eyes staring unseeingly straight ahead.

"Who are you?" Matsuki demanded.

There was no answer. The creature still swayed stupidly before them, his death mask of a face expressionless behind the filthy matting of white beard.

"Who are you? Speak up!" Matsuki cried again.

There was a sudden croaking, half-human noise rattling in the throat of the tattered parody of a man. That was all.

Matsuki turned on Tokamo. "What did he say?"

The dapper young lieutenant shook his head.

"I could not understand."

"It matters not," Matsuki decided. "Can you direct us to the coastline, idiot?" he demanded.

The creature swayed there, unanswering, apparently uncomprehending.

Again Matsuki repeated his question. The result was no better the second time. Tokamo stepped up.

"We might make signs," the dapper young lieutenant said, "to indicate to this mad person what it is we want."

Slowly, then, with infinite patience, Tokamo began a sign ritual before the stranger. He repeated his gestures perhaps a dozen times, until at last the sunken eyes of the thing seemed to be aware of what he was trying to convey. There was another rattling, unintelligible croak from the throat of the mad person, and a gesture that seemed to mean a nod. Tokamo turned triumphantly to his captain.

"The mad person understands," he said. "We must follow him. I am certain he will lead us to the coastline."

Matsuki was about to open his mouth in protest, when the weird creature turned and started across the small clearing in the direction from which he had originally come. He had gone some

ten feet, then stopped, swaying, looking back over his shoulder.

"You see?" said Tokamo excitedly. "He means for us to follow him!"

Matsuki muttered something unintelligible, and the three started out after the filthy, tattered spectre that was the new guide. The mad person, on seeing that they followed, turned again and lurched onward, his steps still strangely in time with the cadence of the booming jungle drums in the distance. . . .

SEVERAL hours had passed, and the three still followed their strange guide through the tangled trail forks of the jungle. For the past two hours the drums had been growing increasingly loud in their ears, until even cocky young Tokamo had exchanged several pale, speculative glances with his captain.

The mad person, still shuffling at that awkward gait, remained ahead of them, pausing only so often to see that they still followed. And the route over which he took them was rapidly exhausting the three Japs.

It was Matsuki who at last expressed their fears in words.

"If this route leads to the coastline," he grumbled suspiciously, "it is a round-about one. And those drums grow far too strong to suit me." He glared accusingly at Tokamo, as if all this were his fault.

The dapper lieutenant returned Matsuki's accusing stare. "You were able to choose or not, honorable captain."

It was then that the drums ceased booming. Quite completely. The utter silence in the jungle was suddenly nerve shattering.

All three halted, staring at one another wordlessly. A few yards ahead of them, their spectre-like guide had paused also, as if listening.

And then Kushamo spoke, excitedly.

"Hear it, ever so faintly, the noise of surf in the distance? We are somewhere near the coastline!"

Captain Matsuki bent his head. "Yes, I think, but—"

The savage whooping yells cut him off. In fact they blanketed the trail section in a bedlam of noise and confusion. Shrill, wildly blood-lusting, the shrieks came from everywhere around them.

And then the Malagasy were all around the three Jap officers. Malagasy, bearing knives, spears and clubs.

Matsuki only had time to grab frantically for the holstered pistol at his side. And in the corner of his vision he saw their mad guide, the tattered, filthy, half-human jungle creature, swaying there on the trail ahead of them, staring blankly at the ambush he had led them into.

Captain Matsuki cursed, and went quite a little mad himself. His gun was in his hand, kicking back with each of the three shots he sent crashing toward the tattered madman.

Then stinking brown arms were wrapped tightly around Matsuki's body, and he was hurled heavily to the earth. The shouting and shrieking were even louder than before, and the Jap captain knew that Tokamo and Kushamo were also buried beneath the avalanche of brown fury that had descended on them.

Hideous, painted faces leered down at Captain Matsuki, and thongs bit deep into his legs and wrists and ankles. And then he knew that they were not going to kill him—yet. He knew, and wished to his Shinto gods that he had saved for himself the shots he'd sent crashing into the mad one.

The drums began to crash loudly all around them again, and Matsuki, Tokamo and Kushamo, trussed helplessly to poles carried by painted Malagasy,

were carried off into the jungle darkness.

At the side of the trail, those sunken eyes still staring blankly, his filthy, tattered body bent just a little forward, swayed the mad person who had guided them.

In his chest there were three separate holes, bullet holes from Matsuki's shots. A black ooze seeped from each of them. An ooze that was not at all like blood. . . .

THE small landing boats slipped silently into the coastal beach cove. The British Marines, crouching low in the gunwales, peered through the soupy fog as best they could, holding their breaths and counting off the passing seconds. Any moment now. The guns of the French behind the emplacements just back on the beach were not in action yet, proving that they were still unaware of the coming attack.

It was the hour just before dawn. The hour when the fog was thickest, steaming up from the jungle and in from the sea. The cockney corporal nudged the young Canadian beside him.

"All set, lad?" he whispered.

The Canadian youth, now unsmiling, face taut, merely nodded. The boats slipped on through the water. Now they were inside the cove harbor itself.

And then the drums boomed forth.

Drums, shouting, savage yells, and suddenly three flaring fires shooting skyward on the beach, as if from three gigantic torches. The machine guns on the beach emplacements began then, chattering a sudden angry staccato of death. And the men in the small boats slipping up toward the beach caught their first glimpses of the brown, painted, leaping figures around those gigantic flaming torches.

They heard next the shrill screams of pain from those leaping painted brown

men, screams of pain and death as the machine guns continued to chatter.

"Something on the beach," the cockney corporal gasped, "something looking awfully close to native trouble. Those machine guns aren't firing at us. The Frenchies are firing right into that swarm of 'owling natives!"

It was all over amazingly soon. The savages still alive fled in confusion to the jungle, leaving their dead littering the beach. The machine gun fire changed to tommy gun pursuit as the French soldiers on the beach emplacements chased the Malagasy back into the jungle. The drums had stopped completely, and the gigantic torches burned high, giving the British Marines perfect assistance in landing on the beachhead.

When the French returned from their chase of the Malagasy, the British had landed and had their garrison very well in hand. A few sporadic exchanges of shots—for the purposes of honor—and it was at an end.

It was then that they turned their attention to extinguishing the huge ceremonial torches which had been set on the beach by the Malagasy. The cockney corporal and his young Canadian friend were part of the detail assigned to this task. The job didn't take long, but it proved extremely sickening when the torches were removed from the tops of the poles.

The torches had been human bodies. Scarcely recognizable bodies now, true enough, with just enough left of the charred remains to show they had once been the bodies of three Japanese.

Papers found in the clothing, stripped from the three human torches and left on the beach, identified the Japanese as naval officers in the service of the Son of Heaven. There was a Captain Matsuki, a Lieutenant Tokamo, and another Lieutenant Kushamo.

And scarcely fifteen minutes after this unpleasant task had been concluded, the cockney corporal and his young Canadian friend were assigned to either side of the cove heads, just in case there was any further mopping up to be done.

It was the corporal who sighted the decrepit little open boat with the useless, tattered sail. It was drifting almost without direction just off the end of the cove harbor opening, and there was someone in it.

The corporal shouted three times for the occupant of the boat to rise with both hands above his head. But the dimly outlined figure in the small drifting boat seemed only to crouch lower in the stern.

So the corporal was forced to fire.

FROM a range of twenty yards he couldn't miss. Two shots, each boring into the skull of the boat's occupant, did the trick. And then the corporal managed to bring the little craft into the bank.

It was then that the corporal almost lost his dinner for the second time in half an hour. The corporal was hardy, and a soldier, but the charred bodies which had served as torches were gruesomely sickening enough—and this decaying, tattered, long-dead shell of a human being that he found in the stern of the little boat was almost too much.

For the body *must* have been dead for some time. The stench was hideous. The corporal identified his own two bullet holes in the skull of the creature, and another three holes in its chest.

"Oo else'as shot this bloody, bloomin'-corpse?" the corporal shuddered.

And then he wondered aloud: "And

'ow did it get here?"

He found the small wrist band, then. Green and moldy, and he had to close his eyes when he removed it from the corpse. Later, when he scraped it off, it proved to be an identification tag.

But by the time the corporal had dragged the body in the boat around to the beach for the inspection of his superior officers, it had quite impossibly decomposed.

The corporal's protestations were in vain. His superior officers knew better than to believe that this body, obviously dead for a matter of at least four years, could have been in the state of preservation the corporal said it was when he first found it.

"Dead men can't be kept alive for that long, old boy," one officer told the corporal kindly. "What you saw in the boat was just the same decayed human rubble you brought to us. You must have been the victim of an optical illusion."

Quite possibly, the superior officer was correct. Dead bodies *shouldn't* remain in the state of living bodies for that many years then suddenly decompose. They shouldn't, even though written legend has it that certain tribes of the Malagasy natives practice the black witchcraft of zombie-ism and death suspension.

But later, when the corporal told his tale in the bars at Diego Suarez, displaying the green molded identification tag he'd taken from the corpse before it crumbled in decay, there were some who blinked in astonishment at the name on it.

The name that read: "*Jacques Chambraux, Col. M.I.S.*"

THE END

THE ICE QUEEN


January's Complete Feature Novel

By Don Wilcox


ROMANCE of the ELEMENTS—MERCURY

SPAIN'S ALMADEN MINE

STILL IMPORTANT AS A SOURCE OF MERCURY-BEARING CINNABAR, SENT TEN THOUSAND POUNDS OF THE ORE ANNUALLY TO ROME AS EARLY AS THE TIME OF CHRIST! NUMBER 1 CINNABAR USE THEN WAS FOR ROUGE. ABOUT 50 B.C. DIOSCORIDES OF GREECE SEALED AN IRON POT OF CINNABAR IN CLAY, ROASTED IT, GOT MERCURY!




FLOWING STREAMS OF QUICK-SILVER (MERCURY) WERE USED TO FORM THE OCEAN, THE YANGTSE AND THE YELLOW RIVERS ON A RELIEF MAP OF CHINA BURIED WITH THE EMPEROR CHI-HUNG-TI WHO DIED IN 210 B.C.




ALTHOUGH HE FAILED TO IDENTIFY MERCURY AS A METAL, GEBER 8TH CENTURY ARABIAN CHEMIST SUBLIMATED MERCURIC BICHLORIDE! SARACEN SCIENTISTS WERE TOP PHYSICIANS OF THE 800'S AND 900'S ONE OF THEM WAS FIRST TO APPLY MERCURY TO SKIN DISEASES.

50 YEARS BEFORE




ENGLISHMEN LANDED AT JAMESTOWN, BARTOLOMÉ DE MEDINA OF MEXICO DISCOVERED HOW QUICK-SILVER COULD BE USED TO MINE MORE SILVER; SPAIN'S "TAKE" OF SILVER LOOT FROM MEXICO AND PERU SKYROCKETED.

QUICKSILVER WAS USED IN CALIFORNIA DURING GOLD RUSH DAYS.



SMALL DOSES OF MERCURY PERCHLORIDE ARE HIGHLY TOXIC! PROBABLY THE WORLD'S MOST POTENT ANTISEPTICS, SAYS SCIENCE OF CERTAIN MERCURIC SALTS.



USE OF MERCURY IN VENEREAL DISEASE DATES BACK TO PARACELSUS, 16TH CENTURY CHEMIST.

MERCURY is number 80 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Hg and its atomic weight is 200.61. It is a silvery white liquid with a density of 13.569 at 0°. It freezes at -38.8° and boils at 357°. It is obtained by a process of heating the mineral cinnabar, a combined roasting and distillation of the vapor. It is used in the manufacture of drugs and chemicals (calomel, corrosive sublimate, mercury fulminate); in electrical apparatus, mercury vapor lamps, batteries, scientific instruments, also in dental amalgams. Used in Mercury-Vapor turbines.

(Next Month: The Romance of Nickel)

"Look!" he said harshly.
"How do you explain that?"





Marlow's Malicious Mirror

by JOHN
YORK CABOT

This mirror couldn't be trusted. It couldn't keep secret the things that were mirrored in its shiny depths. . .!

THE messenger boy looked up briefly at the small, ultra swanky lettering on the ornate, solid-glass door.

"bennet-hastings & co."

He sighed, then pushed his peaked cap defiantly back on his red locks, picked up the manila-wrapped, three-by-five package at his feet and strode breezily into the lavish, thick carpeted reception room beyond the door.

"I gotta package," he told the girl in the switchboard cubicle, "fer a Mister Scott Marlow. He work here?"

The girl at the board smiled. "Put it down, sonny. I'll sign for it."

Scott Marlow, Advertising and Promotion Manager for Bennet-Hastings and Company, sat at his very wide desk in his very big office and doodled worriedly with a crayon on a scratch pad.

Marlow was a tall, wide-shouldered man in his early thirties. His

hair was dark, with the faintest sign of premature gray at the temples, and his friendly, regular features and clean gray eyes were at the moment wearing an expression of sober contemplation.

When the trim, lovely, blonde young woman in the tailored gabardine suit walked in, Marlow looked up sharply, startled out of his moody concentration.

"Eh, oh, Joan," he said. *Damn, how I love you*, he thought.

"That letter to Oberman and Company, Mr. Marlow," Joan Kenny reminded the boss. She held a shorthand pad and pencil in her hand.

"Oh," Scott Marlow said. "Oh, yes. That's right."

Joan Kenny took a chair on the other side of the desk, put the pencil to the ready pad, and looked up expectantly. *Poor, poor, Scott, she thought. That she-wolf wife of his is driving him insane. It wouldn't be so bad if I didn't love him so!*

Marlow cleared his throat and looked up at the ceiling. *If I look at her directly I'll blurt out everything I feel about her. What a hell of a mess this is*, he thought.

Clearing his throat a second time, Marlow still looking at the ceiling, flushed.

"What was that letter about, Joan?" he asked embarrassedly.

"Their contemplated national promotion scheme," Joan Kenny reminded him patiently.

"Oh yes. That's right, isn't it?" Marlow said. *Her voice is like cool, clear little bells*, he thought.

It was fully a minute before Marlow realized he'd been off in another fog, and then he looked down quickly, flushing still more deeply.

"Dear sirs," he said hastily.

That was as far as he got. A knock sounded at that instant on his oak paneled door. Grateful for the interruption

Marlow swung slightly in his chair.

"Come in," he called.

An office boy entered, bearing a large three-by-five package wrapped in heavy manila paper.

"This arrived a few minutes ago for you, sir."

Marlow's dark eyebrows went up a notch in surprise.

"For me?"

"Yessir."

"That's funny," Marlow observed. He rose and walked around his desk, past lovely Joan Kenny. "I didn't expect any package."

The boy held onto the package as though his curiosity wouldn't permit him to release it.

"You can leave it here, Johnny," Marlow said.

THE boy flushed and left the room. Marlow had his hands on the package and it rested on one thin edge on the floor. Curiously, he inspected the lettering on it.

"For me all right," he said aloud. Then he grinned. "Well, I'll bet—Sure that's it. It's from old Julius Wolcott. I'll bet it's a picture."

Hastily, Marlow tore the wrappings from the package. Then, less than a minute later he was lifting it to his desk and propping it against the wall. The object proved to be a shining, antique mirror.

"Well I'll be damned," Marlow said. "I'll be damned."

"You've heard me mention old Julius Wolcott, Joan," Marlow was saying as he stood back to appraise the antique mirror. "He had an art studio here in town. He was a dealer, y'know. I used to buy a lot of things from him."

"There's a note in the wrappings," Joan Kenny observed.

Marlow went over and retrieved it. "That's right." He tore the envelope

open and pulled out a sheet of paper.

"Dear Scott," Marlow read aloud. "This is just a little something I dug up in a deserted attic. Thought you'd like it. Traced it back to find it once hung in the palace of Henry the Eighth. Don't try to send me a check for it. It's a gift."

Marlow shook his head. "Old Julius is in Philadelphia now," he mused. "Damned decent of him to remember me like this."

"I'll make a memo for you to thank him," Joan Kenny said.

Marlow nodded, abstracted by the mirror. "It's a fascinating thing, isn't it?"

"It seems very old," Joan Kenny answered tactfully.

Marlow forgot himself enough to grin. "I don't blame you for not being wild about it, Joan. I've always been a sucker for any antique. My house is full of 'em. This'll go wonderfully well in the drawing-room."

Joan Kenny was silent.

"Come around here and get a better look at it," Marlow invited.

Joan Kenny rose and started around to where the mirror was propped on the desk. The throw rug on the waxed, cork flooring took that instant to slide out from underfoot. Joan's foot.

Joan gave a sharp cry and threw out her arms in an attempt to regain her balance. And Scott Marlow moved instinctively to prevent her impending fall.

They found themselves hanging together in a mutually accidental embrace some five seconds later.

Marlow, arms around the girl, was suddenly, overpoweringly aware of the circumstances into which the near-accident had placed him. Joan's body was soft in his arms, and the scent of her perfumed hair frighteningly near to being irresistible.

It was then that they both turned to meet each other's glances, and found themselves gazing at their reflected embrace on the surface of the antique mirror.

Marlow released the girl quickly, shakily, then, after making certain she had regained her balance.

There was a wordless interval in which they regarded one another somewhat breathlessly.

"My," Marlow managed, drawing a deep breath, "My, that was close, wasn't it?"

"It was," Joan agreed. "It was very close." Her blue eyes shaded the meaning of her tone.

MARLOW reached for a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

Then, with hands that trembled, he lighted a cigarette.

"They shouldn't wax these floors so heavily," Marlow said in a poor attempt at a casual comment.

"I—I'll make a memo to that effect," Joan Kenny declared softly. "Shall we get on with the letter?"

"I think," said Marlow a trifle thickly, fumbling with his cigarette lighter as he endeavored to put it back in his pocket, "that we might as well put it off until tomorrow."

Joan Kenny watched him wordlessly.

Marlow ran a finger under his collar uncomfortably. "You have the notes and data for Mr. Bennet tonight after the dinner at my home?"

Joan Kenny nodded. "They're all prepared."

Mr. Bennet was the President of the firm, his original partner, Mr. Hastings, having been dead some fifteen years. Mr. Bennet was generally not around, confining himself almost exclusively to the New York office, of which this ornate establishment was just a branch.

"The dinner is at seven," Marlow said.

When Mr. Bennet passed through town, or stopped in on a branch office—even if it were the most important branch office—it was just as if God, with wrath in one hand and promotions in the other, had deigned to drop in at the factory of his heavenly employees. And the reason for Mr. Bennet's being in town on this particular occasion was his desire to talk with Scott Marlow about a move that might mean a substantial promotion to him.

"I won't be late," Joan Kenny promised.

Mr. Bennet generally liked to be entertained in the homes of his more important employees, and though Scott Marlow was not the most important employee in this branch, Bennet had hinted that he would like to discuss the new scheme at Marlow's home. He had advised, too, that Marlow bring his secretary along to handle what business they transacted after supper. Hence the inclusion of Joan Kenny.

"You'll be ready to get there all right in a taxi?" Scott Marlow asked the girl.

"Of course," she said. "But it's four now, and I'll have to dress for dinner."

Marlow crimsoned. "I'm sorry. That never occurred to me. Take what little there's left of the afternoon off. I'll see you at my house."

Joan Kenny nodded, turning to leave.

"Joan," Marlow said suddenly.

The girl turned, looking at him levelly. "Yes?"

Marlow seemed to choke. "Tell the office boys to wrap up this mirror and have it sent out to my house immediately, will you?"

Joan nodded. "I'll tell them on my way out," she promised.

Marlow watched her leave, a sick futility in his heart. His expression suddenly became one of wrathful self-

condemnation.

"Damn Natalie!" he exploded.

Natalie was Scott Marlow's wife. . . .

ALTHOUGH it was five o'clock when Marlow left the office, and his suburban home was but twenty-five minutes away in his roadster, nevertheless it was almost six-thirty when he pulled up into the driveway of his somewhat expensive residence.

The additional hour had been passed in a bar several blocks from the office, where Marlow had downed five scotches in solitary bitterness and with no noticeable effect.

Natalie, his wife, met him at the door. She'd evidently been waiting for him.

She was an attractive woman with a sultry body, raven black hair, and a sensuous, predatory red mouth. She had already dressed for dinner, and her gown, as well as her careful grooming, showed no little thought and some expense. Her eyes were so brown as almost to be black, and now they were flashing angrily.

"Rumpotting again, eh dear?" Natalie greeted him.

Marlow didn't bother to reply. He took in the almost artificial perfection of her appearance, and mentally decided that Natalie would consider herself no little factor in successfully molding Mr. Bennet into an amiable frame of mind tonight.

It was Natalie's constant, though highly inaccurate, assertion that whatever business and financial success Scott Marlow had achieved was due to nothing more than her own acumen and inspiration on his behalf. Certain it was that, from the moment they married, she had started an endless, nagging comparison between Marlow's position and the position of the

wealthier friends they knew. And no matter what success Marlow achieved, the nagging never ceased. There were always wealthier friends with whom she could compare him. For her goal was money and all that it could buy; even if the gaining of that sought-for fortune meant driving her spouse to an early grave.

Marlow had known from almost the second year of their marriage that Natalie had never loved him. Her attraction to him had been merely one of shrewd evaluation of his potential ability to rise high in the world of prestige and wealth.

But, stubbornly at first, he had tried to hang on, tried to make a go of the one thing in his life in which he'd failed. For six years, grimly, resolutely, he had tried to fashion in Natalie the girl he thought he'd married. And at the end of that time he found himself loathing her, waiting and watching for her to give him just one chance to obtain his freedom.

And in this past year, wanting his freedom had become an aching, terrible thing. For now there was Joan. Joan, whom he loved yet dared not love, until he was free of this bitter hell with Natalie.

Now Marlow took his eyes from his wife and stepped past her into the drawing-room where he removed his coat and fished for a cigarette.

He was lighting his smoke when Natalie followed him into the drawing-room, intent on continuing her one-sided quarrel.

"If you'd spend less time slopping around in bars, Scott Marlow," she said waspishly, "you'd have a clearer head for your business."

"You might point that out," Marlow said wearily, "to Bennet when he comes for dinner tonight." He sank down into an armchair.

"It's a wonder he hasn't found it out for himself by now," Natalie snapped.

Marlow, however, hadn't heard her. He was looking across the room at the antique mirror he'd had sent out. It had been hung just above a wall table to the right of the sofa.

"When did that arrive?" he asked.

Natalie's glance shifted from her husband to the mirror.

"Over an hour ago," she said. "That seemed to be the only place to put it. I wish you wouldn't clutter up the place with any more antiques."

"Julius Wolcott sent it to me as a gift," Marlow said, merely to keep the conversation on this new tack. "It's supposed to have hung in the palace of Henry the Eighth."

He could see Natalie making a mental note of that. She invariably sought to give the impression that her husband's art and antique collections were but the result of her own cultural perceptions. He knew that she would draw Bennet's attention to it casually that evening.

"Well if you bring in any more junk we just won't have room for it," Natalie declared.

Marlow didn't answer. He studied the mirror another moment and turned his glance away. It was then that he saw the framed photograph on the bookcase. He looked at it in open-mouthed amazement.

IT was an abominable picture of Mr. Bennet, wearing fisherman's hip boots, a weatherbeaten fedora, a flannel shirt, and a broad, beaming grin. In his right hand he held a fishing rod, and in his left a net. The photograph was loudly colored.

Marlow rose deliberately, crushing out his cigarette in an ash tray by his chair.

"Where in the hell did that come from?" he demanded quietly.

"It arrived today," Natalie told him. "Mr. Bennet sent it himself; a gift, I supposed."

"And what in the hell is it doing here in the living-room?" Marlow demanded coldly.

"Have you forgotten," Natalie said frigidly, "that Mr. Bennet is going to be our dinner guest tonight?"

"Take that down and bury it in some drawer," Marlow told her. His lips were set in a tight line.

"Are you crazy?" Natalie's voice rose shrilly.

"You heard what I said!"

"That will stay just where it is. If you haven't brains enough to know diplomacy when it hits you in the face, I have!" Natalie moved swiftly over to the picture, as if to protect it.

"I'll have no such stinking hypocrisy in my house!" Marlow blazed. "And if that damned old coot has the insufferable gall to expect me to decorate my living quarters with his image he can go straight to hell!"

Marlow stepped quickly to the bookcase, and Natalie moved swiftly between her husband and the photograph.

"You'll throw away a promotion and a ten thousand dollar raise for your lousy sense of moral integrity?" Natalie asked between clenched teeth. "Oh, no you won't. Not if I have anything to say about it!"

Marlow grabbed his wife roughly by the shoulder and spun her away from the bookcase. He grabbed up the photograph and, holding it in one hand, glared down at it in white rage.

"I've never licked boots to get along in this world yet. I don't intend to begin now," he said with restrained fury.

Natalie, rubbing her soft white shoulder where Marlow's hand had

left red prints, looked at him wide-eyed, but said nothing. She had never seen him so furiously enraged.

Marlow strode across the drawing-room, still holding the picture and glaring down at it wordlessly. Passing the couch, he paused, and as if acting on an instant decision, brought the picture smashing down on his knee, shattering the glass in the frame.

Then he tore the photograph itself loose, and determinedly ripped it to shreds. Face still white and mouth grim, he let the fragments flutter to the rug.

"Have the maid clean up this mess," he said evenly. "I'm going upstairs to dress for dinner."

Wordlessly, Natalie watched him stride out of the drawing-room. Her expression was half of fright and half of wonder . . .

WHEN Marlow returned to the drawing-room it was ten minutes to seven and he carried a highball in his hand. He had changed to a dinner jacket.

Natalie had been standing by the French windows at the end of the room, smoking a cigarette. She turned as she heard him enter. Her expression suggested that she had decided her husband needed to be put back in his place.

"I didn't like that nasty scene," she declared, her eyes moving accusingly to the drink in his hand.

Marlow took a gulp from his drink, moving over to the wall table on the right of the couch. He put down his drink and began to adjust his tie before the antique mirror over the table.

"Did you hear what I said?" Natalie demanded, her voice rising a note.

Marlow continued to adjust his tie. He answered his wife as he did so.

"Now seems to be just as good a

time as any to tell you I want a divorce," he said quietly. "I'm sick of this hypocrisy."

He heard Natalie's sharp intake of breath.

"What did you say?" Her voice was suddenly harsh.

"I want my freedom. You don't love me; you never have. This can't go on any longer." Marlow patted his tie and picked up his drink. He turned to face her, leaning back against the wall table.

Natalie's expression was one of shocked incredulity and mounting rage.

"So," she said venomously, "you've been playing around with some other woman, eh?"

"I was afraid," Marlow said dryly, "that that would be the only reason to occur to you. No. I haven't. Foolishly or not, I've been quite faithful to you, Natalie. Too faithful."

"What do you mean by that?" There was a sudden, unreadable expression in her dark eyes.

"Nothing," Marlow said, "except that I'm through."

The fleeting, unfathomable expression left Natalie's eyes. A look of shrewd cunning crossed her features. "I get it," she said. "You're dropping me by the wayside now that you expect to move into the forty thousand dollar a year class. I've been responsible for every last cent you've made. When I married you you didn't have a dime!"

"You're being a trifle melodramatic," Marlow reminded her quietly. "I was making several hundred a week at the time we married, with excellent prospects for the future. Unfortunately, you were well aware of those prospects, Natalie. You tied your wagon full of greed to a fairly certain star."

"You louse!" Natalie said shrilly. "Do you think I'm crazy? If you try

to divorce me I'll take every last cent you've got. I'll ruin every last shred of your reputation!"

"I was going to suggest," Marlow said levelly, "that you divorce me. Bring whatever charges you care to. I won't contest it. And as for alimony, you won't suffer."

"Alimony, hell!" Natalie spat. "I'm not going to divorce you. I'm not that mad, just when your really big chance is coming. And as for your Little Lord Fauntleroy gesture, keep it. You haven't a chance of getting rid of me unless I want it that way. And I'm sticking around!"

Marlow's lips were set, now, and there was a whiteness around his mouth.

"I was afraid that was the way you'd want to play it," he said in sick anger. He downed the rest of his drink in one gulp, and placed it on the table behind him. He looked up to see a complete change in Natalie's expression. She seemed to be staring over his shoulder, her eyes startled and incredulous.

MARLOW whirled, and found himself gazing at the surface of the antique mirror. His jaw went slack, and he drew in his breath in sharp amazement.

For there, reflected in the mirror, was not the image of the drawing-room and Natalie and himself. Instead, Marlow stared incredulously at a background that could belong only to his own office. And against that background, locked in what seemed to be an embrace, were the images of himself and his secretary, Joan Kenny!

Fully half a minute passed while Marlow gaped in numb horror at the scene portrayed on the antique mirror. And then he whirled to face Natalie.

Her eyes were venomously cold, and the expression on her face was one of

savage gloating.

"So you've been faithful, eh Scott? You haven't another woman in mind, eh?" she grated harshly. "No one but that little trollop of a secretary at your—"

"Don't mention her name!" Marlow blazed, swept by a sharp white heat of rage. "In spite of what your rotten little mind is thinking, she doesn't even suspect I care for her. And while we're on the subject I might as well admit that I do love Joan Kenny. Do you understand that? I do love Joan Kenny!"

Natalie laughed harshly, contemptuously. "No wonder she's to be here tonight. Dinner guest, eh? Transcribe notes while you and Bennet discuss your business. That's rich—you philandering swine!"

Marlow clenched and unclenched his hands, fighting off the overpowering desire to smash his fist into his wife's mocking red mouth.

It was then that they both heard the sound of tires crunching to a stop in the gravel driveway. Their heads turned simultaneously in the direction of the door.

"That might be Bennet," Natalie said, suddenly lowering her voice. "But you haven't heard the end of this. Not by a long shot. You can tell that blonde wench she'll rot in hell before she'll ever sink her hands into your money. I'm more determined to stick around now than ever before."

They heard the houseboy going to the door. And Marlow suddenly remembered the incredible scene on the mirror. He turned back to it swiftly. The incriminating tableau had vanished; the mirror was blank!

Marlow gaped at it foolishly, uncomprehendingly. He rubbed his hand along his jaw, shaking his head bewilderedly. He looked around for an

instant, and saw Natalie staring wordlessly at it also.

And then he heard Joan Kenny's voice in the hallway.

Instantly, Marlow moved across the drawing-room and met his secretary just as she was crossing the threshold.

"Joan!" he said.

Joan Kenny was looking incredibly beautiful in a black velvet dinner gown. Her blonde hair was piled high on her shapely head in an upswing coiffure. The only jewelry she wore was a small string of pearls around her white throat.

She smiled, a little bewildered at the tone of his greeting.

"Hello, Mr. Marlow. Am I on time?"

Marlow had forgotten Natalie. But now she stepped angrily, sarcastically, into the conversation.

"How do you do, Miss Kenny. Really, you needn't bother being so formal with my husband. Just call him Scott, as you undoubtedly do elsewhere."

Marlow, jaw tight, said stiffly, "Joan, this is my wife, Natalie!"

JOAN KENNY'S soft blue eyes were uncomprehending, and she flushed in embarrassment.

"How do you do—" she began.

"And I'm going to continue being Scott's wife," Natalie broke in acidly, "in spite of both your efforts to the contrary."

Joan looked wide-eyed toward Marlow.

"Natalie!" Marlow snapped. "I don't think you're feeling very well. You'd better go upstairs!"

But his wife glared spitefully at him, relishing his discomfort.

"My husband has just informed me that he wants a divorce," she went on shrilly. "He admitted also that he is

very much in love with you, Miss Kenny."

Marlow was white with rage and humiliation. He put out his hands, as if to shake his wife, then dropped them limply to his side. He turned to Joan Kenny.

"I—I'm sorry this had to happen, Joan," he said bitterly.

But the expression on Joan Kenny's face had changed now. The doubt and confusion were gone. She placed her hand reassuringly on Scott Marlow's arm. But when she spoke she addressed Natalie.

"Your discovery that your husband loves me was probably as much a shock to me as it was to you, Mrs. Marlow. I've always suspected the hell he has, living with you, and for the last two years I've loved him, terribly. You don't know how happy this nasty little scene you started has made me!"

Marlow was looking at Joan Kenny with incredulous joy.

"Joan," he blurted. "Oh, Joan. Do you mean that? You aren't just saying that to—to—" he faltered.

"I mean it—Scott," Joan said quietly.

Natalie was glaring at them both, rage and suspicion blazing in her dark eyes.

"What is this—this act?" she demanded. "You've both been carrying on behind my back for months, and you know it."

Joan Kenny looked at her coldly. "I'm afraid you're wrong," she said.

"I saw it, with my own eyes. Moments ago. The two of you, in the office, twined together like a pair of vines!" Natalie stormed.

Joan Kenny looked at her as if she'd lost her mind.

"Scott, what is she talking about?" Joan demanded.

Marlow shook his head troubledly. "The mirror, Joan. The antique I got

today. I had it sent home. Remember when you slipped and almost fell?"

Joan nodded bewilderedly. "But what—"

"That entire scene, when I caught you from falling, and we were momentarily in each other's arms. That scene was on the mirror, here in the living room, moments ago. Natalie saw it."

"But, Scott!" Joan protested. "I don't understand you at all. What is this? What's it all about?"

Natalie turned and moved across the drawing-room to the antique mirror.

"I don't know what kind of a hoax or trick it was," Natalie raged. "But this mirror," she paused to point to the antique. And suddenly Natalie's face went ashen. She placed a hand across her red mouth.

Marlow was across the room instantly, stepping up beside his wife, staring into the mirror. He didn't notice Joan following him.

The antique mirror was presenting another scene again. But not the reflection of Marlow and Natalie and Joan who stood before it. Just the image of Natalie, and a tall, Latin-looking, moustached young man in the uniform of a chauffeur!

"**A**RMAND!" Marlow gasped. "Our chauffeur!"

"It's a lie!" Natalie choked.

Armand, the chauffeur, and Natalie were locked in each other's arms in passionate embrace, their mouths pressed hard together!

Marlow wheeled savagely on Natalie. "You tramp!" he snapped contemptuously. "You rotten tramp!"

"You—you can't prove anything," Natalie choked, backing away.

"You said I had no grounds for divorce, eh?" Marlow blazed.

"You haven't," Natalie said. "Even

if it's true, you can't prove it. You could never prove it in a million years."

"Scott!" the sharp cry came from Joan.

Marlow turned. Joan was pointing at the mirror. The images of Natalie and the chauffeur were gone, and the mirror was once against just a mirror!

Natalie's voice was shrill, defiant. "I still say you can't prove it. And if you try to I'll drag this blonde's name through the muddiest court sessions this town has ever seen!"

Marlow went white.

"I'm still your wife, and I'm going to continue to be your wife. Remember that," Natalie said savagely.

Joan Kenny looked close to tears, and Marlow moved beside her, holding his arms gently around her and speaking softly.

"Joan, Joan," he said gently. "You poor kid. This is why I never told you how I feel. I'm sorry you were dragged into this, Joan. Believe me, I'm sorry!"

The front buzzer sounded at that instant, and the three of them turned guiltily to face the hallway.

"That's Bennet, for certain," Marlow said.

Natalie regained her composure instantly. She smiled at Scott Marlow and the girl with acid sweetness.

"I'm sure we all feel that this is none of Mr. Bennet's affair, don't we?"

Marlow took his arms from Joan.

"Stiff upper lip, honey. We'll straighten this out later, somehow."

Natalie's smile was tauntingly triumphant.

"Oh, no, you won't," she said. "I'll remain as Mrs. Scott Marlow for quite some time. As long as I please!"

Natalie stepped into the hallway . . .

be an amiable enough, fat, red-faced, bald-headed man whose only apparent weakness was his desire to monopolize the conversation.

His voice was deep and rumbling, and his laugh, which chortled forth frequently, sounded much like loose stone sliding down a chute.

Marlow, sitting on the divan beside Natalie, nervously sipped his drink and smoked incessant cigarettes, glad that Bennet's conversational monopoly demanded little in the way of reply.

Joan, in a chair by the fireplace, said little, merely smiling now and then when Bennet came to the climax of an anecdote.

It was different, however, with Natalie. She was the perfect hostess. Or at least her own idea of the perfect hostess. She was alternately charming and coy to Marlow's boss; sometimes the country girl, blushing under a sunbonnet, and others the arch, attractive young woman of the world.

Sitting back watching Natalie's performance, Marlow felt a nausea in the pit of his stomach. For he was well aware that Natalie was doing her utmost to put Bennet in a perfect frame of mind for the business conference which was to follow the dinner. All of which meant that Natalie had meant what she'd said about never relinquishing her legal claim to Marlow, and was thinking heavily in terms of her husband's continued financial rise and its effect on her insatiable greed.

When finally they sat down to dinner, Bennet was in an especially affable mood, and Natalie gaily continued as his conversational partner, deserting it only now and then to rope Marlow or Joan charmingly into the conversation. She was the fond and loving wife where her husband was concerned, and the aristocratically bending patron to his secretary.

DURING the cocktails before dinner, Mr. Bennet proved himself to

Throughout the meal Marlow and Joan exchanged mute, suffering glances, enduring the torment all the less stoically since Natalie had placed them nearest each other.

And when dinner was over, and they retired to the drawing-room, Marlow began to mark the time element, wondering how long and how heavily Natalie would overplay her hostess act before she realized she was holding up the business conversation.

Bennet was in the middle of a conversation concerning some of his fishing exploits below Marlow suddenly recalled the picture that he had destroyed. The one of Bennet in hip boots and with rod, net, and reel.

It was Bennet's occasional glance around the room that brought it to Marlow's mind. He wasn't certain of the significance of the glances, until Bennet himself confirmed Marlow's interpretation at the conclusion of his anecdote.

"Incidentally," Bennet boomed, "I sent a little token of that occasion to the house here, when I arrived in town today. Did it arrive?"

Marlow looked over at Natalie, who seemed suddenly to have lost some of her composure. She gave her husband a swift, veiled, accusing glance.

Marlow cleared his throat. "You mean that photograph of you, Mr. Bennet?"

Mr. Bennet nodded, smiling diffidently. "It was just a little gesture, Scott," he said. "Thought you like it."

Marlow opened his mouth to reply. But at that instant Natalie broke in swiftly to head him off.

"It did arrive, Mr. Bennet," she smiled charmingly. "But it must have been damaged in transit. The glass over it was shattered; so we sent it out to have it put in another frame. We'll really prize it, you know."

MARLOW'S jaw went tight at this glib lie. He started once again to speak. And again Natalie cut him off.

"Incidentally, Mr. Bennet, that mirror over there should interest you," she said. Marlow realized instantly she was trying to change the conversational trend, and had grabbed at the first thing to come to her mind.

Mr. Bennet looked over at the antique mirror, eyebrows raised.

"We picked it up from an old art dealer who's a friend of Scott's and mine. I just begged Scott to buy it. You see, it has a simply fascinating history. It hung in the palace of Henry the Eighth," she concluded.

"That is quite an antique, then," Bennet agreed. He rose ponderously and moved over to the mirror. He bent forward to examine it, when a sudden, startled exclamation came from his lips.

Marlow looked up swiftly. Then he rose and stepped quickly to Bennet's side. The mirror was once again refusing to reflect what was before it. Once again it was portraying what *had been* enacted in its presence.

It was presenting in clear, damning detail the image of Scott Marlow ripping what was obviously Mr. Bennet's photograph into small fragments!

The tension in the room was electric; the silence pregnant.

"Well!" boomed Mr. Bennet in thunderous anger. "Well!"

Marlow heard the sharp cry from Natalie as she saw the scene in the mirror.

"So that's what happened to the photograph," Mr. Bennet snapped, turning to glare at Marlow.

Scott Marlow's jaw went grim. He began to get mad. "I was quite prepared to tell you exactly what happened to that monstrosity in color and

bulk, Mr. Bennet!" he grated.

"Oh, you were, were you?" Bennet retorted. "Like hell you were. You had that fine yarn cooked up about having the glass in the frame repaired. This is outrageous, absolutely outrageous!"

"My wife," said Marlow seethingly, "cooked up that one. She cut me off just as I was about to tell you the truth, Bennet. That silly lie was none of my doing."



"Shut up!" Marlow shouted, wheeling on his wife

"I have never been so insulted!" Bennet declared.

"And I," Marlow broke in hotly, "was never so insulted as when that picture arrived. Do you think because you're the president of the company I work for that you can intrude yourself into my personal life to the extent of forcing me to put up a hideous colored photograph in my drawing-room as a sort of shrine to your blasted omnipotence?"

"I pay your salary," Bennet declared. "And a most handsome salary, if I do say so."

"And I make more damned money for your firm than you realize," Marlow came back. "I earn that salary and much more. Your outfit was an obscure hole in the wall when I came to work for you. Through my control of the advertising department I've built your business into one of the biggest in the country. And, salary or no salary, a paycheck doesn't buy souls!"

"Your attitude, sir," said Bennet, stiff with rage, "is positively astounding!"

"It doesn't match the colossal gall of sending me that picture," Marlow blazed. "Does the altar that goes with it arrive tomorrow?"

AND suddenly Natalie had injected herself into the scene. She was white-faced with horror, and her eyes blazed wrath at her husband.

"Scott doesn't know what he's saying, Mr. Bennet," Natalie said swiftly, placatingly. "He's been working too hard. He's near a nervous breakdown. He doesn't mean this at all!"

"Shut up!" Marlow shouted, wheeling on his wife.

"You can consider your present position with my firm at an end!" Bennet boomed.

"You can take the damned job and

go straight to hell!" Marlow roared. "In the meantime get out of my house!"

Natalie choked something unintelligible.

Bennet glared at Marlow.

"I don't need your job," Marlow grated. "I'll start out on my own. It'll take years, perhaps, but sooner or later I'll run your firm right out of business. I'll slam your company back against the wall so hard it'll fold!"

Natalie suddenly exploded.

"You damned fool!" she screeched at Marlow. "You stupid louse! Throw up everything I've slaved years for you to get, will you? Well, you can call another bet off. I won't stick by and starve to death with you. I'm getting out. Now!"

Natalie wheeled and left in a storm of shrill epithets. Marlow turned back to Bennet.

"And now that everything's settled just fine," he said, "let me tell you something about this branch office of yours. It stinks with stupid inefficiency. Two out of every five orders I give are countermanded by pot-bellied superiors who haven't had the moss cleaned out of their muddled minds in twenty years. The entire dump needs drastic reorganization. And now that I won't be in there working sixteen hours a day to keep it going in spite of your executive board, I'm happy to predict that it won't last much longer than a year."

Joan Kenny appeared at Marlow's side. Her eyes were glowing.

"Will you need a sort of secretary and assistant, Scott?" she asked.

Marlow looked down at her.

"Huh?"

"In the business you're going to start," she said, "I'll work for nothing until you can get going."

Marlow suddenly relaxed, and the rage left him. He grinned and patted

Joan's shoulder.

"You'll work for nothing," he said, "but in the capacity of the new Mrs. Marlow. I expect we'll be hearing from Natalie in Reno in a few weeks, now that I'm starting from scratch again."

He looked up at Bennet, the grin leaving his face.

"Now, if you'll leave, Bennet," he said quietly.

But Mr. Bennet was beaming. He was beaming and his hand was extended to Marlow.

"Put're there, Scott," he suggested.

MARLOW gazed blankly at his former employer.

"I don't get you," he

"Shake hands," Bennet told him, "on a damned fine bargain."

"But—" Marlow stammered. He was clearly bewildered.

"I haven't backed down from my original statement," Bennet said with mock severity.

"Look," said Marlow bewilderedly, "I thought this was all settled. I thought I'd made myself perfectly clear to you. Everything I said still goes."

"And what I said—at least to the effect that you can consider your present position with my firm at an end—still goes," Bennet said.

"That's fine," said Marlow. "Now goodbye." He still disregarded Bennet's outstretched hand.

"Perhaps," grinned Mr. Bennet, "I had better stop being coy. That photograph I sent this afternoon was exactly as you described it, a hideous monstrosity. No one knows it better than I. And my expecting you to mount it fawningly in a conspicuous place in the room for me to see tonight, was, also as you described it, colossal gall. I was praying that you'd refuse to do so."

"Wait a minute," said Marlow. "You

were praying that I refuse to do so?"

"Exactly," said Bennet. "It was a test. A somewhat outlandish test, I'll grant you. But by it, I expected to test your moral integrity, your get-up-and-gumption. Briefly, your honesty and guts. You see, I know you have brains. You wouldn't be where you are with my company now if you didn't have. But I didn't know much about your character. For all I knew you might have been a hypocritical yes-man, a boot-licker. Had you placed that picture on display for me, I'd have been sure that you weren't the man I wanted."

"The man you wanted?" It was Joan who broke in.

"The man I want to step into my shoes as President of Bennet-Hastings and Company," explained Mr. Bennet. "I'm stepping out. I'm sick of the grind and getting old. You, Scott, will succeed me as head of the firm."

Scott Marlow grinned.

"That's a big job, Mr. Bennet," he said.

"You've just proved to me you're a big man, Scott," Bennet grinned. "Lord, what a going over you gave me!"

Marlow suddenly snapped his fingers.

"I'll take the job," he said, "on one condition."

Bennet looked surprised. "And what's that?"

"That you officially fire me from my present job right now," Marlow said, "and that I don't take the presidency of the firm until seven weeks from now. I'll take a vacation from now until then, but I won't be on your payroll until I take over."

Bennet frowned. "I suppose, if that's the way you want it," he began.

Marlow smiled. "You see, it takes six weeks to get a Reno divorce. And

I know Natalie well enough to know she's headed for there right now. If she knew about this, she'd change her mind."

Bennet looked from Joan to Scott Marlow and smiled benignly.

"That is a very shrewd idea, Scott," he said. Suddenly a peculiar expression came across his face. He snapped his fingers. "Good God!"

"What's wrong?" Marlow asked.

"That mirror," Mr. Bennet said. "I'm just this moment beginning to realize what it did!"

Scott Marlow nodded soberly. "An incredible thing," he admitted, gazing reflectively at the antique mirror on the wall.

"But how on earth," Bennet protested.

Marlow shrugged. "I'll be damned if I know," he said.

Mr. Bennet shuddered. "I'll be

damned if I *want* to know," he declared. . . .

OF course, Scott Marlow and Joan never did know, exactly. For the antique mirror didn't tell tales any more. At least during the next weeks in which it remained in Marlow's possession it didn't. Possibly because Marlow didn't give it any further opportunity. It still looked decidedly, ominously *potential*, however, especially on the day when word arrived that Natalie's divorce was final and that she'd married an oil tycoon she'd met while waiting in Reno for the final decree, ten minutes after the courts had severed her old marriage.

For that was the day Scott Marlow and Joan, smiling maliciously, had crated the mirror and shipped it anonymously as a wedding present to Natalie's new husband. . . .

GERM KILLER

A FEW years ago, Professor A. Fleming of the St. Mary's Hospital in London, was conducting some research on colonies of different germs that were growing on some specially prepared plates.

One day he noticed that, through someone's carelessness, a mold had developed on one of the plates. He examined the plate and found the mold resembled those formed on very stale bread or cheese. And as an experiment he left the mold and germs on the plate and started to observe the reaction. He noted that the mold prevented the germ culture from growing and even started to kill the germs, a further observation was made that the mold, called *Penicillium*, was fatal to only certain germs while other germs could live when associated with it.

With these observations on *Penicillium* completed, a suggestion was made that perhaps the mold be used to destroy harmful germs in the human body. Others suggested that an antiseptic be prepared that would contain the germ-killing substance found in *Penicillium* and use this as the germ killer.

A group of men was carefully chosen with Professor Florey of Oxford University as supervisor to isolate this germ-killing substance and put it to work. Hundreds of experiments were per-

formed, but at last the substance having the antiseptic powers was extracted from the mold. The substance was called penicillin and it was found to be one of the most powerful killers of germs both inside and outside of the human body. Its antiseptic qualities were even superior to sulfanilamide which had just recently come into prominence as a germ-killer.

Not only is penicillin a powerful germicide, it is also the safest one yet discovered. It kills the germs without injuring the body. It can be diluted as much as one part in a million without losing its effectiveness. It can be taken orally or injected into the vein when necessary. Moreover, it can be used over and over to kill germs. This is possible since penicillin enters the urine after it has killed the germs and can be reclaimed by a chemist.

The only difficulty encountered thus far is the scarcity of penicillin. There is not enough of the right kind of mold to yield the desired amount and thus research has begun to uncover new sources.

Chemists are hopeful that they can produce it synthetically by studying its chemical composition. When they are successful it will be a great boon to medical science.

The MANCHU



It was a saying that Life refused to relax its claim to the bodies of those to whom Death came violently. But in this coffin had been both violent and natural death—and both came back!

COFFIN ^{by} HAROLD LAWLOR



Incredibly there was life coming to that chalky face—life and a strange terror

ALAN WILCOX was about to re-enter his lonely house on the dune when he saw it.

The sheer unexpectedness of it held him there transfixed, his hand frozen on the doorknob. His black eyes widened, then narrowed with his effort to pierce the rapidly-thickening curtain of November fog.

No, his eyes were playing no tricks on him. It *was* a gray hearse he saw swinging off the little-traveled main highway, splashing recklessly through the ruts of the long, ever-green-bordered driveway leading to his house.

A chill ran over Alan's lithe body as he watched the hearse racing toward him. There was something unseemly about such haste in a car meant to move with measured pace on its somber journeys. The pines' dripping branches tried to bar its passage. The fog parted before it in ragged reluctance, as if seeking to retard its progress with futile ghost-fingers of gray.

But the hearse came on without slackening its speed, rocking irreverently on its luxurious springs.

Alan became aware of his fingers aching from their unconscious death-grip on the doorknob. Again that ominous chill of foreboding played up his spine. Then he swore softly.

In a flash of clairvoyance, he sensed that the approach of this hearse was bound up in some way with the crate

which had arrived a week before. The crate consigned to him from China by Piet Van Druten. This mysterious oblong of raw wood was even now resting on trestles in his library facing the lake at the back of the house.

Alan stepped back in the shelter of the portico to avoid the spray of icy water as the hearse swept up.

Piet Van Druten leaped from the driver's seat. His sparse tan-colored hair was uncovered. His dome-like forehead and pear-shaped face glistened in the half-light.

"Alan! Good man! You got my wire?"

"I got it, but I can't say I understand it." Alan came forward, extending a hand, feeling again all the old pull of Van's febrile vitality. "What devil's work are you up to now?"

"Body-snatching. Hi-jacking a hearse." Van's nasal voice was clipped, matter-of-fact. "Quick, man, help me. I can't stop to explain now. But I'm on the trail of the biggest thing in the world!"

Alan remembered Van's cryptic telegram, sent from Seattle.

"CONSIGNING CRATE TO YOU. IMPERATIVE DO NOT OPEN TILL MY ARRIVAL. ABOVE ALL DO NOT TALK."

He'd had telegrams like that from Van before, and they were always the fore-runners of some weird adventures. Van was not the stolid, phlegmatic Dutchman of fiction, but a man of great personal magnetism and immense nervous energy—a heritage, no doubt, from his Javanese mother.

Possessed of an adequate income, he roamed the world in search of the exotic and unusual, appearing at intervals only to be off once more on another wild tangent. Now he'd turned up again, but this time—

"I don't like this, Van." Alan

frowned. "What are you letting me in for?"

He felt Van's strong fingers bite into his shoulders. The steel gray eyes bored into his. "You've never failed me before, Alan. You can't now. Come on, I need your help."

HE RAN to the rear of the hearse, opened the door. Alan followed unwillingly in time to see him pull a dark oak casket from the interior.

"Grab the other end of this," Van ordered. "We'll get it into the hall."

They staggered under its weight, maneuvered it into the house only with considerable difficulty. When it was placed on the hall floor, Van rubbed his long chin thoughtfully.

"That pier of yours out there—"

Alan watched him narrowly. "If it's the launch you want, it's moored to it."

Van shook his head. "I don't want the launch. How deep is the water at the end of the pier?"

"Fifty feet."

"Fine! Now, if you have a length of light, strong rope—"

When it was produced, Van led Alan outside. The fog was so thick by now they couldn't see twenty feet ahead of them. Van stood back, motioned Alan into the driver's seat.

"You know the terrain," he said. "Back this thing, and get it down onto the pier."

The motor sprang to quiet life under Alan's toe. He felt like a robot as he obeyed unquestioningly. Van always had this effect on him, he remembered. He backed the hearse, half-turned it, and then they were slipping and lurching down the wet slope to the point where the pier began.

"Stop!" Van cried.

Alan pressed the brake. The wheels skidded in the soft sand, then gripped. The front tires of the hearse rested

on the boards of the pier. Alan got out. Somewhere ahead was the vast expanse of the lake, invisible in the fog. But he could hear the soft lapping of the waters above the doleful mourning of the wind.

"A lucky break for me that you chose this lonely spot to write your novel in." Van's voice came muffled. He was busy with the rope, lashing the steering wheel fast. "Why did you build this pier so long?"

"I didn't build it. The former owner did, to accommodate a yacht."

"Bless his plutocratic heart!" Van said feelingly. "Its length and width come in damned handy now."

As if hypnotized, Alan watched Van put the hearse in gear, saw it leap forward, heard the loose boards of the pier clatter under its weight in a gargantuan tap-dance. The car gathered speed. As it vanished into the curtain of fog, the purr of the motor rose to a whine. Alan could feel the whole pier shaking under his feet. There was an angry roar from the racing motor, a gigantic splash, then silence.

The silence came as an actual physical impact after the racket, and succeeded in jerking Alan from the curious lethargy that held him.

He started to run toward the end of the pier. "Van! Van!"

AN ANSWERING hail checked his terror. Halfway down the pier the tall, angular figure of Van Druten loomed up out of the surrounding fog.

"Hold everything, Alan. I jumped. I'm okay."

"The hearse?"

"Where they'll never trace it now. But I'll send the undertaker money anonymously to replace its loss."

Alan felt belated anger surge through him. He caught Van by the arm, jerked him around. "What the hell's the mean-

ing of this hocus-pocus? I want an explanation—and I mean *now*."

Van shrugged. "You'll get it, I tell you. But at least wait till we get back to the house. I'm chilled through."

In silence they climbed the long ramp leading from the dock to the house. The hand-rails were dripping wet under their touch. Though the ramp's slope was gradual, Alan's leg-muscles ached with the effort to keep upright on the slippery concrete.

Back in the hall, he indicated the oaken casket. "Whose body is in that?"

"Frederic Robles'."

"The scientist? Good God, Van, he was famous!" Alan stared, appalled. "You'll have the whole country searching for the man who snatched his corpse."

Again Van's narrow shoulders shrugged. He said quietly, "It was necessary. And if I'm successful—" He broke off. "But first, that crate I shipped you from China? It came?"

"That's another thing," Alan cried hotly. "That damned crate gives me the creeps. I could swear a *knocking* has come from it at intervals."

"A knocking? Ah!" A light glowed at the back of Van's gray eyes. "Every four hours, eh?"

Alan stared. "How did you know?" Then his voice went heavy with sarcasm. "I suppose there's another corpse in that?"

"Yes."

"*What!*" Alan's jaw dropped. To think, he'd been sitting chummily every day for a week with a cadaver!

Van glanced at his watch, began pacing the hall feverishly. "Another hour to go," he muttered. "There's just time to tell you. Come on, let's see the crate. And bring a couple of hammers, will you?"

Dazed, Alan got the hammers and led the way into his library, which was in

an ell jutting out from the back of the house. Windows, heavily draped in dark velvet, broke the walls on three sides. Back of this desk, on wooden horses, was the crate. He remembered how often he'd leaned back in his swivel chair and rested his head against it. Despite himself, he shuddered.

"Sit down. You're looking rocky," Van said. As Alan sank into a chair, he went on, "I suppose you think I'm going crazy?"

"Or that I am," Alan answered grimly.

Van nodded. "When you hear the story I have to tell, you *will* think I'm mad. But I swear it's true. And, fortunately, I have the means to prove it."

"Yes?"

VAN absent-mindedly stroked the hammer he held. "A year ago, in Manchuria," he began, "I heard of a village, remote in the hills, which was populated entirely by people who were dead."

"Dead!" Alan sat upright.

"Had been dead, I should say. And given re-birth when their corpses were placed in what was known as 'the Manchu coffin'." Van broke off to laugh harshly at the expression on Alan's face. "I know how you feel. My mind instantly rejected such an absurdity, too. But later I had proof that, due to some occult power inherent in itself, this coffin *could* restore life to any body placed within it."

Alan sat quietly. For the first time he became aware of the change in Van since he'd last seen him two years before. The man was haggard, his eyes looked haunted, sunken deep in their sockets. And now his mind—

Alan shook his head imperceptibly. Poor Van!

He watched as Van turned abruptly

in his jerky, erratic fashion and went to the crate. His teeth ached sympathetically at the sharp *skreel-skreel-skreel* of nails being drawn protestingly from wood. He leaned forward, didn't even realize he was holding his breath, as Van lifted the top from the crate and the sides fell away to reveal its contents—a coffin.

A coffin ornately carved, its original bright red lacquer faded now to a dark maroon. The heavy gilding on the whorls of the carvings was rubbed off in places and dimmed with age, but it still gleamed richly.

Alan rose and came nearer in time to hear Van's whisper, "Legend has it that it first held the body of Kung Fu-tse, the philosopher."

Through three circular holes cut in the coffin's long side, the faint odor of sandalwood came to Alan's nostrils. His ears strained for a sound, but in the deathly stillness there was only the slight rasp of Van's labored breathing. Then, from somewhere far out on the shrouded lake, came the dismal wail of a fog-horn—like a soul howling in hell.

Alan shivered.

Van looked at his watch. "3:55. We haven't long to wait."

For what? Alan wondered. He watched Van's long bony forefinger test one of the hand-made wooden pegs that held shut the lid of the coffin. It moved easily. But as if it were a signal, at that instant every light in the library went out.

Alan felt Van jump a foot. He himself, after an awful moment, breathed again.

"Power failure," he explained to Van, in relief. "It's happened before, this time of year. The dampness gets into the dynamo."

"Candles—*quick!*" Van hissed.

Alan groped his way to the mantel, felt for the twin sevenbranched candel-

abra at either end. With fingers suddenly gone stiff, he lighted the candles in each, gave one to Van.

"3:59," Van whispered. Sweat beaded his forehead. Alan leaned forward, his heart thudding against his chest, his eyes riveted to the coffin-lid.

They stood in a pool of golden light, the walls of the room lost in shadows. Again they heard the banshee-cry of the distant fog-horn, and then—

Thump! Thump! Thump!

HOT wax spattered Alan's hand as he took the candelabrum Van thrust at him. Van's fingers were working frenziedly at the wooden pegs of the lid. He was twisting them in frantic haste . . . lifting off the heavy lid . . . leaning it against the wall—

Alan pressed forward, stopped, uttered an exclamation. The candles guttered in his shaking hands as he stared.

Within the coffin lay the lissome body of a girl clad in robes of Nile-green satin. Robes wondrously embroidered in many colors with the figures of bees and birds and flowers. A spiked head-dress, glittering with jade in various hues, was on the raven hair. Slippers to match the gown encased her tiny, "lily" feet.

Alan's eyes went to Van's unbelievably. Van drew himself up, looked at him from under half-hooded lids, not bothering to hide his triumph.

"She," he announced quietly, "is the Manchu princess, Tanni Fah Lo!"

Even as they watched, the girl's voluptuous breasts—half-hidden, half-revealed by her robes—fluttered with returning life. A sigh came through the parted scarlet lips.

The waxen lids lifted slowly, and Alan found himself gazing deep into fathomless dark eyes—long, slanted, incredibly lustrous.

A long moment she returned his

stare, and then she smiled. The smile tore at his heart. Something seemed to pass between them—mysterious, magnetic. He saw a faint hint of color flush the ivory cheeks before her lids again closed wearily.

"Wine!" Van's voice rang out sharply, jerked Alan from his spell.

He set the candlesticks down, grabbed a decanter, splashed most of its contents over his shaking hand as he hastily filled a crystal goblet. He turned to see that Van had slipped his arms under the girl's slender body and lifted her from the coffin.

A curious stab pierced Alan's vitals. With a shock, he realized this swift emotion was jealousy—hot, unreasoning.

Then Van set the girl down in a throne-like chair, and Alan brushed him aside unceremoniously to hold the goblet to the painted, sensuous mouth of his incredible guest. His arm circled her narrow back. His hand tightened on her shoulder. His heart was pounding.

The wine seemed to revive her miraculously. She leaned back in the chair. Its high carved back outlined her slender, elegant figure. Her long scarlet-nailed hands rested on its arms. And her gaze, meeting Alan's, seemed to smolder.

He realized with a start that he was staring. What was the matter with him, he wondered? He was gaping like a fool, or—or a man in love. This last thought nearly made him smile. Love! He'd be babbling next that he believed in love at first sight.

GRADUALLY he became aware that Van had been talking for some time. Tanni Fah Lo, at least, had evidently been listening.

"Let me see if I have understood you correctly," she said, transferring

her inscrutable gaze to the spare figure of the Dutch adventurer. She spoke English with only a slight accent. "You learned of my suicide to avoid the unwelcome attentions of a barbaric Japanese general. Learned that certain of my faithful retainers sent for the Manchu coffin and placed my lifeless body within it. Before their efforts could be rewarded, you seized the coffin by trickery, and succeeded in smuggling it out of China."

Alan saw Van nod, and Tanni Fah Lo's eyes narrow.

"Why?" she asked softly. "Was it your intention to exhibit me in this country as a freak?"

"No, no!" Van protested hurriedly. "To tell you the truth, I hardly considered you at all. My main purpose—"

His eyes went to the hall, where the body of Robles lay.

"Yes?" Tanni prompted, and Alan could sense that instinctively she disliked and distrusted Van.

Van left the desk he'd been leaning against, and started to pace the room, rubbing his hands nervously. He talked rapidly, the staccato words rattling like hail in the silent room.

"War," he began, "between Japan and this country is inevitable. I know it's coming . . . perhaps before this year of 1941 is out. And in time of war, as everyone knows, our scientists, our statesmen, our military officers of experience are invaluable to us. We have them, fortunately. We have their genius, their loyalty, their integrity. But there is one fifth columnist we have to fear. And he is one against whom we are utterly helpless."

Strangely moved by the fanatical glow in Van's eyes, Alan asked, mystified, "And he is—?"

"He is—Death."

As if it were Death himself mock-

ing, the fog-horn wailed again. Alan saw Tanni Fah Lo shiver almost imperceptibly as she stroked a long golden nail-guard on one of her fingers.

Van stopped pacing, stood regarding the other two in the dim candlelight.

"When I heard of the fabulous Manchu coffin, the conclusion I reached was obvious . . . to bring it here and use it to revive the bodies of those men, so necessary to us, who were already dead."

"But why send it to me?" Alan protested. "I should think you'd have sent it directly to Washington—"

"And earn myself commitment to an insane asylum before it could be demonstrated? Don't be absurd!" Van snapped. "My story would be dismissed as the raving of a lunatic. That's why I couldn't wait for an exhumation order in the case of Robles. I knew it would be denied me. But Robles—dead! Why, here was one of the very men most indispensable to us, in the event of war. When I read of his death, I knew I must act immediately. There was only one thing to do—"

"Steal his body *before* he was buried," Alan said.

"Yes. Because we must not lose his genius. Furthermore, once revived, he would be irrefutable evidence of the Manchu coffin's power."

"Who is this Robles?" Tanni Fah Lo asked. "And where?"

"Come," Van said. He picked up a candelabrum, indicated that Alan was to take the other. Silently they filed out to the hall.

TOGETHER the two men knelt and started to unseal the casket, while Tanni Fah Lo stood by, her hands thrust in the loose sleeves of her robe. They removed the lid. The thin, ascetic face of Frederic Robles gleamed

waxily in the light of the candles.

"You knew of Robles' latest experiments?" Van asked.

Alan shook his head. Tanni Fah Lo stood gazing down thoughtfully at the body.

Van explained. "He had succeeded in isolating certain high-decibed sounds inaudible to human ears—sounds so shrill that with them he had been able to destroy the brain cells of rats, resulting in madness and death. All during his lingering illness he was engaged in magnifying these tones so as to make them audible to human beings."

"And if he'd succeeded?" Alan asked.

"With the additional aid of a powerful broadcasting transmitter, he'd have a weapon of warfare whose results would be appalling. Swift annihilation would come to those it would be used against."

"But what of our own men? Surely they'd hear—"

"No, Robles had already perfected soundproof helmets. He had to protect himself, you know, during his experiments."

"Then he did succeed?" Alan asked.

"No—just as success was within his grasp, he died. However—" Van paused, looked significantly toward the other room where the Manchu coffin rested. "Help me, Alan." He bent to Robles' casket.

Caught in the spell of Van's story, Alan moved forward. But Tanni Fah Lo stretched out an ivory hand.

"Stop!" she hissed sibilantly. The jade ornaments of her headdress quivered with her intensity. "I should have spoken before. You can't do this."

"Why?" Van asked suspiciously.

"Because it always fails with those who've died natural deaths. You'll unleash something horrible—" She choked in her agitation, was unable

to go on.

Alan asked, "What do you mean by 'something horrible'?"

"I don't know. Those unsuccessful attempts have been shrouded in secrecy, spoken of in whispers. I only know that something terrible happens. It's legendary."

Van looked up skeptically from where he was squatting by Robles' casket. Then he shrugged pointedly.

"No, wait!" Tanni Fah Lo cried, at his obvious disbelief. "You must listen! The Manchu coffin is only successful with someone like me—someone who didn't relinquish life willingly, who didn't entirely loose his hold on his soul, his animus—call it what you will. But with those others who die natural deaths, the soul, freely released, instantly leaves the body. And nothing remains. Nothing but the clay."

Van said, "Are you trying to tell us Robles can't be revived?"

She hesitated. "No," she said slowly. "I can't say that. So far as I know, it's possible."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Van said briskly. He rose to his feet, and went to the library to prepare the coffin.

ALAN hesitated. Tanni Fah Lo came and put her hands on his shoulders. He could hear the rustle of her silken garments, smell the heady odor of musk from her perfume.

"You must stop him!" she said, and swayed toward him.

He put his arms around her. "But," he objected mildly, "nothing terrible happened when we revived you. And aren't you glad—"

Her long almond-shaped eyes blazed momentarily. "Ah, do you think then that death is to be feared? Willingly would I go back."

"I wouldn't let you." His arms

tightened around her. Her mouth was a crimson butterfly, beckoning him onward. He bent, his lips seeking hers.

But she held him off. "You forget—that I am of another race."

"What do you think that matters to me?" Alan asked hotly. "From the moment you awakened, I sensed some bond between us . . . something that can't be denied."

"Oh, no!" she said, and the light in her eyes was tragic. "No!"

Her opposition only served to convince him of his feelings. After all, he'd known other women. But he'd never felt like this before.

"I love you, Tanni," he said.

"East and West cannot meet, Alan. You know that as well as I. You've only brought me back to unhappiness." She half-turned, cried despairingly, "Oh, I wish the Manchu coffin had never been! It's wrong. It's against every natural law. But I can't make that fanatic understand. Alan, can't you—" She broke off suddenly, stifled.

Van was standing in the door of the library, watching them. He came forward slowly, and Alan saw he held a revolver in his hand.

"The lady *might* convince you, Alan," he said softly. He waved the revolver. "I have no wish to be melodramatic, but I'm taking no chances. Understand this, both of you . . . *Robles is to be placed in the Manchu coffin!*"

Alan said wearily, "Put the gun away, Van."

Tanni Fah Lo met defeat with true oriental fatalism. "I have done what I could," she said quietly.

Van smiled, and put the gun in his pocket. "I'll keep it handy, nevertheless," he announced. "Now, Alan, if you please—"

Alan shrugged. This time they lifted

the oaken casket, and bore it into the library. Tanni Fah Lo followed. From the throne-like chair she watched them transfer Robles' body to the lacquered coffin, and seal the lid. . . .

AT EIGHT o'clock nothing happened.

Van was obviously first uneasy, then alarmed. "Perhaps there hasn't been enough time," he muttered, half to himself. "Surely at twelve—"

It was as if they'd divided into two camps, Alan thought. He and Tanni Fah Lo on one side of the room, Van and the Manchu coffin on the other.

Once, Alan went to the window. Cupping his hands on either side of his eyes, he tried to pierce the thick fog. It was useless. But the darkened window acted as a mirror, reflecting the room behind him, and in it he saw that Van's hand had stolen to the pocket where he'd placed the gun. It was plain that he was suspicious of some trickery on Alan's part.

The minutes until twelve dragged by like hours. Alan had to struggle to stifle his rising excitement. But Tanni Fah Lo sat like an idol at his side. Their glances always seemed to be meeting vibrantly. And Alan thought he detected a new softness in her eyes.

Van stood up abruptly. "One minute to twelve!" He had to moisten his thin lips before the words could come. His hands tensed into fists.

His eyes were on his watch. When he raised his right hand, they knew it was twelve o'clock.

Alan's heart was hammering. Even Tanni Fah Lo leaned forward in her chair. But for all her expression revealed, her face might have been carved from ivory. Van's eyes were glued, now, on the coffin.

But nothing happened.

Seconds ticked by, then Van turned

with a stricken face. "Something is wrong." His words came in a sepulchral whisper. "It isn't going to—"

Thump! Thump! Thump!

There was a sharp hissing intake of breath from Tanni Fah Lo. Van leaped for the coffin, Alan right behind him. Furiously they worked at the wooden pegs, had the lid off in a twinkling.

And again, as they watched, the miracle happened.

But with an appalling difference. Where Tanni Fah Lo's revival had been almost effortless, Robles literally fought his way back to consciousness. His arms flailed the air, his face purpled, his pale blue-gray eyes glared.

As he struggled upright, Alan and Van hesitated. They had to force themselves to help him from the coffin.

Robles stood there, supporting himself by one hand, his whole body shaking violently. At last the tremors passed, and the ugly purple tint faded from his skin, leaving it the white of a dead fish's belly. His eyes gleamed with a cold, awful intelligence, but there was such a total lack of expression, of emotion, of *something*—

Alan shivered. There was, suddenly, a supercharged atmosphere of evil in the silent room.

Van, too, was looking shaken. He seemed afraid of the man he had given new life. "You'll want an explanation—" he faltered.

The cold eyes flicked him before the scientist said tonelessly, "No. I understand everything. I—" He broke off, went to the desk. Lifting the lid of a crystal box, he delved within, found nothing.

Impassively he thrust the box from the desk. It crashed in a brittle spill of sound.

ALAN and Van looked at each other, startled. The strange act seemed

so pointless. Behind it there had been no fury, no petulance, nothing. The man was entirely master of himself. Recovery seemed complete.

"A cigarette," Robles said. It was neither a demand nor a request. Just an uninflected statement.

Van hesitated, then offered his silver case. Robles took a cigarette, dropped the case to the floor. Ignoring the lighter Van extended, he took a packet of matches from the desk, applied the light to his cigarette.

While Van was still standing there, his hand outstretched, the incredible happened.

With absolutely no expression whatever, Robles held the lighted match to Van's hand.

"Ouch! Dammit!" Van leaped back from the flame. The lighter fell from his burned hand. He held it to his mouth, stared over it at Robles in amazement.

"Is he crazy?" Alan gasped. There seemed no other explanation for such a dispassionate act of sadism.

The scientist's cold eyes didn't blink.

Behind them they heard Tanni's stifled cry. Robles' head turned. She was sitting almost lost in shadow. Slowly he started for her.

Before this inexplicable menace, Alan backed to Tanni's side. Van, too, retreated, as though from some foul thing. Sheer terror was a living thing in the silent room.

Alan held himself in readiness. The scientist came on without faltering. When his hands stretched out toward the cowering girl, Alan leaped.

He hardly realized what happened next. The seemingly frail arm of Robles swept out. It possessed a terrible, unsuspected strength. The sheer power behind the apparently aimless blow sent Alan crashing against the

wall. He struck his head, slumped to the floor.

Dazed, he heard a low growl come from Van's throat. Van was drawing the revolver from his pocket. Before he could get it out, Robles was upon him. Van was caught in a grip that forced his arm backward and up—up—up—

Robles' face was not distorted. He might have been idly scanning the advertisements in a street car.

The revolver fell from Van's nerveless hand. A shrill animal-like scream of pain was torn from him.

"My arm! . . . He's breaking it! . . . Alan, quick! . . . The gun!"

Alan shook his head to clear it, crawled forward on hands and knees. He was kicked by the struggling men, his hand was stepped on twice, before he got hold of the gun. He tottered to his feet, swayed there, gripped in an unbearable dizziness.

Through a haze he saw that Robles' hands were now on Van's neck, the thumbs relentlessly pressing the helpless man's windpipe.

Alan's shaking arm wavered as he held the gun at full-length.

He fired blindly.

Someone dropped. He didn't know which one. He was sick. He was falling. . . .

SUCCESSIVE waves of nausea flooded over Alan. He opened his eyes a slit. A butterfly seemed to dance before them. Dimly he heard Tanni Fah Lo's soft voice.

"No, he wasn't insane."

"So you felt that, too?" It was Van speaking. "I sensed a marvelous intelligence—"

"*But no soul,*" Tanni's soft voice stressed the words. "Nothing to direct the wonderful brain. Nothing to move him to emotion. I see it all now. My

people feared, and didn't understand, these seeming monsters they occasionally resurrected. And I—"

The butterfly swimming before Alan's eyes resolved itself into a bit of embroidery on Tanni Fah Lo's robe. He was lying on a sofa. He struggled upward, felt her cool hand on his forehead.

"I'm all right," he said thickly. He closed his eyes. When he opened them again, the dizziness gradually faded.

Van's hand tightened on his shoulder. "I've got you in to an awful mess, old man. How we're ever going to dispose of the casket and—and *that*—"

Alan looked down at the floor. A still figure lay there, covered with a brown drapery evidently torn from one of the windows by Van.

"I've been blind," Van went on. "And stupid. I'd forgotten the one important thing—that *new men will come forward.*" He looked down at the sheeted figure. "These others have served their time, and won our gratitude. They've earned their rest . . . and the new men will carry on. Though the Manchu coffin is a failure, I know now that we never really needed it."

"And you'll destroy it?" Tanni Fah Lo queried eagerly.

Van nodded. "But how? Weight it, and drop it in the lake?"

"No," Tanni said. "I have a plan."

Alan smiled up at her. How beautiful she was! He reached out for her hand. She let it lie in his lifelessly. Puzzled, he tried to decipher the strange look in her clouded eyes.

"A plan," she went on quietly, "that will also dispose of Robles' body and casket."

Her sadness cut through Alan like a knife. He felt something else, too—ominous, foreboding. But as if she sensed his alarm, she smiled and her hand stroked his forehead.

Reassured he asked, "And the plan?"

"Once, long ago," she said, "I read of a Viking funeral."

"Ah!" A soft exclamation from Van, who seemed to understand.

"*'Viking funeral?'*" Alan repeated uncomprehendingly.

"When a Viking died," Tanni Fah Lo explained, "his body was placed in his ship . . . the ship was set afire, and cast off from its moorings to sail out into the sea, bearing the Viking to—eternity."

"I see." Alan's eyes went to the dark windows. Out there lay the lake, the waiting launch, and the fog to serve as a screen. And in just a little while there would be no trace. "I see," he said again, and added, "There's a can of kerosene in the basement. Will you get it, Van?"

Van left the room, and Alan got up from the sofa.

"Tanni?" Alan said.

A long moment her almond eyes regarded him. No mistaking their soft expression now. Slowly she came to stand before him. Submissively she bent her head. "Yes—*my lord?*"

HE understood. She, the proud Manchu princess, was telling him she was wholly his. Exultantly he bent and pressed his mouth to hers. And this time she didn't draw back.

"Tanni, you've forgotten that 'East is East' nonsense?" he asked. "When this is over—"

He raised her head. Her eyes were filled with tears.

"When this is over, Alan—"

She broke off at a cough from Van, standing in the doorway. A strong odor of kerosene came to Alan's nostrils, erasing the subtle scent of Tanni's perfume. . . .

The pier was a finger thrusting through smoky fog. The thick gray

haze walled them in. Tanni Fah Lo insisted upon coming with them, to witness with her own eyes the destruction of the Manchu coffin.

One at a time, they bore their burdens down the slippery ramp to where the launch was moored. Again that night Van lashed a steering wheel fast. Tanni Fah Lo, almost lost in fog, stood on the dock and watched as they placed the somber oblongs side by side in the stern.

They brought no lanterns. Only a large box of matches and a torch—hastily fashioned and still unlighted.

Alan seated himself behind the wheel. "All right, Van. The kerosene."

He could see the darker shadow that was Van moving around the stern. His ears caught the soft gurgle of the jug as Van emptied it.

"Okay, Alan."

Alan started the motor, put it in low gear. The launch moved forward slowly, then halted, straining against the ropes which still held it to the dock.

The two men leaped out. Van lighted the torch and threw it into the launch just as Alan cast off the mooring lines and the craft *putt-putted* slowly away.

Flame leaped upward, bit a jagged orange hole in the gloom. The launch was slipping safely past the end of the pier, gathering headway. The noise of its engine seemed louder than ever under the low-pressing fog.

"There it goes," Alan said softly. "Tanni, look."

No answer.

"Tanni?"

Still no answer. Swift, horrified suspicion sent his heart plummeting downward. Her sadness . . . her resignation there at the end. Had she planned—?

He raced forward. Van caught him just at the end of the dock.

"She knew it was hopeless, Alan. And that this was the only way."

"Tanni!"

Desperately Alan's eyes strained through the fog to the burning, rapidly-vanishing ship. Was that a figure standing there between the caskets? Was that the gleam of embroidered robes and a jeweled headdress?

"Tanni!" He cried once again, through an aching throat, scarcely conscious of Van's restraining hands.

And then it came . . . Tanni Fah Lo's voice through the fog . . . a soft call he'd always remember.

"Farewell!"

THE END

VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Sir Isaac Newton

He was one of the greatest of all mathematicians, scientists and natural philosophers; one of history's mental giants.

ISAAC NEWTON, the famous English mathematician, scientist, and natural philosopher, was born December 25, 1642 in Woolsthorpe, in Lancashire, England, the son of a small freehold farmer. He received his early education at the grammar school at Grantham near by. He is said to have made little progress with his books until a successful fight with another boy aroused a spirit of emulation and led to his becoming head of the school.

At the age of 19 he entered Cambridge University. He immediately applied himself to mathematical studies and within a few years not only made himself master of most of the works of value then existing, but had also begun to make some progress in original methods for extending the science. In the early part of 1665 he discovered what is now known as the binomial theorem, and a little later came the elements of the differential calculus which he called Fluxions. He also extended the application and usefulness of the method of Tangents. It was also in the year 1665—according to the legend, for which there is much foundation of authority—as Newton sat in his garden at Woolsthorpe, the fall of an apple suggested the most magnificent of his subsequent discoveries—the law of universal gravitation. Ever since the publication of the theories of Copernicus as to the movements of the heavenly bodies the existence of a force of some kind had been postulated, to account for the movements of the planets in space, but it was left to Newton to state the laws under which it worked.

On his first attempt, however, to apply the law, to explain the lunar and planetary motions, he

employed an estimate then in use of the radius of the earth which based on the value of a degree of latitude then prevalent, was so erroneous as to produce a discrepancy between the value of the real force of gravity and that required by theory to explain the motions and indicated only an approximate verification of his theory. After going over his calculations with the greatest care, and finding no material mistake in them, he abandoned the quest temporarily, and turned his attention to other matters; investigating the nature of light, and the details of the construction of telescopes.

In 1666 he had acquired a glass prism of good quality and in 1668 completed his first reflecting telescope, with which he observed Jupiter's satellites. In a variety of ingenious and interesting experiments where a spectrum was produced by sunlight refracted through a prism in a darkened room, he was led to the conclusion that rays of light which differ in color differ also in refrangibility, and that in consequence the production of a perfect image of a distant object was an impossibility, with that kind of an instrument. The indistinctness of the image formed by the object glass was not necessarily due to any imperfection of its form, but to the fact of the different colored rays of light being brought to focus at different distances. Therefore, it was natural that he abandon the refracting telescope, and turn his attention to the reflecting variety which was then unknown. The instrument he constructed proved serviceable and proved useful in astronomical researches. Sixty years later the first achromatic lens was successfully perfected by Chester More

Hall.

It was on January 11, 1672, that Newton was elected a member of the Royal Society of London, having become known to that body from his reflecting telescopes, and a month later his famous paper on a "New Theory of Light and Color" was read on the occasion of his installation. In his paper he states that "Light consists of rays differently refrangible" and that "Colors are not qualifications of light derived from refractions or natural bodies, as is generally believed, but original and connate properties which in divers rays are divers." In 1675, he brought another paper to the Society's attention on the same subject stressing the phenomenon known as the Newton Rings. In connection with this he formulated the emission theory of light, on the foundation of calculations made some years before by Descartes. At the basis of this was the hypothesis that light consisted of material corpuscles, emitted by the luminous body. Hence, it is known as the "corpuscular" theory. It was universally accepted as a correct explanation, until superseded by the undulatory theory about 1815.

In 1679 a new and much more accurate determination of the earth's diameter became available, and it is believed that shortly thereafter Newton resumed his studies on gravitation. In 1684 his conclusions were confidentially given to Halley, the astronomer. It was on the urgent solicitation of Halley that he was induced to commit to a systematic treatise these principles and their demonstrations, Halley undertaking to print it at his own expense. The principal results of his discoveries were set down in a treatise called "De Motu Corporum," but advised by Halley, he substituted it for a much more elaborate paper, which was entitled "Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica," translated "The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy," now universally referred to as the "Principia," and gave it to the world in 1687.

This work, perhaps the most notable scientific production which the mind of man had so far brought forth, was in three parts, two of which were devoted to the subject of Motion in general, and its laws, while the third is devoted to the movements of members of the solar system. In the "Principia" Newton formally introduced the ideas of mass and force and established the science of theoretical mechanics, as it exists today. In the entire history of science no single contribution of any man has been as important as this.

Since 1669 Newton had occupied the Leucanian chair at Cambridge, and had taken an active part in defending the rights of the university against the encroachments of King James II, who, being a Catholic, was not in sympathy with the liberal atmosphere of the great institution. The conspicuous part which he had taken on this occasion procured him a seat in the Convention Parliament, in which he sat from January, 1689, to its dissolution in 1690. In 1696 he was ap-

pointed Warden of the Mint and in 1699 was promoted to the office of Master of the Mint, an office, which he held till the end of his life. In 1701 he was again the chosen representative of the university in Parliament, and in 1703 was elected President of the Royal Society, a position which he also held until his death, being re-elected for twenty-four consecutive terms of a year each. During this nearly quarter of a century of political and scientific activities he made it an invariable rule to subordinate his studies to his public duties, and yet found time to do much work towards the advance of science. One of his most important works during this time was the superintendence of the compilation and publication of the "Greenwich Observations."

Queen Anne visited Cambridge in 1705 as the guest at Trinity Lodge of the Master, Dr. Bentley, and on this occasion Newton was knighted. About the same time the controversy with Leibnitz as to the invention of the differential calculus began. In a review published anonymously of Newton's tract on quadrature, Leibnitz, in 1705, implied that Newton had borrowed from him the idea of Fluxions.

The controversy lasted many years. Leibnitz died in 1716, but it continued to affect English mathematics for more than a century.

Newton's death occurred on March 20, 1727, at the ripe age of 85. His remains were interred in Westminster Abbey, where a handsome monument was erected to his memory in 1731. At his death a cast was taken of his face, and from this a magnificent full-length statue was made by Roubillac, which stands in the ante-chapel of Trinity College at Cambridge. It was given to the College in 1750 by the Master, Dr. Smith.

In person Newton was of medium height and of robust build, inclining towards corpulency in his later years, though a light eater. In his prime his countenance, which was finely and symmetrically cut, expressed thoughtfulness and mental repose. He was affable and modest, rather reserved and dignified, but without the least implication of hauteur.

Newton never married. From early manhood he was always in comfortable financial circumstances, and left an estate estimated at about \$150,000, which meant great affluence for his day.

At the age of sixty to sixty-five his health began to fail, and while he did not allow the circumstance to interfere with his public duties, he began to abandon science as a field of thought, and turned his mind to speculations regarding the future. Having a profound reverence for the Scriptures, these took the form of endeavoring to fathom the mysterious sayings of the books of Daniel and of the Revelations of St. John, about which he wrote rather voluminously, but apparently with no intent of publication. In 1733, six years after his death, his scriptural studies were published under the title of "Observations of the Prophecies of Daniel and of the Book of Revelations."

LOUIE'S

by LEROY YERXA

"LOUIE!" Sam Wallace's voice cracked out like a whip from the city desk. Louie approached slowly.

"Want me, Chief?" The question was unnecessary. He knew damned well what was coming. Louie's five feet of skin and bones were never cut out for a press photographer. He'd been waiting a long time for Wallace to find it out.

Sam looked up again from under the green eye shade, squinted and growled.

"You're fired."

Louie gulped. He sidled around behind Wallace, forgetting the momentarily silenced typewriters and side grins that greeted his downfall.

Sam was studying page one of the competitive City Journal. It carried a three column blowup of the Tony Rezzcheck funeral. It was a nice shot of a big-time gangster making his last trip to the cemetery. At Wallace's elbow a glossy photo spelled Louie's last stand. He had been on the Rezzcheck job—had one camera smashed by Tony's playboys, and finally come home with a nice print of a man's shoulder. It was a clear, well defined shoulder, perfect for reproduction purposes, but Sam didn't like it.

Louie gulped and departed.

The boys down stairs were very quiet when Louie came in. He stopped at the door, lips twisted into a wry grin.

"Exit one lousy photographer," he said. Louie needed a beer. He took a few things from the locker. Pat Mul-

lens stopped him at the outer door, looking sheepish.

"Heard you busted your box on that last job," he muttered. "Here's an old one I don't use much. Take it."

"Thanks, Pat. I can get along."

Louie choked and pushed past him. He couldn't see well in the sunlight outside. The light brought tears into his eyes. The Post gang were swell to a guy. Too darn swell. He fumbled in the baggy tweed coat and drew out the last ten spot. Kissing it tenderly, Louie headed for Ray's Beer Hall.

"Whatever's on tap," he requested, and Ray slid a foamy one across the polished mahogany.

"What's the matter?" Ray looked him over carefully. "You look lower than a busted kite."

"I am," Louie answered, and slid down off the stool. The telephone jangled loudly in the darkness at the other end of the bar.

"Yeah?" Ray answered it. "Hey, Brock," he said. "It's your girl. She says she expected you'd be here."

LOUIE came on the double, clutching the receiver to his ear.

"Kitty?" he questioned eagerly. "Hello, Honey, where the devil are you?"

A pleasant tinkle of laughter came over the wire.

"Hello, Napoleon." It was Kitty Wallace, all right, fresh and vibrant as a lake shore breeze. "I'm in California. I've got such grand news, I had to call

CAT EYE

In a flash Louie was down the bank and lashing out with both fists at his enemy



Louie got fired—and all he knew was taking pictures. Well, he'd show the boss! So he bought a junky camera with a cat's eye for a lens—and took a pic of the end of the world!

you at once—"

"California!" Louie's voice was incredulously startled, but he was singing inside at the sound of her voice. "When are you coming home?"

Kitty laughed again.

"Lonely?"

"I'm *plenty* low."

Louie told her about the job. Kitty was deeply concerned.

"But I'll be home tomorrow, cave man." She had a way of saying it that wasn't hard to take. "What I've got to tell you will make everything all right again."

"Yeah?" Louie was worried. "What do we furnish the bungalow with?"

"Love," Kitty answered. "And you know what else—"

"Your three minutes are up," the harsh, metallic voice of the long-distance operator cut in.

"Bye, bye," Kitty said. "Lots of kisses, and I'm taking the plane tonight."

The receiver clicked. Louie stood very still for a minute, listening. Then he turned away toward State Street.

"California," he groaned. "A plane . . . What a girl!" And what was all this surprise business?

Down the street, he hesitated in front of Joe's pawn shop. Ten bucks, less one beer. He went in, feeling more comfortable in the half-lighted, shabby room. Joe came from the back room, hunched forward with a critical eye.

"Mr. Brock," he said with suspicion in his voice, "I ain't buying today."

"I am," Louie said shortly. He started to paw over the collection of battered cameras on the end of the counter. Joe leaned over, his stubble-covered chin close to Louie's.

"It's a camera you want?"

"You ain't got one in the joint," Louie was disgusted. "But I might take one of these boxes."

"I got good cameras." Joe was rising to the battle. He pushed the best of the lot forward. "A hundred-dollar Speed Graphic, this is, and in fine shape."

He turned it in his hairy fingers.

"Without a lens," Louie reminded him.

"So." Joe was unruffled. "I'm selling you a hundred-buck camera for ten ones, without lens."

"Ain't you got an old one I can use," Louie was beginning to get ideas. "That dead eye won't help any."

Joe rummaged around in a grimy box. There was glass of all types in it. At last he drew something out and screwed it quickly into the camera.

"That's a good one." He held it up for Louie's approval.

THE box was tight enough—no pin holes, but the lens stared at him like a cat's eye. It was pale green, with a deeper, pupil-like circle in the center.

"This is a glass eye," he sputtered, drawing back. "What in hell you trying to sell me?"

"Now listen, Mr. Brock," Joe clouded suddenly, "I'm selling you a hundred-buck camera, not the lens. Do you buy, or do I turn you around and throw you out?"

Brock hesitated.

"I'll take it," he said, "for five bucks."

Joe seemed about to disintegrate. Then realizing he still had the upper edge of the deal he held out his hand for the cash.

"Give."

Louie handed him the money and turned. His eye caught the twelve-inch figure of a cat sitting on a shelf above the door. It was of metal, and black with age. One green eye winked from the head as though begging for its mate.

"A very valuable number," Joe was on the trail of the other five, "A genuine Egyptian cat, dug from ancient ruins. Price, five bucks."

"What the hell would I do with a one-eyed cat?" Louie shot back. He left the shop and headed up State toward Madison. There was a plate left in the camera. An intriguing idea entered his mind. Why not take a shot and see how the world looked through a cat's eye? In front of the First National he spotted an old begger. Lifting the camera he aimed carelessly and released the shutter.

IN THE dark room under Mrs. Sheridan's hall stairs, he went to work. With fresh chemicals mixed, Louie turned out the light and started making prints of his best work. Some of these were bound to sell the syndicates. Cash was hash right now, and he needed food badly.

An hour later he stopped, then remembered the plate in Joe's bargain camera. Drawing it out, he doused it in the developer. To Louie's surprise dark spots began to appear on the face of the negative. The crazy lens *had* worked. Sweat oozed on his forehead and he bent over tensely. The blackness was spreading and figures stood out plainly. He nursed the plate into the hypo. Working carefully now he washed the negative and placed it on the drying rack. It was too dark to make out the image.

Later, out in the brightness of the hall, he looked at what the cat-eye lens had captured. Louie almost passed out. There wasn't any beggar at all. This was a perfect shot of two coppers fighting a death battle with what seemed to be three bank robbers. He sat down on the stairs, wiping his face with a chemical-stained sleeve. It was an on-the-scene shot if he'd ever dreamed of

one, and what staff photographer hadn't?

Dashing back to the dark room, Louie pulled down the enlarger and went to work. Common sense told him there hadn't been a robbery at the First National in ten years. He tried to convince himself as he stared at the finished prints, that he, Louie Brock, had seen this with his own eyes. It was no use. He'd seen one seedy looking bum and that was all. Mumbling, he slipped the print into an envelope, put it carefully inside his coat and headed for Ray's.

"NOPE," Pat Mullens shook his head. "I haven't heard about it, and if the First National had been busted open, Sam woulda had me down there in twenty minutes."

"That's funny," Louie had to lie. "I heard a couple of guys talking. Must have been listening backward." He gulped another tall one and thumped the glass down with a note of finality.

"Next one's on the house," Ray offered.

"Thanks, fella," Louie climbed down. "Me—I need sleep, and very bad."

Pat looked after him as he went out the door. He turned to Ray.

"Funny what losing a job will do to a guy," he offered. "Louie's acting wilder than a tire salesman."

WHEN Louie Brock woke up it was raining. The clock told him night was gone by five hours and Kitty would have long since arrived by the morning plane. His clogged nostrils smelled news. It whipped up through the smoky air of West Madison and brought his bare feet out on the damp floor. Then he realized what had called him from his dream of a thousand cat's eyes all staring at once.

A newsie was howling from the street.

"Hi-Ya. Read all about it. Cops fight gun battle at First National Bank. Three crooks killed. Hi-Ya. Read—"

Louie was half way down in his pajamas. Back up again, he flung the robe over his shoulders and amost fell down to the front door.

"Hey, Kid," he shouted. "Bring me a paper."

His heart was pounding. Safe in the room again, he read the first paragraph.

The First National Bank was held up early today by three unidentified men who attempted to escape through the front entrance with ten thousand dollars. Only the speedy work of two officers on the beat prevented their— He read on by jerks—*gun battle—two men killed—companion wounded badly.*

THIS WAS IT. This was the robbery he had a picture of—but how?

Louie's mind was whirling. He sat a moment on the bed, nursing a head that wouldn't stop pounding. Page one of the paper carried a single column shot of the bank. Sam must have dug it from the morgue at the last minute.

He got determinedly to his feet.

MADISON Street was a dirty spattering mess of mud and rain. Louie's slippers squished through it; his pajamas were wet to the knee. The topcoat might have been some protection if he'd remembered to button it.

In five minutes Louie was standing before Sam Wallace's desk. The precious envelope was clutched firmly in one hand. He passed it to Sam.

"Well, well," Wallace's grin was caricatured by an ink-stain. "If it isn't little Tom Thumb Brock back again. What can we do for you, sonny?"

"Nothing," Louie flared. "Just take a look at what you're missing."

Sam opened the envelope carelessly. The print flopped out on the desk top.

He stared at it a second, then galvanized into life.

"How in—?" he started. "My God, man, do you realize what you've got here?"

"A gold mine," Louie grinned. "And all for the Journal."

Sam's expression softened.

"No employee of the Post will sell his stuff to that crackpot outfit. You're hired again with twenty-five a month as your first raise."

He turned in his chair and shouted like a bull moose.

"Ed, call the press room and tell them to hold everything. Junk page one and get the engraver up here. I want a cut of this print that will leave just room enough for the head and caption." He relaxed again. "Louie, a hundred bucks for the sole rights to this shot?"

"I oughta put in a clause where you'd have to take off your hat every time we meet," Louie said bitterly. "But maybe I won't."

"Thank you, Mr. Brock," Sam said, and left Louie twiddling his thumbs.

Louie sat down on the desk top, listening to the pleasant humming of a city room in action. His stuff was opening their eyes, and promptly. In the back of Louie's head, that cat's eye glowed brightly. He blessed it. If the breaks held, Louie Brock would buy a house full of cats.

IT WAS a constant source of wonder to Pat Mullens how Louie ever managed to get Kitty Wallace from the grab bag. She'd spent the better part of six months loving the half-pint Brock, and Pat was trying harder all the time to see with his thick rimmed glasses just what Kitty could see, and admire. Today, Pat was more worried than ever over the way Louie had called his shots on the First National job. He

looked up, at least figuratively, to Louie, as some small image of a great man.

Kitty, trim, and with hair of warmest brown, came tripping into the beanery and sat down beside Louie.

"How—Great Chief." Her nose wrinkled a little at Louie's seedy appearance. "You could stand a bath and some fresh linen, Laddie."

Louie groaned.

"Don't I know it." He tried to hide as much as possible under the edge of the table. "I—I've been a busy guy these last two days. Gee, Kitty, I'm sorry about this morning."

"It *was* lonely at the air field," she squeezed his arm. "But I guess you did pretty well, from what Dad tells me."

Her toe crept out and he felt its pressure against his. Everything was all right again.

"My midget does have trouble, doesn't he, Pat?"

Pat chuckled. "I'd like to hear one of the boys call him that!" He stood up. "This is where I came in."

Kitty grabbed his arm.

"So," she said sternly. "You'd walk out on us after I've been gone for two weeks."

Joe sat down again sheepishly.

"Me, I'm always in the way," he muttered.

"And a darned good place to be," Louie included. "When we get that 'want to be alone' feeling, we'll let you know."

Kitty's toe pressed a little tighter against his shoe. He blushed in spite of himself. Something about her complete disregard for his physical shortcomings made a big warm spot in Louie's heart.

"You won't even ask if I had a nice trip," she pouted a very little, her amazing light green eyes twinkling with mystery. "Well, anyhow, I'm home,

I have a big surprise for you in just a few days, and now let's have some spaghetti."

"Listen, Honey, don't you think I oughta know about this secret," Louie was wearing down. "It's been two weeks—"

"You will, cave man, when I get good and ready to tell you."

The spaghetti came, dripping with meat sauce, and the incident was closed. Kitty was like that.

SOME hours later, pleasantly smeared with lipstick and smelling pleasantly of Kitty's perfume, Louie Brock sat on a bench behind the Park Central Hotel. It had been a long time since his nose had met on even terms with Kitty Wallace's. The experience had been an old thrill renewed, with exciting promises for days to come. Louie felt fine. A swell girl, Kitty; and a swell job with a cat's eye camera. He had everything.

Louie thought about the camera. *Something*, and that was all he could call it, was making that camera register a scene just twenty-four hours before it actually happened. That *something* was making an actual prediction and backing it up in black and white. *Something* that had to do with Egypt, and history back at the time mummies were going around under their own power. Black magic, and right under Louie Brock's arm.

He'd have to be careful. If the gang found out he wasn't playing fair with them. . . .

A new camera! That was the thing. Buy a new camera for everyday shots, and keep the cat's-eye model out of sight. No good taking a picture of a visiting celebrity, only to find he had a print of the empty railroad station twenty-four hours after said celeb had vanished.

MORNING, and with the sun in his face, Louie felt better. He drove the Chevrolet along slowly. The state highway passed under him, with the smooth click of tar strips against his tires. The cry of the newsboys still rang pleasantly in his ears. "Pic of the Century" they called his shot of the First National robbery. Life, Look, Black Star all wanted him on the staff. Kitty was the one thing that held him on the Post staff. A mighty firm anchor, at that. Kitty, surprise or no, was about all one man could ask.

Louie enjoyed the assignment this morning.

"There's an old screwball about eight miles west of town, just off the main drag," Sam had told him. "He thinks the world is going to end this week. After that pic you brought in, I'm not so sure but what he's right. At least it will make good Sunday Supplement stuff. Go out and bring him back alive."

Louie turned off the highway at Stateville, and followed his nose down beyond the railroad tracks. Here in a secluded gully, washed out by a muddy creek, the Prophet had built his ark. Noah had nothing on this boy, Louie thought as he climbed out of the car. The ark was made from what was left of an old life boat. It had been decked over with old timber and sheet metal. Top-side, it groaned under a small, tarpaper shack. This was the Prophet's living quarters which he shared with an unholy assortment of goats, pigs, dogs and cats.

Louie stood on the bank for a minute, looked at the smooth, soft yellow clay below and wondered how he'd get down. The Prophet came out and Brock's camera mind saw some nice shots immediately. The old gent was good material *any* day in the week. He had a gunny sack wrapped and tied

around his center overlapped by about three feet of whiskers. That was all.

He propped one skinny shank against the side of the boat and surveyed Louie's slight form.

"Welcome, son," his washed out blue eyes kindled with interest, and the high quaver of a voice was friendly. "Welcome to salvation."

Louie unlimbered the new Speed Graphic he'd purchased that morning and gathering up the cat's-eye model, started down the bank. He slipped, and riding on his back, hit the bottom with a muddy thump. He came up sputtering. The Prophet was properly shocked.

"Tut, tut, my son," he admonished, "such language is in vain."

"It wasn't," Louie said. "It did me a lot of good. Say, I'm out here to get some pictures of you. How about it?"

The Prophet's chin slipped a notch and his eyes clouded.

"Verily," he muttered, "I had hoped some poor sinner had seen the light. I felt that you were sent to join my heavenly caravan."

THEN he saw the press card that Louie was presenting for impression's sake. His face brightened.

"If the world would have one more look at my humble body, before its peoples are plunged into the whirlpool, you may take your tin-types as my last gesture of love."

He hoisted himself upright and stood tense and dignified at the end of the ark Louie judged to be the prow. A couple of cats nosed about his legs and he picked one of them up. Louie scrambled back up the clay bank. He snapped two or three shots of the gulch and the ark. Then, with his precious cat-eye he took another of the entire scene. This time, twenty-four hours wouldn't bring any change, not even

the end of the world. Louie was assured of that as he headed the Chevy toward town.

Still, that cat's-eye lens was too much to pass over lightly. Just a chance that something *might* happen. Louie Brock had a healthy respect for broken mirrors, black cats, and superstitions in general. The old world was anchored pretty firmly for a complete washout in one day. He thanked the old duck and promised to look him up in Heaven.

BACK at the Post he turned the plates over to the engraver and headed for the boarding house. No good trying to find Kitty. She'd said she'd be gone all day. That might mean weeks. With nothing better to do, Louie headed for the darkroom, and his "end of the world" picture. Without looking at the drying negative, he made a double deck sandwich in Mrs. Sherrigan's kitchen and sat on the metal table top to digest it.

The negative dry, he went after it, still chewing on the cold bacon and lettuce. Back in the kitchen he plopped it down on the table and started munching again. The sharp outline of the negative flashed up from the table top and his jaw dropped. Louie swallowed the last mouthful of sandwich and stared. *The Prophet had been right. Tomorrow was the end of the world.*

Here under his twitching nose was a picture of a great raging torrent. People were being flung about under its force, small heads drifting above the mass of dirty water. Some of them had reached the very bank he'd stood on this afternoon, and were hanging to the roots and underbrush, mouths open in despair.

Feeling very weak in the knees, he dragged himself into the darkroom. Working feverishly, he made an eight by ten print of the thing and tried to

make out more of the details in the dim light. No good. The ark was there, he was sure of that, and the bewhiskered figure at its prow was familiar. Out into the hall he ran, the print still dripping. The door was open, and he ran to it, letting the sun pour over his shoulder. Then Louie Brock saw something that ended his own private world at a glance.

Stretched full length on the slippery river bank was Kitty Wallace. He tried to convince himself that it was a dream. No, she was there, her slippers gone, hair soaked and clinging against white shoulders. The dress, or what was left of it, lingered against her smooth body, accenting every curve. There was a mole, too. A little brown spot that branded her clearly. The mole, Louie thought with a blush, was right where it should be, and where no one but he should ever know.

That wasn't the worst of it. A tall, dark fellow bent over Kitty, arms about her slim waist. Held in close embrace, Kitty's lips were pressed against his cheek.

The world turned a dirty collection of terrible pinks and mangy greens. He started to tear the print in his shaking hands, thought better of it, folding it carelessly. He started blindly for Ray's place, minus hat and coat.

LOUIE drank the clock around. He went into an uncomfortable stupor on the bar. At eight in the morning Ray brought him gently to his feet.

"Better go home, Laddy," he said kindly. "You've had enough to sink the Axis."

Louie emerged into the sunlight, hiding it from his eyes. His hat was four sizes too small.

"Wish there wasn't any sun," he muttered. "Who started the idea anyhow?"

The sidewalk lurched up under him. He dodged it, saving himself a treacherous blow in the face. Traffic on State was all moving backward. Horns blasted at his eardrums in a continual scream, trying to undermine his last bit of morale. A man, at least ten feet tall emerged from the Post building and came toward him. It was Pat Mullens. His height shocked Louie.

"H'lo Pat, ol' boy," he murmured. "My, how you've grown."

"From your looks," Pat suggested, "I'd say your head was the biggest part of you."

Louie sighed, looking very sad. The minute he closed his eyes a dozen Kitty's all with big green eyes danced around him, teasing wickedly. His stomach twisted savagely. Louie was going to die.

"I'm going on the ark," he said. "When you and the rest of 'em are drowning, I'll sit with the Prophet and float away from it all."

Pat took him firmly by the arm.

"You're going home, pronto."

Louie was deeply hurt. Pat couldn't understand him. Besides, Pat was a traitor. Finding he couldn't fool him with the tall man disguise, Pat was getting short again. Very short, and spreading out all over the sidewalk. He looked like something under a steam roller.

Louie chuckled.

"Pat," he said, "you get around, don't you?" He leaned on a fire hydrant to steady himself, and it lurched from under him. Pat steered him into the car.

"Jeebies," Pat muttered. "You *are* lit."

"Nope," Louie was growing insistent. "And I ain't going home. The world is gonna end. Kitty's two-timing me, and I'm gonna get saved."

There was some grain of sense be-

hind all this, Pat decided. When a man gets this bad, humor him.

"Okay," he agreed. "Where are we going?"

Louie told him—with gestures.

LOUIE BROCK'S magic lens had scored a direct shot. The little gully beyond Stateville was a bedlam. Water, rising by the minute had filled its banks to the brim. The ark had swung into midstream, with the Prophet and his horde of wild stock on board. It hesitated there, about to break loose from the mud bottom.

People struggled in the water, sinking, to rise again, their heads floating on the surface. Some of them had crawled free of the rising water and were clinging to debris along the bank.

Kitty Wallace and her lover were among them. Her clothes were nearly torn from her. The soaked green dress left more in sight than to the imagination. Her arms were about the man with her. Their lips were pressed tightly together. Kitty was putting everything into that kiss.

"Help me, darling," she whispered, "I'm so helpless, but now—"

"I'm glad I came," he answered simply. "Without you, life wasn't worth living."

A motor roared above them on the road, then stopped. There was the slam of a door and Kitty sat upright. Her companion was deeply concerned. A small projectile of hate plummeted down the bank, slipping and howling bloody murder. He landed smack against the man at Kitty's side, sending him into a backward spin toward the water.

"You slimy, lousy, woman-baiting son of a spinach eater," Louie screamed. The spinach eater's offspring sank out of sight in the mud and water, came up spitting.

"Oh! Mister Slinkvitch," he shouted in a high tenor. "S-save me."

"Coming," a high voice sang out from the bushes behind Louie. A stout figure emerged, and knickered legs bore it down upon Louie. With three gallons of Ray's beer in him, Louie let go again. Mr. Slinkvitch sank out of sight beside Louie's first victim. Louie started up the bank for more of them, slipped, fell flat on his face in the mud. Kitty was by his side, helping him up. Tears coursed down her dirt-streaked face.

"Oh! Louie," she wailed mournfully. "Look what you've done. You've ruined everything!"

THERE were more of them now, one fellow carrying a box on a tripod. Blinded, Louie ignored Kitty's cry and tore into the fray. He had all the gusto of a landing Marine. Louie took the big boy first and went into the drink with him, box, tripod and all. He came up, shouting:

"Goodbye, Kitty. Always remember, I loved—" there was a horrible gurgle as Slinkvitch clutched at his shoulder and drew him under water again.

He swallowed a gallon of water mixed with three pounds of wet clay. Something solid clutched his wrist and Louie felt the bank slide under him. Pat was drawing him to safety. He stretched out very still and white beside Kitty. For a moment something akin to discouragement was in her eyes. Then she smiled tenderly down at him.

"You've made an awful mess of things, cave man."

Louie tried to speak, but no sound came.

"Leave him there to die!" The voice shook with rage. It was Sam Wallace, standing well in the background in a spray of mist. Louie shook his head

and rubbed the water from his eyes. The rest of them were there. The guy who had kissed Kitty, Slinkvitch, Pat, Sam, and some others who had murder in their eyes.

"I should kick him," Slinkvitch screamed. "Already he's ruined a camera and a hundred feet of film. Five hours lost and all because of this dum-mox."

"Listen, honey," Louie groaned. "I was tight. I saw that guy making love to you and blotto." He sank back again, found her knees cushioned under his head. A cool hand stroked his face.

Pat hunched down beside him.

"Listen, sap," he said. "I didn't know this was where you were headed for. This is the surprise Kitty was saving for you."

Louie looked sad.

"It was a surprise all right," he answered. "The biggest one I've ever had."

"Not *that* kind," Kitty reassured him. "Mr. Slinkvitch is a movie director. I got permission in Hollywood for a short feature test. He was directing the picture." She hesitated, smiling oddly. "That—that jar of cold cream you saw me making love to is the lead man."

"Yeah," Sam Wallace offered. "She was doing a good job until you flashed on the scene."

Slinkvitch entered the conversation abruptly.

"It's all off. My camera ruined, that coffer dam built for nothing. Extras paid, and all because I want to make an actress out of this cheap little—"

Slinkvitch had said the wrong thing. Louie tottered upright, trying to break the hold Pat had on his shoulder.

"Let me go," he howled. "Did you hear—?"

"You've done enough," Mullens answered. "Stay put—" He pushed

Louie down again, and held him there.

"I'll sue," Slinkvitch shouted. "It's an attempted murder. It's sabotage, assault—" as he wound up with a dozen very fitting adjectives.

THE cameraman leaned over and picked up a bit of folded paper that had dropped from Louie's pocket. His eyes feasted on it for a second, then he ran toward the disappearing figure of Mr. Slinkvitch. Beside the truck they had all come in, he stopped. The director went into conference, waving his arms aloft bitterly. Then he took the paper and studied it closely. Waiting for more action Louie saw Slinkvitch turn and retrace his footsteps. A broad grin was on his face.

"That's mine," Louie shouted, recognizing the print. "Give it to me."

It was the print of the flood he'd taken the day before. Sam Wallace would see it, and then there'd be talk explaining to do.

Slinkvitch ignored him, going straight to Kitty Wallace.

"You are a natural," his thick lips working with pleasure. "This—this picture. I don't know where it came from, but it's got more on it than a thousand feet of film."

Kitty looked at it and blushed prettily.

"Who took this shot?" Sam asked, looking over Slinkvitch's shoulder.

No one spoke. Pat looked at Louie oddly. "You said it was yours."

"I'm saying a lot of screwy things." He wriggled uncomfortably. "Never saw it before."

"Such-such a-a-face," Slinkvitch was growing very red around the collar. "Such—"

Louie thought of the mole.

"Such a figure," he said. "Why don't

you admit it?"

Slinkvitch ignored him. Turning to his men he said:

"Pack up what's left. I'm going down town and write that contract." He turned to Kitty. "Young lady, you got a job. Better yet, you got a position, with money—folding money."

The Prophet had climbed over his craft and waded toward them through the slowly sinking pond.

"When are you going to break the dam and let this water out?" His eyes were pleading. "It's awful wet around here."

He carried a big black cat under his arm, and it scrambled to safety, purring and rubbing on Louie's leg.

"Looks like you got a friend," Pat told him.

"Guess he's got a lot of them," Sam Wallace started after Slinkvitch. "You're a screwball, Brock, but with enough rope, you seem to hang on the right end every time."

Kitty put her arms around him.

"Are you going to kiss me, or would you rather have that cat?"

Louie picked it up, stroking its fur gently.

"Could I have both?" he asked mildly. "I'm—I'm very fond of cats."

"You're crazy," Kitty said, and stood on tiptoe, her bare feet buried in the mud. Puckering her lips she asked softly, "Now?"

Pat studied them quizzically, started to turn away then hesitated.

"Your love of cats is mighty strong, Mr. Brock," he said. "You must have developed it in a hurry."

Louie looked at him wondering how much he knew.

"You don't know the half of it," he grinned, turning his attention to the pleasant task at hand.

NEXT MONTH: "The Man with Five Lives" by Clyde Woodruff

RADIO NEWS *for November*

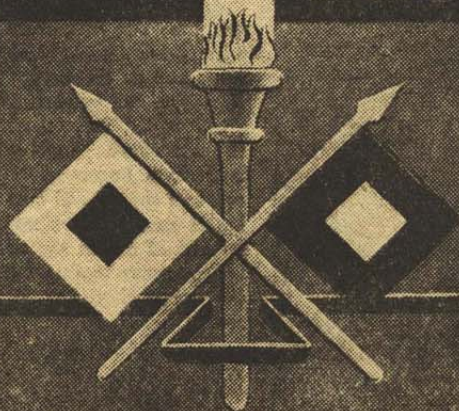
The Complete Story of the U.S. Signal Corps . . .

by The Signal Corps

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The special November U. S. Signal Corps issue of RADIO NEWS presents a complete, authoritative account of the vital communications branch of the Service. Written entirely by Signal Corps officers, each of whom is an expert in his branch of the Service, this special issue of RADIO NEWS includes brilliantly illustrated articles on: The Signal Corps in War, The New Signal Corps, History, Development of Field Sets, Signal Corps Research, Laboratories, Meteorology, Training, Army Signal Service, Signal Corps in Aviation, Supplies, Signal Corps Equipment in Mechan-

ized Units, Portable Ground Signal Equipment, Communications by Wire, Army Amateur Radio Systems, Photography and many other functions of the Service. A special section has been given over to the Signal Corps Radio Course, made available in this form for the first time — valuable instruction for future Signal Corps men as well as reference guide to all members of the Signal Corps. Also featured are two special pictorial sections in natural color and in black-and-white gravure of fine salon quality — striking photographs of the Signal Corps in action.



U.S. SIGNAL CORPS ISSUE



AT NEWSSTANDS OCT. 23rd

READER'S PAGE

ILLUSTRATION REPRODUCTIONS

Sirs:

Both my husband and I are avid fans of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. We never miss an issue.

The story "The Leopard Girl" in your October issue was just grand. We enjoyed it very much. We were wondering if it would be possible to get a reproduction of the illustration at the beginning of the story. It was so beautiful that we would like to have a copy for framing.

Also, we are very fond of Lefty Feep. He's one of the first things we read.

MRS. HELENA YOCUM,
5212 W. Margaret Way,
Seattle, Washington.

Many readers have asked us for reproductions suitable for framing. This hasn't been possible because of metal priorities, and the need for the metal used in these plates for the defense effort. However, beginning next issue, we will offer reproductions (simply as a one month trial for the first issue to determine whether or not the readers really want them) of the illustrations in the issue, reproduced on glossy paper, suitable for framing. Watch for the announcement next month as to prices.—Ed.

HIS DEBUT

Sirs:

I've never written to any magazine, so I guess this is my debut. FA just entered my files in January, so that makes me a new reader. Your

mag is among the first three, if not first, fantasy mags in the country.

Your best author, by all means, is Don Wilcox. His last eight stories for FA have all made hits with me. Don's now headed straight for the top.

Tell Paul to keep up the good work with his back covers. It is interesting to note that on the September back cover Paul depicts the god Perseus together with Atlas the snake-haired head bearer. I was very interested in the snake-haired feminine head Perseus was holding. I was at a loss when Gade said nothing about it in his story of Atlas. Then on the October back cover Paul gives us Perseus himself. The stories for these covers by H. Gade are making your back cover department more than it really is. Bravo, Paul, and Gade. How many paintings has Paul on the firing line?

In the April issue you promised to give us some Finlay pictures. Where are they?

JOHN C. HREHA,
974 Greenfield Ave.,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Not counting the painting on this month's cover, we have three more paintings by Paul on hand. Artist Finlay is present in this issue, and we have a half-dozen excellent illustrations waiting future issues. They will appear as soon as suitable stories are written around them.—Ed.

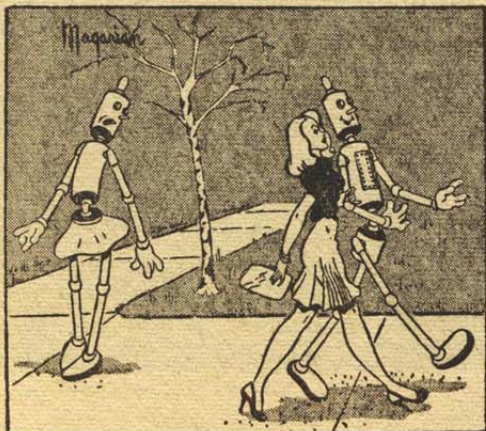
GUNS TO THE RIGHT OF US . . . !

Sirs:

After seeing your books listed as fantastic adventures, I've reached the conclusion only a fanatic person could even write such trash as is contained in the books you publish. I do not think you can be such good Americans when you waste paper, ink, etc., which could be used for the war effort. Anyone that dares to print such trash lives unreasonably. You should be taken out and shot. . . if ever I can get enough backing, I am going to see all trashy literature destroyed. I am an American soldier. I will always boycott your magazine until you wake up; realize how much you are hindering the war effort.

A SOLDIER,
Ft. Posenans,
San Diego, Calif.

The Office of War Information in Washington sends your editor a fourteen-page brochure of suggestions for material for our magazines each month, suggesting possible plots for stories, ideas to make the magazines more interesting, not only to the general public, but to the soldier in camp!



"What's she got that I haven't got?"

It is the opinion of those vitally interested in the war effort, that amusement and pastime for the soldier and the civilian is vital for morale. They heartily endorse our magazines. We receive hundreds of letters from soldiers each month thanking us for publishing our magazines, and telling how much they enjoy them. The USO and other organizations make special collections of pulp magazines for distribution free to soldiers. Washington has allotted sufficient paper and ink to publishers to continue publication as a vital service to defense. We are sure that if you ask your comrades in arms, you will discover that you might find viewpoints to effect a change in your opinion.—Ed.

OCTOBER LINE-UP

Sirs:

Your October issue of FA is the best issue you have put out in a long time. The line-up:

1. "The Leopard Girl" by Don Wilcox. The idea of having a real leopard instead of a girl gave the story a twist.

2. "The Devil's Lady" by Dwight V. Swain. At the end it had me wondering until I found out they were married.

3. "Mystery of the Lost Race" by E. K. Jarvis.

4. "Corporal Webber's Last Stand" by Leroy Yerxa. None of Yerxa's stories that I have read have been a flop.

5. "Union In Gehenna" by Nelson S. Bond. Let's have more stories like that.

6. "Double Trouble For Oscar" by James Norman. How about another Oscar of Mars story soon? Don't forget Oscarette.

7. "Mr. Throop's Incredible Hand" by Russell Storm.

8. "Jerk The Giant Killer" by Robert Bloch. Although in last place it is still a good story. I don't see how Bloch writes so many Feep stories without making them all seem alike.

As for the Fantastic Classic, "Empress of Mars" by Ross Rocklynne, I didn't rate it with the others though it was excellent.

Who did the illustration for "Empress Of Mars"?

J. F. DEWITT,
223 E. 12th Street,
Tulsa, Okla.

Julian S. Krupa, now a Marine, did the illustration for "Empress Of Mars." Your observation on that particular story leads us to ask, again, for comments from readers in reference to future Fantastic Classics. Which of those stories of a decade or so ago do you want reprinted in this magazine? It's up to you, fans!—Ed.

"SOFT SPOT"

Sirs:

You must have a soft spot in your head for Don Wilcox, but his offering for October is his first good story. These authors that write

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GARBER SERVICE, 72 Fifth Ave., Dept. 3011, New York City

on a mass production scale could write fewer and better stories.

Edmond Hamilton is a case in point. His story of other world silicate beings rang the bell, but Oh, My Lord, what hack that man puts out.

You must develop your writers, not work 'em to death. What I mean to say is this: With what you have to go on, you are the finest science-fantasy editor by far.

MCLEOD,
Chicago, Illinois.

You can't baffle us, McLeod! We use a mirror on left-handed compliments, and you know what happens to things in a mirror!—Ed.

HIT PARADE

Sirs:

I am not going to waste valuable time pouring superlatives on the story I consider to be No. 1 for the month of October. It is one of those things upon which no adjectives can be successfully lavished. So I will simply name it. First story of the month is—"The Leopard Girl," by Don Wilcox. The author's name is enough recommendation. Rest assured, dear editor, that this tale is going to be placed on the Hit Parade immediately.

Second place to "The Empress of Mars." Sorry, dear Ed., it's a fine story, but Wilcox has it beat a mile. If you really want to reprint a classic, try the first Burroughs yarn you ever ran—"The Scientists' Revolt," July, 1939.

Third place to that consistent winner of third place, Robert Bloch and his latest "Lefty Feep" yarn.

Fourth, "Union in Gehenna." Nice crazy yarn.

Fifth, "Mr. Throop's Incredible Hand."

Sixth, "The Devil's Lady." That much for the above-average yarns. Now for the less notable ones.

Seventh, "Mystery of the Lost Race." Nicely written, but it shares your usual "cover-jinx," which so far this year has only been broken by two stories, "Doorway to Hell" and "The Eagle Man."

Eighth, "Corporal Webber's Last Stand." Ending, dear editor, was *much* too obscure. Ah, if some favorite author were to rewrite that tale and make it nationally famous.

Ninth, last, least, lowest, "Double Trouble for Oscar."

Well, that's the way it goes. Either you go over an issue and delete all stinkeroos, leaving a mere, fair-to-middling mag, or else you print what you feel like, wind up with a couple of duds—and, in the same issue, things like Wilcox's and Rocklynne's classics which deserve Academy Awards.

PAUL CARTER,
156 S. University St.,
Blackfoot, Idaho.

We're working on some reprints that will make you rave. We've dug clear to the pyramids for something that's worth repeating and yet was written many years ago. We have abandoned any

ideas of reprinting stories of as late a vintage as 1939. Apparently Leroy Yerxa came mighty close to making you rave, if you consider the story had enough in it to make it material for a "nationally famous" story. And to Mr. Yerxa, a new writer, that will be encouragement indeed. It's encouragement to us, we know, because we've weaned this writer with great anxiety and hope. —Ed.

WE PROMISE, ROSEMARY!

Sirs:

Whee! Another Mac girl, this one being very much all right, even if she isn't quite human, and I'm not being catty either, the story said the same thing. Nelson S. Bond certainly gets around. Last night I heard a one-man dramatic reading of his baseball story, "The In-Chute" on the radio, and the fellow who did it, unfortunately I didn't catch his name, said that Nels had written some of the wackiest stories he'd ever read. Which is true, all right, but one of the neatest novels in a long time was his "When Freeman Shall Stand." Maybe he didn't mean to be funny, but I giggled every time I read one of his name contractions of cities pretty well-known right now.

"The Golden Opportunity of Lefty Feep" was also a golden opportunity for the Lefty Feep fans. I like that mug.

And man alive, two such wonderful stories of the same variety in one issue is very much in the order of an advanced Christmas present. I mean Magarian's illustration of "Talu's Fan" as well as the story itself, and F. Magarian's picturization of "Shayla's Garden"—and that story too! Wow! Those two artists are super special and should be No. 1 on your Hit Parade every time.

I like that John York Cabot. He's one fellow who keeps 'em turning out right every time. Don't ever misplace him.

"The Picture of Death" reminded me of "Dorian Grey," but McGivern twisted it nicely into a surprise ending. He's good at that.

I got a bang out of Clee (is that all of his first name or is it Cletus?) Garson's "Startling Statue" story.

"The Tireless Leg" theme was old way before my time. Surely P. F. Costello could do something else, huh?

Keep up the good work, Ed., and we'll keep buying, and that's a promise!


ROSEMARY DUCKWORTH,
8047 Lane,
Detroit, Michigan.

Your information about Nelson S. Bond's story on the radio is interesting. Recently, too, his "Bring My Drum to England" was broadcast over a national hook-up. Many of Bond's stories have been broadcast, even his fantasies.—Ed.

"GRAVEYARD SHIFT"

Sirs:

I am just finishing my last watch on the "graveyard shift," which means that I have fin-



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Keep up the good work, Ed., and we'll keep buying, and that's a promise!

ROSEMARY DUCKWORTH,
8047 Lane,
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I am just finishing my last watch on the "graveyard shift," which means that I have fin-



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ished the current issue of **FANTASTIC** (*Amazing Stories* bit the dust a week ago). And now here's a heart-rending plea from the very hub of the wheel of national defense.

The boys in the lab are running short of reading material, especially science fiction. Thus far AS and FA have been the best innocuous against that dreaded malady, "the graveyard shift nods." We're all prolific readers, and the lag between issues is terrific. In fact the shortage is so acute that some of the boys are threatening to start reading chemistry texts—but only as a last resort, of course. Why don't you guys get in the groove and speed up production!

ELWYN F. MAYEAU,
411 George Street,
Midland, Michigan.

Remember when FA and AS used to be just 144 pages thick? Well, look at 'em now! Haven't we speeded up production? We've doubled it. And you still want more? Ye gods, we must have a couple of magazines you really like!—Ed.

"I TAKE EVERYTHING BACK!"

Sirs:

I am shocked, I am dumbfounded. I am devastated. After reading all those terrific stories in your October issue of **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES**, I take back everything I've ever said about your books. Of course, it wasn't all perfect, but it was the closest thing to science fiction classics that I've seen in a long time.

I take back all the nasty things I said about your stories. I love you like a bosom companion. In fact I am going to subscribe to both **FANTASTIC** and *Amazing* at the earliest possible date.

Here is how I rate the stories in the October issue of **FANTASTIC**:

1. "The Leopard Girl" (Wilcox). My favorite author at his best.
2. "Union In Gehenna" (Nelson S. Bond). Orchids to Mr. Bond. He outdid himself on this one. Better than any of his Biggs stories.
3. "The Devil's Lady" (Dwight V. Swain). It's got that certain something.
4. "The Empress Of Mars" (Rocklynne). It's very good, but his "Big Man" was his masterpiece.
5. "Corporal Webber's Last Stand", "Jerk The Giant Killer", "Mr. Throop's Incredible Hand" all rate about the same. A little under the average for a good short story.
6. "Mystery Of The Lost Race" (Jarvis). A new name, a new type of story. The reason I saved this for last is because Mr. Jarvis also deserves orchids, about twice as many as Mr. Bond.

ROBERT RICHEL,
12-13 Ellis Ave.,
Fairlawn, N. J.

We're mighty glad to know we've finally made you satisfied with our book. We'll try plenty hard to keep you satisfied—and if this issue doesn't do it, we will go back and sit down!—Ed.

READS ALL OUR MAGS!

Sirs:

I read all of your large mags. So I just think I'll let you know what I think of all of them. FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. 1, "Outcasts of Eternity." 2, "Resurrection From Hell" (that's my type of fantastic story). 3, "The Infinite Invasion". 4, "An Angel With Four Faces". Illustrations—keep McCauley and let's have more Mac Girls. Could do with a little less Jackson, Ned Hadley. More Fuqua, Magarian. L. R. Jones does the weaker sex credit (Deadly Yappers). Shoot M. Smith!!!!

Amazing Stories. Best—"Secret Of The Earth Star". Horsensense Hank was P-U-KY!!!

Mammoth Detective. Best—"Enemy Agent." Keep Wyndham Martyn! I thought the first edition was the best.

Note to AS and FA. If you're going to classify some of those short novelets as novels, look at the length of the novels in MD. Put the illustrator's name in print under the illustrations.

DAVID DINGES,
413 N. Jefferson Ave.,
Cookeville, Tennessee.

We'd call this real loyalty! Here's a fan who reads all of our pulps. But it really is a good habit to get into. We dish them up in the same office, and we have all our old friends in mind as well as new ones. We try to put each book at the top of its particular field, and when we succeed, we look for another field. As for those novels in Mammoth, we think everybody loves a good long mystery—and boy, we made 'em long!—Ed.

COVER CONSCIOUS!

Sirs:

Well, well, and, emphatically, well! What a cover! What color! What balance! What texture! What stroke!

That cover is about the most beautiful thing I have ever had the pleasure to cast these focals of mine on. And coming from me, that is saying a lot! Yessir! For real color, and real—well color, give me either St. John or McCauley.

E. K. Jarvis' story is peachy! What a plot! Wow! And that tiger girl! Let's have more of this type of fantastic stories.

Here are my comments, suggestions, and ratings on the stories. A—especially excellent; B—excellent; C—good; D—crummy; E—horrible.

"Mystery Of The Lost Race"—B. Good plot, nicely written.

"The Leopard Girl"—B. Again a good plot.

"Union In Gehenna"—B. I laughed till I thought I'd die, as the saying goes.

"Corporal Webber's Last Stand"—C. Fairly good plot, not much life. (Joke).

"Double Trouble For Oscar"—B. I always give Oscar an excellent standing.

"Jerk The Giant Killer"—B. Full of laughs. Keep them coming, Bloch.

"The Devil's Lady"—C. Just about made it. He was quite a jerk. Do you actually call that hero a human being? My gosh, all those chances, and he

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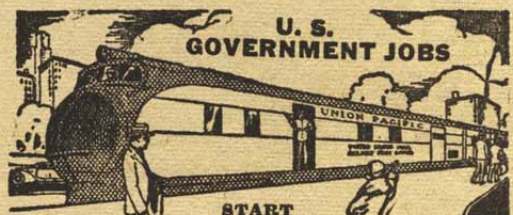
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sneered down all of them if you get what I mean.

"Mr. Throop's Incredible Hand"—B. A little different. Ending wasn't so hot.

So it goes, *Rap* old boy, nothing "A", but everything "OK". Now don't bother me while I get back to the cover!

JOHN SCHOMBURG, JR.,
(no address)

Everybody seems to have liked that cover, and we'd like to indulge in a quiet laugh at the art department, which frowned mightily on the "soft" colors in this cover! Ha ha!—Ed.

DOUBTLESS!

Sirs:

Doubtless you will receive so many letters in praise of Nelson S. Bond's "When Freeman Shall Stand" that one more or less will not make much difference. However, I cannot resist the urge to write in and tell you that it was the second best story FA has ever printed. First place is tie between Wilcox's "The Eagle Man" and Pragnell's "War of Human Cats". It was so good that I won't say a word about it being science fiction and having no place in a fantasy magazine.

I wonder how many of your readers appreciate the careful work of Robert Fuqua. Both his Carew Tower and the Cincinnati skyline were extremely well drawn, and more important, accurate. By the way, it's nice to see a story laid somewhere other than New York. Let's have more of the same.

Though the other yarns in the November issue were not as good as Bond's, they were excellent, too. Second place seems to be a tie between "Talul's Fan" and "Shayla's Garden", both of which were well-written fantasies.

The interior pix were both good and bad this time. Fuqua and Magarian were "good" and the rest were, quite definitely, "bad".

Paul's back cover was somewhat better than the front cover, but McCauley did a good job too. You're overworking H. W. Give him more time and he'll produce better work.

Wanted—Paul on the inside (and not just occasionally) either. At least twice an issue. Ditto, *Amazing Stories*. A much larger Reader's Page. A cover by Fuqua. Trimmed edges. Virgil Finlay. Edgar Rice Burroughs.

CHAD OLIVER,
3956 Ledgewood,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

If our readers do not appreciate how accurate Robert Fuqua is, we do! And when we want an especially good job done, one that requires a little research, we call on good old Bob!

Paul is coming on the inside. Virgil Finlay is here. Fuqua will paint many more covers before our career ends in the misty future. Burroughs will very certainly be back, and that very soon! Trimmed edges? Well, now, we still haven't any proof they'd be what most of us want.—Ed.

FROM SCOTT FIELD BARRACKS

Sirs:

I was always a close follower of your magazines in civilian life, and you can imagine what a kick it gives a fan to browse through these dog-eared copies that pass around our barracks.

Your September FA had some excellent stuff—but one suggestion. Give us more cartoons. Only three in that issue. The one by Miller was good. A little SA won't hurt. Here's hoping to see as many more cartoons in FA as you give us in your new one, *Mammoth Detective*.

PVT. JOHN MATHERS,
Scott Field, Illinois.

Only one bad thing about your suggestion, pal; we have a heck of a job getting enough cartoons on the science and fantasy angle. And to tell you the truth, we always just barely manage to scrap together enough to make the deadline without going to press minus any at all! Any cartoonists in the army?—Ed.

BEST WRITERS

Sirs:

You are now gazing upon the hitherto unpublished work of one of the many *normally* silent readers. We consist of many types, races, and colors (mostly red in the face when we read the "Reader's Page"). Our names are Tom, Dick, but not Harry. Harry's the jerk who's always writing those stupid letters in to you—you know, those "make ya wanna fight" masterpieces?

So I will now proceed to vary a bit from the beaten track, and divulge a little hot steam in your general direction. This has been coming on for the last year or so.

I will rate your authors. Ahem. First, of course, comes Burroughs. He takes the prize for being able to hold your interest through the story. His "Pellucidar" series was magnificent. But of course you have to consider the fact he's one, if not *the*, of the best fiction authors of today. At least to me he is.

For an average, easily taken (but not in large doses) author, I would take Wilcox. (Your standard.) His works are sometimes a little rusty, but can be imbibed, usually, with a chaser. Preferably coca-cola.

Cabot is the best run-of-the-mill short story writer, although he fools us once in a while with stories like "The Tenant On The 13th Floor", or "The Fantastic Twins". He turned in one of his most hacky, crummy, and otherwise disgusting stories in his latest about a haunted house. It had no actual plan. So the hero got scared, so what? We want to hear about *fantastic* things, not a polished up ghost story.

O'Brien, Costello, Swain, and Lawlor are okay. McGivern, Williams, and Farnsworth are a little better than okay. Okay?

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APOLLO—God of Hygiene

By HENRY GADE

**Apollo is celebrated in legend as the god who
drove away disease and filth and evil things**

(See Back Cover)

APOLLO came of good stock, since his father was none other than Zeus himself. His mother was Leto, who, pursued by the jealous Hera, found shelter in Delos, where she bore her godly son under a palm tree at the foot of Mt. Cynthus. Previous to this event, Delos had been a barren, floating rock, but now it was chained to the bottom of the sea so that it remained to mark the birthplace of the son of Zeus.

While he was yet a youngster, Apollo performed the first of the acts that made him famed in legend. He slew the python with his silver bow. Apparently this was not a heroic deed, since he was forced to wander for a term of years and expiate his crime by servitude and purification. Perhaps it was because the snake was considered the symbol of the oracle Delphos.

Apollo seems to have been a jack of all trades, and has accumulated a series of titles that are rather staggering in their variation, and even in their contradictions of his basic traits.

Etymologically, his name signifies one who "drives away disease." Roscher's derivation names him as a "sun god," but with little substantiation. Homer calls him the "god of prophecy," but Homer probably got a garbled account of his association with the oracle and the killing of the oracle's pet, Pythios, which name Apollo acquired in some localities as a result of his deed. Another title assumed because of the Python was "god of the silver bow."

He has been depicted as the "sender of plagues," as "the warrior," as the "god of agriculture," as the "destroyer of mice," and as the "ruler of the seasons."

At one time he must have been a herdsman, because he is known as the "keeper of flocks," and especially as one who keep wolves away from flocks.

Later in life he became known as the "rearer of boys" and a "sponsor of gymnastics." He was the first victor at the Olympic games, overcoming Hermes in the foot race and Ares in boxing. It is probably this that leads to his warlike aspect.

He is known also as "the helper," and "god of the war-cry." That he was quite a marksman with the bow is evidenced by his title of "shooter from afar." His fighting ability might have been the reason for his reputation as the "destroyer."

When Apollo began to capitalize on his knowledge of oracles, he went into the business himself, and as a result, earned the title of "ambiguous

crook" (to translate literally) which indicates that he wasn't very successful in this racket.

Because of his association with the oracle, who was also supposed to have healing powers, Apollo became known as the "healer and seer" and no doubt earned many a gold piece as a quack doctor who killed oftener than he cured. The title of "avertor of evil" probably is synonymous with this title.

Apollo liked music, and by reason of some enamoured goings on with the Muses, became known as the "god of song and music" and "leader of the Muses." He was proud of his ability to play the lyre, and when Marsyas boasted of superior skill at playing the flute, Apollo had him flayed alive. He was less drastic with Midas, causing his ears to grow long because he had declared himself in favor of Pan insofar as flutists went.

He must have traveled the seas to a great extent, because he became known as the "dolphin god." Offshoots of his seafaring came in the form of the titles of "embarker" and "disembarker" (probably he served as a longshoreman), and as "the islander."

That he did a lot of traveling afoot is obvious from his title of "god of streets and ways." This led also to his adoption as the one who "stands before the house" probably in the guise of a protector, or a symbol of protection, both from violence and from disease.

Lastly, he became known as the "originator and protector of civil order" and the "founder of cities and of legislation." From this we may infer that he also put his hand into politics and government.

A great many things and animals were made sacred to him: The lyre and the bow; the tripod (as the god of prophecy; the bay (a plant used in sacrifices); the crown of victory of the Olympic games; the palm; the wolf; the roe; the swan; the hawk; the raven; the crow; the snake; the mouse; the grasshopper; the griffin (a mixture of eagle and lion).

Apollo was a favorite with sculptors, because of his great beauty and his physical perfection. That he was also a great favorite with the people is evidenced by the many festivals celebrated in his honor.

Perhaps the greatest truth that can be said about this god is that he certainly had been "around"!

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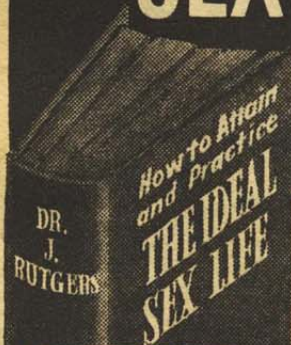
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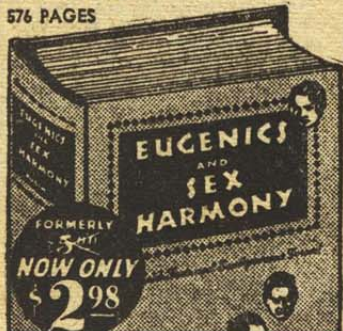
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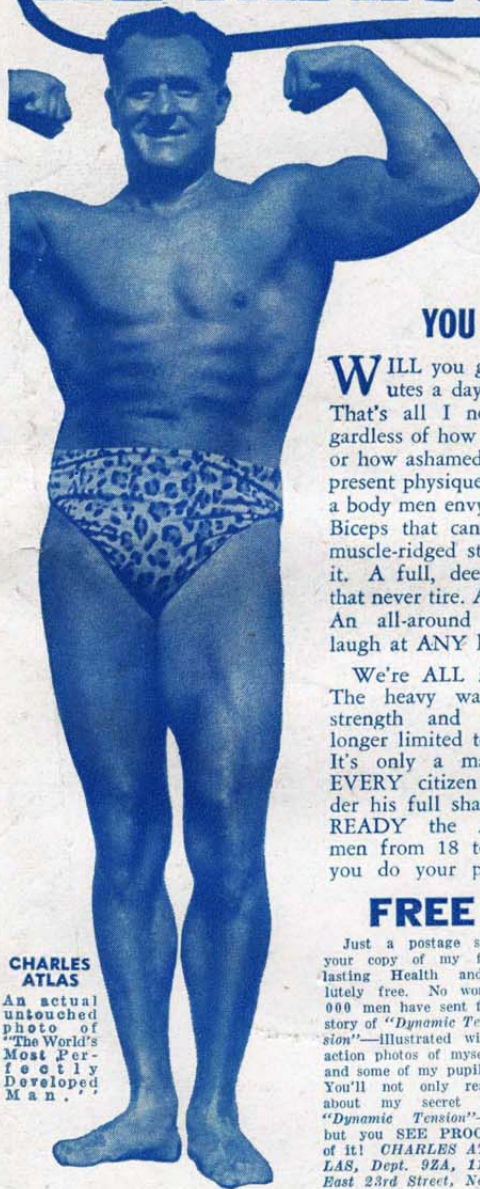
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